Section VI: Data-driven Decision Making

State coordinators can use the information in this section to:

- Translate data insights into concrete programmatic actions
- Develop measurable, achievable goals that align with strategic priorities
- Leverage data to improve program operations such as monitoring, application review, and training
- Facilitate collaboration and feedback loops with stakeholders for contextual data interpretation

Effective decision making starts with asking clear, targeted questions and systematically analyzing the data at hand. This structured approach ensures that every decision is informed, objective, and aligned with strategic goals. Furthermore, data must be interpreted in context. State coordinators are encouraged to engage with subgrantees to better understand what the data may reflect—and what it may not. Conversations with local partners can reveal explanations for unexpected trends, identify data quality issues, and provide critical insight into what is happening on the ground.

Administrative Tools

When considering the next steps, State coordinators should leverage the available administrative tools to implement changes to improve programs, including:

- **Reviewing and selecting applications:** Developing an application template and reviewing applications are instances where State coordinators may consider incorporating data-driven decision making. For example, application questions should address how facilities will serve students with disabilities. This is critical in all facilities and may be especially important when facilities are not appropriately identifying students with disabilities. Incorporating a needs assessment in applications helps ensure that subgrantees systematically collect and analyze data, interpret the findings, and connect them to clear goals, providing a strong justification for their proposed use of funds. When reviewing applications, it is important that the programs address needs that are identified in the data. In another case, if student math assessment outcomes indicate students are struggling, programming proposed in the application should involve interventions to improve math comprehension.
- **Subgrantee monitoring:** The process of subgrantee monitoring is deeply intertwined with data. Some States conduct monitoring using a risk assessment; data quality or performance issues (e.g., low outcome achievement to low rates of improvement on assessments) can be factors to incorporate into risk assessments. Furthermore, when conducting monitoring, if there are identified data issues—whether quality or performance related—it is important to work with subgrantees to identify improvements in processes and practices to resolve the issue.
- **Assessing facility eligibility:** Reviewing certain data points, such as demographics and facility type, can provide insight into facility eligibility. State coordinators can evaluate whether the characteristics of the facility's population suggest a need to re-evaluate the eligibility of the facility. For example, a facility where all the students have individualized education programs (IEPs) may indicate a program specifically established for the care and treatment of students with disabilities, and this would require further investigation to understand the primary purpose of the facility.
- **Training and technical assistance:** Data provide insights into performance or administrative challenges. This can help determine the types and topics of training subgrantees need, as well as identifying facilities in need or fostering peer learning through exemplary facilities.

SMART Goals

Developing SMART goals are an integral part of turning data insights into concrete, actionable outcomes. They help State educational agencies (SEAs) translate analysis into targeted initiatives that drive program improvement. Ensuring that each goal meets these criteria creates a clear, focused roadmap that aligns with strategic priorities and facilitates ongoing evaluation. When setting these goals, it is important to not only look at the current year of data, but previous years as well to identify trends over time. This can provide helpful context in setting goals that are achievable and time-bound by understanding the direction and magnitude. Important considerations for setting SMART goals are detailed below:

- **Specific:** Clearly define the objective. Detail who is involved, what needs to be accomplished, where it will take place, and why the goal is important.

- **Measurable**: Establish criteria for tracking progress. Identify key performance indicators (KPIs) or quantifiable metrics, such as assessment scores or attendance rates, which can measure success.
- **Achievable**: Ensure that the goal is realistic given available resources and constraints. Consider the strengths and capacities of the team and facilities, so that the goal is realistic and attainable.
- **Relevant**: Align the goal with broader educational strategies and priorities. The goal should directly address the insights or issues highlighted in the data analysis.
- **Time-bound**: Set a clear deadline for goal achievement. A defined timeframe, such as "by the end of the current academic year," or "within the next six months," helps maintain focus and accountability.

Improving Program Operations

State coordinators can use data to improve program operations, such as increasing initial and follow up assessment-taking among long-term students and ensuring accurate identification of students with specific needs (e.g., students with disabilities and English learners). The examples below, using data from ED Data Express, walk through two cases of using data to improve program outcomes, including posing questions, calculating measures, analyzing results, and taking action.

Example 1: Academic Assessments

In this example, the focus is on understanding and improving the number of long-term students taking assessments, which uses data from FS 125 (student academic achievement in Subpart 2). While this example uses public use data from ED Data Express, State coordinators may use internal data to validate or produce a more detailed analysis.

