

# Longitudinal Student Data in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

by  
**Chrys Dougherty, Ph.D.**

The new federal legislation, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, endorses, but does not require the use of longitudinal student data by states and school districts. The endorsement comes in Title I, Part A, Section 1111(b), subsection 3(B) on state plans, which states that

“Each state may incorporate the data from the assessments under this paragraph into a State-developed longitudinal data system that links student test scores, length of enrollment, and graduation records over time.”

Under Title VI, Part A, Section 6111, the U.S. Department of Education may provide funding to states for the purpose of

“improving the dissemination of information on student achievement and school performance to parents and the community, including the development of information and reporting systems designed to identify best educational practices based on scientifically based research or to assist in linking records of student achievement, length of enrollment, and graduation over time.”

This funding is available for states that have already developed the required grades 3-8 assessments.

Funding to help states develop longitudinal data systems could also be provided under Title I, Part E, Section 1501(b), which says that

“the Secretary may, directly or through awarding grants to or entering into contracts with appropriate entities...provide guidance and technical assistance to State educational agencies and local educational agencies in developing and maintaining management information systems through which such agencies may develop program performance indicators to improve services and performance.”

An additional section of the bill that could be used to encourage states to fund JFTK-type projects is Title V on “Promoting Informed Parental Choice and Innovative Programs.” Section 5121, subsection (6) says that states may use funds made available under that section for “Support for arrangements that provide for independent analysis to measure and report on school district achievement.” The Department could, at its discretion, make the existence of such arrangements a factor in considering state applications for funding under this section.

There are other provisions of the bill can be better met if statewide longitudinal data are available:

1. Under Title I, Part H, Section 1830(a) on dropout prevention programs, at the end of the first year of funding school districts must report their annual dropout rates by school. The accuracy of dropout data is greatly increased if students that transfer across districts between years can be accurately accounted for. Our analysis of dropouts in Texas showed that districts report as interdistrict transfers thousands of students who do not, in fact, transfer to another district. Without statewide longitudinal data that makes it possible to verify which students ended up in another district in the following year, the accuracy of the dropout data is severely compromised.
2. Under Title III, Section 3121(a) on evaluation of programs serving limited English proficient students, each district or entity receiving federal bilingual/ESL money must submit to the state, after the first two years of funding, the number and percent of students attaining English proficiency by the end of each school year, and a description of the progress made by children in meeting state proficiency requirements for the two years after they leave the program. States with high interdistrict mobility will be able to track a higher percentage of these students over time if they have a statewide student ID that can keep track of the same students as they change districts.

3. Under Title III, Section 3122(a) on state English proficiency achievement objectives for LEP students, the legislation states that the objectives "shall be developed in a manner that (A) reflects the amount of time an individual child has been enrolled in a language instruction educational program..." Reports on the percent of students meeting these objectives by length of enrollment must be collected by states and a report based on this information submitted to the Secretary at the end of the second year of funding.<sup>1</sup> In theory, districts could aggregate their own data by length of program enrollment and provide the aggregated information to the states. However, there will be students who enter the district having spent time in other districts' English language programs. For a proper evaluation, these students should not be treated the same as students who have never been in an English language program prior to enrolling in the district. If states themselves can keep track of how long students have been enrolled in English language programs – which requires statewide longitudinal data capability -- they can ensure a proper evaluation of these programs.

In each of these three cases, the accuracy of the data will be compromised by a state's inability to match records over time.<sup>2</sup>

Title I, Part A, Section 1112 on local school district plans calls for school districts to provide campus-level reports, beginning in the 2002-03 school year, to parents and the public on the percent of students meeting state standards, disaggregated by the student's race, ethnicity,

gender, disability status, migrant status, English proficiency, and economically disadvantaged status. This requirement could be satisfied entirely with snapshot data of student performance on the day of the test, with no provision for the student's prior achievement or how long the student has been enrolled in the same school.

However, there is an indirect relationship between these reporting requirements and longitudinal student data. School districts can satisfy this reporting requirement much more easily if states maintain individual-level records on every student. (The state could then generate the required report automatically for every district.) Once a state goes down the path of designing a statewide student record system with all the necessary information, incorporating a consistent statewide student ID into this record system is a logical step.

The Secretary is also required under Section 1501(c) to conduct a study of the long-term effects of Title I funding on student academic achievement. A preliminary version of the study is due three years after the date of enactment and the final version is due in five years. This study will require following a group of students over time, much as was done with prior evaluations of Title I. This will be much easier for the Department in states that can match the records already. The national evaluation of comprehensive school reforms required in Title I, Part F, Section 1607, and the data collection on the effectiveness of federally funded dropout prevention programs required by Title I, Part H, Section 1811(a), will also be much easier for the Department to carry out in states with the ability to match student records over time.

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**Footnotes:**

1-The legislation does not explicitly say that states must collect data, but it does say that "Each state educational agency...must hold eligible entities receiving a subgrant under such subpart accountable for meeting the annual measurable achievement objectives under subsection (a)..." which the state cannot do unless it has the necessary information.

2-It should be possible to show, using states that do have longitudinal data, the percent of students whose information would be lost if the state lacked the ability to match student records over time.

**National Center for Educational Accountability**

4030-2 West Braker Lane, Suite 200-W  
Austin, Texas 78759  
512.232.0770 / fax: 512.232.0777  
www.just4kids.org