

Elevating Family Voices: How ECTA and DaSy Technical Assistance Supports State Innovations for Equitable Family Input

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The Early Childhood Technical Assistance ([ECTA](#)) Center¹ and the Center for IDEA Early Childhood Data Systems ([DaSy](#))² collaborated to help state early intervention programs improve the quality and representativeness of their family data and use the data to advance equity. Stories from two states highlight the support that ECTA and/or DaSy can provide to Part C and Part B 619 programs seeking to improve their system, service implementation, and child and family outcomes.

State early intervention agencies received intensive TA to improve and use data from surveys of participating families. This TA supported states to make systemic changes focused on advancing equity in their programs.

An Invitation to Improve Family Outcomes

Over two years, ECTA-DaSy TA teams supported a cohort of Part C state agencies to improve family outcomes through collaborative and sustainable systemic change focused on ensuring that all families are served and voices are heard.³ The TA focused on supporting states to improve the quality of data collected from families participating in early intervention and to use these data to improve services and supports. TA teams provided a combination of cross-state and state-specific activities including:

- self-assessment exercises to identify the changes needed;
- state-specific action plans to provide a road map to system improvement; and
- ongoing data collection to monitor and evaluate progress.

State Story: Illinois

To drive system improvements, Illinois aimed to:

1. improve the response rate of their Family Outcomes Survey;
2. devise strategies to address the lack of survey participation by under-represented families; and
3. foster data representativeness to ensure the views of the wider population are known.

The state had been planning changes to its survey methodology and noted that TA helped them think more expansively about representativeness and equity. As a result, they began to consider outcomes by income level in addition to language, race, ethnicity, and region. Improvements to their survey processes and increased attention to potential biases and inequities empowered Illinois to:

- conduct additional analysis on “undeliverable” surveys;
- increase training on the survey process;
- move to electronic data collection (e.g., text message delivery);
- change the survey timing (3 months after aging out of services instead of 6 months);

¹ ECTA supports state IDEA [Part C](#) and [Part B, Section 619](#) programs in developing more equitable, effective, and sustainable state and local systems, that support access and full participation for each and every young child with a disability, and their family.

² The DaSy Center builds relationships and provides high quality technical assistance (TA) to build the capacity of states to collect, report, analyze, and use data in the Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education program improvement and federal reporting. These TA centers collaborated to support states in improving the quality and use of data to promote better outcomes for families.

³ Advancing equity in early intervention services and outcomes requires attention to interpersonal relationships among families, children, and professionals at the core of early intervention practices, as well as systemic factors including uneven distribution of privilege and power inherent in public systems nationally ([NAEYC position statement on Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education](#)).

- streamline the survey process;
- create promotional materials for the survey; and
- use specific engagement strategies to elevate the family perspective in services (e.g., connecting with parent group partners, creating a new SSIP Advisory Group with parent representatives).

Additionally, TA helped Illinois create webinars to promote the survey to providers so that they can encourage families to participate. The state also published an article about the survey for the Parent Training and Information Center (PTI) newsletter.

Next Steps

Illinois continues to review their survey methodology, its limitations, and potential areas for improvement (e.g., limited cell phone minutes may affect some families' ability to complete the survey). The state intends to do further analysis on undelivered surveys, in particular, and aims to remain vigilant about groups still underrepresented in the survey.

State Story: New York

When this TA cohort began, African American and Hispanic families were underrepresented in New York's Family Outcomes Survey data. State staff expressed concerns about whether geographic and demographic factors could predict how parents respond to the survey and whether these factors reflect negative trends in family outcomes data. They sought to:

1. explore what service areas families tend to respond to negatively; and
2. better understand strategies to improve parents' experiences within the program.

New York was concerned that without representative survey data, improvement strategies might not reflect the population needs. The state team aimed to obtain a more representative sample and, in turn, a better understanding of all participating families' perceptions of early intervention.

TA efforts helped the state team improve their process by:

- distributing the survey quarterly, on a date closer to when a child leaves the program, rather than the prevailing annual distribution;
- sending text message alerts and reminders from the NYC government to promote the survey;
- using a family training initiative, family Facebook groups, listservs, and state team governance structures (e.g., SSIP Advisory Group and State Early Intervention Coordinating Council) to solicit feedback on the survey and process and as a platform to remind families to participate;

As a result of Illinois' TA, the return rate for family outcomes survey responses more closely matches the distribution rates across demographic groups. Thanks to the Family Outcomes Survey's higher response rate and greater representativeness, conducting demographic analyses is now more feasible and meaningful.



Figure 1: New York Family Outcomes Survey Brochure

- sharing the list of families receiving the survey with county staff across New York to encourage participation at various points of entry with government systems; and
- translating parent information into six additional languages to improve accessibility.

The TA Team also supported the state in developing an infographic and brochure (Figure 1 on previous page). This resource explains the survey’s importance, how data is used, and who to contact for assistance completing the survey—all in ways that are motivational to families. After the TA cohort period, New York began distributing the brochure to families along with the survey. The team also developed a [video vignette](#) to further support family engagement in the outcomes process.

Next Steps

The brochure was originally translated into six languages and will be translated into eight additional languages. The state plans to continue making progress on action plan implementation and data analysis for improved representativeness. Once greater representativeness is realized, they will be poised to conduct geographic and demographic analyses to help them better understand variations in family outcomes and implement improvements.

Lessons Learned from the TA Cohort

TA Process for Supporting State Teams

- Self-assessment is a valuable tool to help state teams determine a baseline from which to begin, and to identify priority needs while engaging in family outcomes work.
- State teams highly value peer-to-peer learning as a time to share ideas and resources and learn from others’ successes and challenges.
- The cohort model is a valuable incubator of thoughts, ideas, and discussions around strengthening systems and procedures to improve family outcomes while providing a road map for continued progress and engagement.
- Providing support on analysis of programmatic and demographic data provided states with information to make informed decisions about next steps

Cohort Strategies for Improving Family Engagement

- Using electronic survey delivery, including email/text message delivery and alerts, is beneficial for improving response rates and accessibility.
- Infographics and family friendly resources can foster increased family engagement in the Family Outcomes Survey process.
- Collaborating with Parent Centers and strengthening family engagement in state ICCs and other governance structures helps to foster process and system improvements tailored to families’ needs.
- One state is creating data dashboards to help local programs examine their data and provide information on families served and outcomes.

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