- **Question**: What proportion of long-term students are taking initial and follow up assessments? (This data point is important because it is difficult to determine if a program is effective if assessment data are incomplete.) Does this differ by local educational agency (LEA) subgrantees? If so, which subgrantees?
- **Datapoints/Calculations:**
    - Count of long-term students
    - Count of long-term students taking an initial assessment and a follow-up assessment
    - Percentage of long-term students who took an initial and a follow up assessment
- **Analysis**: This analysis uses comparative analysis to identify subgrantees that are exceling at administering assessments, as well as subgrantees who may be struggling.
    - For instance, LEA 1 had 168 long-term students and assessed 11 percent of long-term students, which indicates a need to improve. LEA 2 had 210 long-term students and 79 percent of long-term students were assessed. Learning about the practices in LEA 2 could help inform supports in LEA 1, especially since both LEAs are of comparable size. LEA 3 had 78 long-term students and assessed 100 percent of long-term students. LEA 3 can also be a useful source of information to learn about the success of these practices.
    - Furthermore, when looking at the metric for percentage of students who improved, it is important to first look at the percentage of students that took an initial and follow-up assessment. In cases where the percentage of students taking assessments is low, then the percentage showing students who improved will be a less reliable metric.

Table 10: Long-term students and math assessment progress and participation in Juvenile Detention facilities by LEA

	Totals		Assessment Score Change				Outcome Measures	
LEA	Long-term students	Students who took assessments	Negative grade change	No grade change	Up to one full grade change	More than one grade change	% of LT students who took assessments	% of students who improved
LEA 1	168	19	0	19	0	0	11%	0%
LEA 2	210	165	0	112	39	14	79%	32%
LEA 3	78	78	6	20	17	35	100%	67%
LEA 4	31	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
All	487	262	6	151	56	49	54%	64%

- **Next steps based on the data analysis results**
  - Identify subgrantees who may need support, as well as those who could serve as exemplars. In the example above, LEAs 2 and 3 can serve as exemplars for other LEAs by demonstrating how they effectively assess a high proportion of their long-term students. In contrast, LEAs 1 and 4 need support in establishing processes to ensure that long-term students are properly assessed. Without appropriate assessment and benchmarking, students risk being placed in classes that do not match their knowledge levels, potentially explaining why students in LEA 1 are not showing improvement. LEA 2 also requires support, as fewer than half of its students demonstrated growth. This may stem from placement issues or suggest that the current math intervention should be reviewed.
  - Provide individual assistance to facilities to improve practices. For example, support LEA 1 in developing a process to ensure follow-up assessments occur, since only 11% of students completed both an initial and follow-up assessment. For LEA 2, where only a third of assessed students improved (32%), focus assistance on linking assessments to appropriate instructional interventions.
  - Investigate at what point an issue could be occurring. For example, is the issue related to data collection, data reporting, or the administration of assessments? For example, LEA 4 reported 31 long-term students but no assessments. Coordinators could check if the issue lies in assessment administration (e.g., assessments not offered) or in data collection/reporting (e.g., assessments given but not entered).

Note: Consider incorporating the proportion of students taking assessments into a risk assessment for monitoring subgrantees.

- **SMART goal setting**
  - **Specific**: Increase the proportion of students who participate in both initial and follow-up assessments.
  - **Measurable**: From 46% to 61% (a 5% annual increase).
  - **Achievable**: Build on existing LEA practices by scaling strategies used in high-performing facilities (e.g., LEAs 2 and 3) to support all long-term students in completing both initial and follow-up assessments.
  - **Relevant**: Better data collection will provide comprehensive information on program effectiveness for reading and math interventions.
  - **Time-bound**: Achieve a 15% total increase over the next three years (5% annually).

Example 2: English Learner Identification

In this example, the focus is on understanding and improving the identification of English learners in facilities, which uses data from FS 127 (participation in Subpart 2 facilities) and FS 141 (all ELs enrolled in public schools in LEA). While this example uses public use data from ED Data Express, coordinators may use internal data to produce a more detailed analysis. A comparable analysis could be performed with FS 119 (participation in Subpart 1 facilities) if SEAs have access to internal data distinguishing Subpart 1 subgrantees or facilities or other publicly available data sources such as the Census Bureau on English proficiency levels.

