



## **Part C Family Survey Redesign Workgroup**

**An Iowa Department of Education Project  
September 30, 2011**

**Funded by  
American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)  
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**Family Survey Project: Final Report Summary**  
**Funded by American Recovery and Reinvestment Act**  
**IDEA Part C Project**

The Iowa Department of Education is required to collect, analyze and report family results of children and families receiving at-risk and special education services. The purpose of this project was to have a valid and reliable method to survey families regarding provision of Early ACCESS services for infants and toddlers at-risk or have special education needs. In addition, the project was to include methods to collect, analyze and report data for stakeholder understanding and federal reporting purposes. Stephen R. Porter, Ph.D. from Iowa State University was awarded the contract through an open bidding competition.

The following information is a summary of the final report provided by Dr. Porter dated September 30, 2011.

The goals of the project were to

1. Review the current sampling and survey administration strategy and suggest improvements.
2. Compare the current survey instrument, the NCSEAM version, to another widely used family outcomes survey, the ECO version, to determine which best met the needs of Early ACCESS.
3. Determine whether switching to an online survey was feasible.
4. If feasible, conduct a pilot test of an online survey, and if switching instruments, propose a set of benchmarks for the new instrument.
5. Consult with Early ACCESS stakeholders about proposed changes during the project.

Goal 1: Review and analysis of current sampling and survey administration revealed several problems. First, sample sizes are based on 95% confidence interval of +/-10; however, results that are reported in the Annual Performance Report do not report confidence intervals, and

instead report point estimates. Second, DE reports a response rate that does not conform to accepted standards for surveys. Third, DE has little oversight as to how the AEAs are administering the survey, and it is likely that actual methods of administration vary across the AEAs. Fourth, the survey responses are inputted into the data systems by the AEAs themselves, yet these data are used to rate AEA performance. This is a clear conflict of interest.

Goal 2: NCSEAM and ECO versions of surveys were examined by Dr. Porter and a project workgroup which consisted of the following people involved with Early ACCESS: parents, grandparents, service providers, regional liaisons, service coordinators, ICEA member, staff from DE, IDPH, CHSC. Review and analysis of both the current survey and ECO survey were completed.

Goal 3: Dr. Porter led a workgroup meeting to review and analyze the benefits and difficulties of administering a family outcomes survey via the Internet. Web administration would resolve several issues. Because the marginal cost of adding families to a web survey is almost zero, DE can survey all families that use early intervention services, rather than rely on samples generated from every AEA (3,772 versus 701). Web administration could be centralized within the DE, ensuring that the same survey process is used for each AEA. Importantly, service coordinators could be removed from the data collection process, allowing them to focus on the main aspects of their jobs while providing families a more confidential process for responding to the survey. Because survey responses are entered by the respondent into a webpage, which is then saved on a server, AEAs would no longer have the responsibility to enter survey data, or the opportunity to alter responses.

Goal 4: To gain a better understanding of what it would mean for Early ACCESS to change to a web survey administration of the ECO survey instrument, a pilot test was conducted in August 2011. The Department of Education provided email addresses that it had collected from 191 families. Respondents were initially contacted via email, with nonrespondents contacted up to

three additional times, for a total of four contacts. Fifty-eight families responded, yielding a response rate of 30%.

The web survey used the ECO survey instrument, with one change. A “don’t know” response was added at the request of the survey workgroup.

Goal 5: The workgroup met at the Heartland AEA office in Ames for a one-day work session. Recommendations to Dr. Porter were to do a pilot study and use the ECO survey tool with the addition of a “don’t know” category as a response choice. Email was used to correspond with DE project staff and workgroup members.

Recommendations/suggested changes based on the findings from this project:

1. Administer the family outcomes survey via the internet.
2. Calculate an appropriate response rate.
3. Replace the NCSEAM survey with the ECO (Early Childhood Outcome) survey
4. Construct different benchmarks and performance indicators.

Based on Dr. Porter’s work and recommendations, the workgroup will reconvene in 2012 to discuss implementation. The State Performance Plan (SPP) dictates that we use the current survey process. Once that SPP expires in June 2013, a new plan will be written. During the rewrite of the SPP, the opportunity exists to implement changes to our current family survey process. The other option is to adopt changes sooner and amend the current SPP.