Acceptable Use Guidelines

Final: November 21, 2023

New Jersey follows strict redaction and suppression guidelines to ensure the privacy of all individuals. The Heldrich Center maintains these guidelines for all data and information used and reported out of the New Jersey Statewide Data System (NJSDS) for education and workforce statistics. This process ensures compliance with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) 20 U.S.C. 1232g.

1.0 General Data Guidelines

Access to data in the NJSDS is restricted for use only by the following individuals and organizations:

a. Faculty or non-faculty educational researchers, including students under the direct supervision of a faculty member or professional research staff member of a postsecondary educational research institution;
b. Research staff from nonprofit research organizations;
c. Research staff from the Legislative branch, Executive branch, Judicial branch, and State agencies of New Jersey state government;
d. Authorized and approved users as defined in the NJSDS Data Access and Use Policy; and
e. New Jersey agencies, organizations and institutions that directly contribute data to the NJSDS.

Only data and the data elements that are in the NJSDS system may be accessed. Data elements from other agencies that formally join the Executive Leadership Council can also be used for analysis. The acceptable access and use of NJSDS will only be approved if such access and use is in accordance with the following purposes:

a. To perform policy research;
b. To improve the economic and educational well-being of the residents of New Jersey;
c. To support the NJSDS research agenda as published annually by the NJSDS Executive Leadership Council;
d. To fulfill federal, state, and other required reporting requirements;
e. For performance and/or operational improvements; and
f. To inform and fortify agency partner external grant making and funding requests.

1.1   De-identification

Although data released from the NJSDS are not released with any sensitive personally identifiable information (name, social security number), there is still some risk of identifying individuals through statistical measures. All data with small counts shall be redacted, grouped with other cases, perturbed, or suppressed to minimize this risk. Redaction is the general process for removing sensitive data from reports prior to release. This process, when compliant with existing data access and use and acceptable use guidelines helps to minimize the risk of individual data exposure. Data may be suppressed, or removed, to prevent the identification of individuals in small groups or those with unique characteristics. When possible, redaction and suppression should be a part of the programming of the report rather than a manual process.

When an identified group is smaller than the thresholds outlined in Section 2.0, the report must display a placeholder (for example, -, *, NA) with a disclaimer explaining what the placeholder means. Internal and external report authors also should be aware of small group suppression rules. Report authors are responsible for ensuring that the NJSDS Acceptable Use Guidelines are applied appropriately to any reports created.

2.0   Specific Data Guidelines

2.1 Education Data

Education data include information from about students, teachers and staff. These data elements include enrollment in primary, secondary and postsecondary as well as academic and financial information provided by schools and districts.

Statistical Counts: General enrollment level information may be reported for any count of individuals. This information includes school and district enrollments for specific populations (race/ethnicity, gender, special education access, socioeconomic status) or by specific enrollment type (postsecondary enrollment, primary and secondary enrollment). If a second dimension is added such as socioeconomic status by ethnicity, then the data may only be reported if there are at least 10 individuals in each category or cell.

2.2 Academic Data

General academic data may only be presented for groups that have a minimum count of 10 individuals. Therefore, the denominator used to calculate any statistic must be greater than 10. For example, enrollment information for students in a specific program may be fewer 10, which can be reported. However, no academic information may be presented on these students. Additionally, if any group may be identified as having fewer than 10 individuals and another group or groups are present adding to the total sum, both or all groups must be redacted. For example, if enrollment counts of male students is fewer than 10, the enrollment information for these and female students may be reported, but academic information may not be reported for either group. Results must also be top and bottom coded, so that rather

than 100% or 0%, results should indicate that greater than 95% or less than 5% of the population falls within the listed category.

2.3 Employment Data

Employment data include information from Unemployment Insurance and Workforce programs. This includes all wage and employment information for employees and employers as well as information about participation in any workforce sponsored programs. Statistical Counts: No employment data may be presented for any groups with fewer than 10 individuals. No employer identifiable data may be presented. Industry level information presented for any geographic area must be redacted if a single employer makes up more than 80% of the employment for that industrial sector or less than 3 establishments. For example, in a county where a grocery store is the only large manufacturer, showing information by employer would identify the specific manufacturer and must be redacted.

Additionally, if any group or employer may be identified as having fewer than 10 individuals and another group or groups are present adding to the total sum, both or all groups must be redacted.

When presenting employment information, it is important to note the limitation of the data to include only those employers submitting data to New Jersey.

2.4 Organizations, Training Providers, Institutions of Higher Education, or Businesses

Data does not need to be suppressed for organizations, training providers, institutions of higher education, businesses or other legal entities unless it can be used to identify individuals, consent is required for release, or it is prohibited by State or Federal Law. If disclosure protections are required, organizational data may be presented for any groups with fewer than 10 firms.