- **Question**: Are LEAs or State Agencies accurately identifying students who are English learners? Are there facilities where under-identification of English Learner students appears to be an issue?
- **Datapoints/Calculations**:
  - Proportion of ELs in Title I, Part D (TIPD) facilities by LEA
  - Proportion of ELs in public schools served by the same LEAs
- **Analysis**: This analysis focuses on identification of English learners in facilities. The analytic techniques used here include comparing the percentage of ELs across facilities, comparing the percentage of ELs in facilities to public school, and comparing the percentage of ELs to a related variable (in this case, the number of Hispanic students, as Spanish is the most commonly spoken language among ELs in this State, and many Spanish-speaking students may identify as Hispanic).

Note: This relationship varies by State. In some States, such as Montana, Alaska, or Hawaii, English Leaner students may be more likely to speak languages other than Spanish and identify with racial or ethnic groups such as American Indian/Alaska Native or Pacific Islander.

  - Most facilities reported 0 percent ELs and at most 4 percent ELs.
  - The percentage of ELs reported in facilities is substantially lower than the percentage in the public schools in the same LEA.
  - Even In facilities with a higher proportion of Hispanic students, the percentage of ELs is low.

Table 11: Total count of students and count and percentage of Hispanic and English learners in Juvenile Detention Facilities; and count and percentage of English learners in public schools by LEA

	TIPD					Public school	
LEA	**Students**	**Hispanic students**	**% Hispanic**	**English Learners**	**% English Learner**	**English Learners**	**% English Learners**
LEA 1	713	113	16%	24	3%	64,102	20%
LEA 2	87	4	5%	0	0%	158	3%
LEA 3	78	4	5%	0	0%	46	5%
LEA 4	148	0	0%	0	0%	916	13%
LEA 5	25	0	0%	0	0%	118	14%
LEA 6	184	29	16%	8	4%	4,976	18%

- **Next steps based on data analysis results**: Given that the percentage of ELs is consistently low and below the percentage of ELs in public schools, it could indicate that there is an issue with how English Learner students are identified in facilities.
  - Coordinators can open dialogue with subgrantees to review screening processes for identifying English Learners. For example, LEA 1 reports only 3% English Learners in facilities compared to 20% in the district’s public schools, suggesting possible under-

identification. State coordinators could ask whether all incoming students are being screened with a standardized tool.

  - Additionally, coordinators can include a question in the application about screening process, as well as services for English Learners in LEAs. For example, since LEA 6 reports 4% identified as ELs compared to 18% district-wide, State coordinators could request that LEA 6 describe its intake process for English Learner identification in its application.

- **SMART goal setting to improve data quality**
  - **Specific:** Enhance the accuracy and consistency of identifying English Learner students in juvenile detention facilities within LEAs.
  - **Measurable:**
    - The proportion of facilities that adopt standardized English Learner screening protocols.
    - Comparing facility identification data with LEA identification data.
  - **Achievable**: Implement standardized identification protocols and provide targeted training for staff in juvenile detention facilities. This approach aims to ensure consistent and accurate identification practices across all LEAs.
  - **Relevant**: Accurate identification of English Learner students is crucial for ensuring they receive appropriate services and support. Enhancing identification practices aligns with broader educational goals and improves data quality.
  - **Time-bound**
    - Short-term: Within the first 12 months, implement standardized protocols and conduct initial training sessions.
    - Mid-term: Over the next 12–24 months, conduct a pilot including complete quarterly reviews and facility audits to monitor progress and refine practices.
    - Long-term**:** At the end of a two-year pilot phase, evaluate the improvements in identification practices and assess the quality and effectiveness of English Learner services delivered to better serve English Learner students.

Improving Program Outcomes

The following examples walk through two cases of using data — including posing questions, calculating measures, analyzing results, and taking action — to improve outcomes related to high school course credits. These examples use public data from ED Data Express; however, States may have more detailed internal data that could allow for useful comparisons.

When improving program outcomes, it is important to consider which outcomes are the most relevant, outcomes for which data users can expect to see short-term changes, and outcomes that align with specific subgrantees, such as a subgrantee focusing on increasing the number of high school course credits earned by students served with TIPD funds.

