



# IPEDES Data Release Stages Tutorial Script 2024-25 Data Collection Cycle

This tutorial explains the three stages of IPEDS data release. Understanding these stages is important when accessing data from the IPEDS Use the Data Page, as the version of data you are reading or analyzing may have implications for how you interpret the information.

For example, when utilizing the IPEDS Use the Data Page, you have the option to select provisional or final release data—two different stages of data release. To illustrate this, we will go to “Use the Data,” down to “Download IPEDS Data,” and select “Compare Institutions.” In the top right corner, we see that “Final Release Data” is the default, but we can change that if we want to. Understanding the differences between the data options is important for accurate data analysis. Provisional release data have undergone all NCES data quality control procedures. Data are imputed for nonresponding institutions. These data are used for First Look (Provisional Data) publications and are released about one year after the initial data collection. Final release data include revisions to the provisional release data that have been made by institutions during the subsequent data collection year through the Prior Year Revision System. The final release data can be used when the most up-to-date data are required; however, these data may not match tables from the First Look reports based on preliminary and provisional data. Final data are released about two years after the initial data collection.

Let’s take a look at the three stages of IPEDS data release and learn more about the differences. Once IPEDS data are submitted through the IPEDS Data Collection System, there are three stages to data release:

- Collection Level Data;
- Provisional Data; and
- Final Data.

The first stage, collection level data, includes data that have been submitted and locked by the IPEDS Keyholder, and migrated to the Collection Level Data Center. These data have not been cleaned or reviewed by the IPEDS Help Desk. This data is not available to the public through the IPEDS Use the Data Page. It is available only to IPEDS Keyholders and Coordinators. Once data are migrated to the Collection Level Data Center, any keyholder whose data have already been migrated can see their own data, as well as the data for all of the other institutions that have already been migrated.

Provisional Data, the second stage, are available after all NCES quality control procedures are complete and data have been imputed for non-responding institutions. However, these data are still subject to additional revisions that may be submitted by institutions during the subsequent data collection year through the IPEDS Prior Year Revision (PYR) System. Provisional data are made available through the IPEDS Use the Data Page. For example, provisional data are used for First Look Web Tables on the IPEDS Data Explorer website.

The third stage, Final Data, includes institutional revisions to data made in the subsequent data collection cycle. For example, institutions may edit Completions data from the 2022-23 collection cycle during the 2023-24 collection cycle for the same survey. After these revised data are reviewed, final data are made available through the IPEDS Use the Data Page.

You may be wondering when provisional and final data are accessible. These become available on a rolling basis depending on the data collection windows. Although unexpected delays in the approval process can occur, the goal of NCES is to maintain or improve the timelines of data release on an annual basis.

For example, the provisional data for the fall survey components, which include Institutional Characteristics-Header, Institutional Characteristics, 12-Month Enrollment, and Completions, are available in early summer following the collection.

The winter survey component provisional data, which include Student Financial Aid, Graduation Rates, 200% Graduation Rates, Admissions, and Outcome Measures, are available in early fall following the collection.

Finally, spring survey component provisional data for the Human Resources, Finance, Fall Enrollment, and Academic Libraries components are available in mid-fall following the collection.

Final release data are available at the same time as provisional data but reflect the collection cycle one year before the provisional data. Final release data reflect any revisions institutions made through the IPEDS Prior Year Revision System, which runs concurrently with the regular survey collection cycle.

To eliminate the step of downloading IPEDS separately by survey component or select variables, IPEDS has made available the entire survey data for one collection year in the Microsoft Access format. The full IPEDS Access Database is typically available a few months after the final spring survey component data are released and includes provisional data for the most recent collection cycle and final data for the prior year's collection cycle. Note that provisional data will no longer be available in the annual IPEDS Access Database when all survey components have been released as final.

When all three stages of data release are viewed together, it provides a clearer picture of how IPEDS data are cleaned and made available to the public. These differences are important for data submitters and users to know, especially when accessing data from the IPEDS Use the Data Center.

For more information on the IPEDS Data Release schedule and publications, please contact the IPEDS Help Desk.