Example 1: High School Course Credits Snapshot

This example of improving program outcomes focuses on the outcome of earning high school course credits and uses data from FS 127 (participation in Subpart 2 facilities) and FS 219 (career and academic outcomes while in Subpart 2 programs). This outcome is more likely to be achieved in a shorter time period than other career or academic outcomes. The example includes the metric for the total count of students, the count of long-term students, and the count of students earning high school course credits for each LEA. While outcome data are reported for all students (not just long-term students), long-term students are the focus of this analysis because they are more likely to earn a high school course credit as they are in the facility at least 90 days, which is the length of a semester.

- **Question:** How many students are earning high school course credits?
- **Datapoints/Calculations**: total number of students, number of and percentage of students earning high school course credits, and long-term students.
- **Analysis:**
    - In LEA 1, LEA 2, and LEA 3, 38 percent, 30 percent, and 33 percent of students earned high school course credits, respectively. These LEAs have the highest rates of students earning high school course credits. Because the count of students earning credits is higher than the number of long-term students, it suggests that short-term students are also able to earn high school course credits.
    - LEA 5 may need support given the larger overall student population and high proportion of long-term students and no reported data for students earning high school course credits. LEA 6, while smaller, also has a high proportion of long-term students and reported no students earning high school course credits.
    - While LEA 7 has a large population of students, the number of long-term students is relatively low. This helps contextualize the fact that no students earned high school course credits or enrolled in GED programs.
    - LEAs 5 and 7 report no students earning high school course credits or enrolling in GED programs.

Table 12: Total count and percentage of students, long-term students, students who earned high school course credits, and students who enrolled in a GED program in Juvenile Detention facilities by LEA

	Totals			High School Course Credits		GED Enrollment	
LEA	Total students	Long-term students	% long-term students	Earned high school course credits	% earning high school course credits	GED Enrollment	% GED enrollment
LEA 1	52	0	0%	20	38%	4	8%
LEA 2	713	168	24%	214	30%	0	0%
LEA 3	87	19	22%	29	33%	0	0%
LEA 4	162	6	4%	4	2%	1	1%
LEA 5	247	210	85%	0	0%	0	0%
LEA 6	78	78	100%	0	0%	8	10%
LEA 7	546	31	6%	0	0%	0	0%

- **Next steps based on the data analysis results**
    - Determine if programs for GEDs or high school course credits are being operated in the LEA. In the example above, LEA 2 and 3 are only reporting students earning high school course credits, suggesting that they are not running GED programs. LEA 6 only reported students enrolling in GED programs suggesting there is no program operated for high school course credits. LEAs 5 and 7 report no students earning high school course credits or enrolling in GED programs, suggesting an issue with the interventions.
    - Reach out to LEAs where lower numbers of students are earning high school course credits or enrolling in GED programs (such as LEAs 5, 6, and 7) to understand what the data are

saying. For example, it could be a data collection issue, a data reporting issue, or a programming issue.

- Facilitate peer learning opportunities between facilities that are struggling and those where students are earning high school course credits (such as LEA 1, 2, or 3). Consider the number of students in the LEA, as well as the number of long-term students when facilitating peer learning.
- State coordinators could also review applications to see what programs exist in facilities reporting low or no students earning high school course credits. For example, State coordinators could review applications to identify programmatic differences between LEA 1, which shows 38% of students earning high school course credits despite having no long-term students, and LEA 6, which reports 100% long-term students but no high school course credits.

> *Note 1*. Sec. 1426 of the Title I, Part D Statute states:
>
> "The State educational agency may—
>
> 1. Reduce or terminate funding for projects under this subpart if a local educational agency does not show progress in the number of children and youth attaining a regular high school diploma or its recognized equivalent; and
>
> 2. Require correctional facilities or institutions for neglected or delinquent children and youth to demonstrate, after receiving assistance under this subpart for 3 years, that there has been an increase in the number of children and youth returning to school, attaining a regular high school diploma or its recognized equivalent, or obtaining employment after such children and youth are released."

- **SMART goal setting**
  - **Specific:** Target facilities reporting less than 10 percent of students earning high school course credits (in this example, LEA 5 and LEA 6) by identifying potential issues—whether in data collection, reporting, or program delivery—and facilitating peer learning with high-performing facilities (in this example, LEA 1, 2, or 3).
  - **Measurable**: Establish baseline high school course credit percentages for all facilities and monitor progress quarterly. Aim for at least a 10-percentage point increase (for instance, moving from less than 10 percent to a minimum of 20 percent of students earning high school course credits) in identified low-performing facilities.
  - **Achievable**: Leverage targeted support by providing staff training, conducting focused program reviews, and sharing best practices from facilities with higher accrual rates of high school course credits. Address underlying issues by evaluating both the data collection process and program implementation strategies.
  - **Relevant:** Improving the rate at which students earn high school course credits is essential for helping them stay on track toward graduation—a primary focus of TIPD. Improving high school course credits outcomes directly supports the program's statutory goal of facilitating successful transitions from facility-based education to secondary school completion and post-secondary opportunities. See *Note 1* on previous page for more information regarding the statutory requirement.
  - **Time-bound**: Implement targeted interventions within the next six months and conduct quarterly reviews, aiming to achieve the targeted improvement within one academic year.

Example 2: High School Course Credits Longitudinal

This example uses data from FS 119 (student participation in Subpart 1 facilities) and FS 218 (career and academic outcomes while in Subpart 1 facilities) to demonstrate how to analyze and act on data when there is limited or no peer comparison by using trends. This is particularly useful if analyzing outcome data from ED Data Express from SY 2022-23 and beyond due to the changes in data collection starting in SY 2022-23.

The outcome of interest is earning high school course credits, which is specifically mentioned in the statute, and it is an outcome that is more likely to be achieved in a shorter time period than other career or academic outcomes. The example includes the count of students earning high school course credits, the total count of students, and the total count of long-term students for each year. While outcome data are reported for all students (not just long-term students), long-term students are included because these students have more opportunities to achieve the outcomes compared to students who are in facilities for the short-term.

- **Question:** To what extent are students earning high school course credits?
- **Datapoints/Calculations**: Total number of students, count of and percentage of students earning high school course credits, and count of long-term students.
- **Analysis:** The analysis analyzes trends across time in a single facility type.
  - The percentage of students earning high school course credits has decreased each year from SY 2019-20 to SY 2021-22.
  - The percentage of long-term students has remained relatively stable.
  - The overall population has decreased from SY 2019-20 to SY 2021-22.
  - Although the population has decreased, the proportion of long-term students has remained stable, while the proportion of students earning high school course credits has decreased.

Year	Total students	Long-term students	% long-term students	Earned high school course credits	% earning high school course credits
SY 2021-22	13,429	9,528	71%	9,369	70%
SY 2020-21	13,195	9,437	72%	9,525	72%
SY 2019-20	18,272	13,042	71%	13,647	75%

- **Next steps based on the data analysis results**
  - Identify any changes in subgrantees or subgrantee programming that could contribute to the change, in this case, the decline.
  - Establish clear benchmarks for high school course credit attainment based on historical trend data (SY 2019-20 to SY 2021-22). For example, since rates were consistently above 70% until SY 2021–22, coordinators might set a benchmark of 75% as a reasonable target for recovery.
  - Investigate any changes in subgrantee structures or programming that may have contributed to the observed decline in high school course credit accrual rates. If subgrantees reduced staff, shifted schedules, or changed curricula, those changes could explain the dip in high school course credit attainment.
  - Conduct qualitative assessments (e.g., focus groups or interviews) with facility staff and educators to understand potential challenges or shifts in educational practices.
  - Evaluate the data collection and reporting processes to ensure consistency over the years.

    - Collaborate with subgrantees to discuss findings and brainstorm corrective actions, including targeted interventions for earning high school course credits.
- **SMART Goal Setting to improve high school course credit attainment**
    - **Specific:** Develop and implement targeted interventions aimed at reversing the downward trend in high school course credit attainment. Focus on identifying and addressing factors—such as changes in programming or data collection practices—that are contributing to the decline.
    - **Measurable:** Set a goal to increase the percentage of students earning high school course credits by at least five percentage points in the next academic year.
    - **Achievable:** Leverage internal best practices and insights gained from subgrantee consultations to tailor interventions. Provide targeted professional development and resources to facilities where the decline is most pronounced.
    - **Relevant:** Improving high school course credit outcomes is critical to meeting statutory educational goals and preparing students for post-facility success. Enhanced high school course credit accrual rates will ensure that all students, especially long-term students with greater opportunities, receive the academic credit needed to progress toward graduation.
    - **Time-bound:** Aim to achieve a minimum increase of five percentage points in high school course credit attainment within the next 12 months, with a comprehensive evaluation at the end of the academic year to adjust strategies as needed.