

Outcomes 101: ECO Center Q&A

This page summarizes many questions frequently asked about the child and family outcomes measurement process and provides brief answers. For more detailed information or to share other questions and comments, contact us at staff@the-eco-center.org.

Outcomes and Federal Reporting

Q. What are child and family outcomes?

A. An outcome is a benefit experienced as a *result* of services and supports provided for a child or family. The fact that a service has been provided does not mean that an outcome has been achieved. Likewise, an outcome is not the same as satisfaction with the services received. The impact that those services and supports have on the functioning of children and families constitutes the outcome. Consider the example of an autistic child working with a therapist to increase his communication skills (receiving a service). If that child learns words he can use to convey his needs to others, then he has achieved an outcome. Similarly, a family may receive information about their child's disability (the service provided), but if the information enables them to assist in their child's learning and development more effectively, then the family has achieved an outcome.

Q. Why are states measuring outcomes for programs serving young children with disabilities?

A. In this age of accountability, policymakers are asking questions about the outcomes achieved by programs supported by public funds. Judging the effectiveness of any program requires looking at results, not simply at the process. The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) in the U.S. Department of Education now requires states to report outcomes data for children served through Part C and Part B Preschool of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as part of their Annual Performance Report. Many states plan to use data on child and family outcomes to improve their programs in addition to providing the required information to the federal government.

Q. What are the child outcomes that states need to report to the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)?

A. States must report the percent of infants and toddlers with IFSPs or preschool children with IEPs who demonstrate improved:

- A. Positive social-emotional skills (including social relationships)
- B. Acquisition and use of knowledge and skills (including early language/communication [and early literacy*])
- C. Use of appropriate behavior to meet needs

* Early literacy only applies to preschool

Q. What do the child outcome statements mean?

A. The outcomes address three areas of child functioning necessary for each child to be an active and successful participant at home, in the community, and in other places like a child care program or preschool.

Positive social-emotional skills refer to how children get along with others, how they relate with adults and with other children. For older children, these skills also include how children follow rules related to groups and interact with others in group situations such as a child care center. The outcome includes the ways the child expresses emotions and feelings and how he or she interacts with and plays with other children.

The acquisition and use of knowledge and skills refers to children's abilities to think, reason, remember, problem solve, and use symbols and language. The outcome also encompasses children's understanding of the physical and social worlds. It includes understanding of early concepts (e.g., symbols, pictures, numbers, classification, spatial relationships), imitation, object permanence, the acquisition of language and communication skills, and early literacy and numeracy skills. The outcome also addresses the precursors that are needed so that children will experience success later in elementary school when they are taught academic subject areas (e.g., reading, mathematics).

The use of appropriate behavior to meet needs refers to the actions that children employ to take care of their basic needs, including getting from place to place, using tools (e.g., fork, toothbrush, crayon), and in older children, contributing to their own health and safety. The outcome includes how children take care of themselves (e.g., dressing, feeding, hair brushing, toileting), carry out household responsibilities, and act on the world to get what they want. This outcome addresses children's increasing capacity to become independent in interacting with the world and taking care of their needs.

Q. Where did these outcome statements come from?

A. The Office of Special Education Programs funded the Early Childhood Outcomes Center to build consensus around a set of child and family outcomes. Between fall 2003 and spring 2005, ECO convened numerous stakeholder groups to gather input on what the outcomes should be and to review and comment on initial drafts of the outcomes. A draft set of outcomes were posted on the ECO website in December 2004 and January 2005. Based on the input received, ECO recommended a set of child and family outcomes to OSEP in February 2005. The child outcomes required by OSEP are similar to those recommended by the stakeholders, but the family outcomes are not. (See question: [What family outcomes did the ECO Center recommend that OSEP adopt?](#)).

Related link:

- Family and Child Outcomes for Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education: http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/pdfs/eco_outcomes_4-13-05.pdf

Q. What is a functional outcome?

A. The three child outcomes are functional outcomes in the sense that they refer to behaviors, knowledge, and skills that are meaningful to children in their everyday lives. The outcomes refer to actions that children need to be able to carry out or to knowledge that they need to have in order to function successfully across a variety of settings and ultimately to be successful in kindergarten and later in school. To be successful in these settings, it is important for children to be able to, for example, get along with others, follow the rules in a group, continue to learn new things, and take care of their basic needs in an appropriate way.

Q. How are the functional outcomes different from domains?

A. Many assessment tools examine children’s development in different domains. Domains are areas of development such as social, fine motor, gross motor, cognitive, or language. Functional outcomes refer to behaviors that are meaningful in the context of a child’s everyday living. Sometimes domain areas on an assessment include items that are not meaningful or even possible for all children, such as “stacks three blocks” or “rides a tricycle,” or items that assess a skill independent of how the child uses the skill, such as “knows 20 words.” Functional outcomes focus on what the child can do and needs to be able to do in the context of his or her life. These are integrated behaviors that usually cross multiple domains and allow children to achieve something meaningful. Domains refer to areas of development that contribute to successful functioning but are not themselves the functioning. For example, a child might demonstrate knowledge of language but still not use language appropriately to meet his or her needs. Conversely, a child who has no spoken language may have an effective and appropriate way to express what he or she wants.

Q. Doesn’t all functioning require the acquisition and the use of knowledge and skills (Outcome 2)?

A. It is certainly true that knowledge and skills underlie functioning in each of the three outcome areas. Outcome 2 refers to the specific set of knowledge and skills that lay the foundation for more formal learning later in school settings. The specific skills referred to in Outcome 2 relate to processes like acquiring general knowledge, thinking, reasoning, problem solving, and learning new vocabulary words. Outcome 1 encompasses the skills required to get along with others and Outcome 3 encompasses the skills needed to take care of one’s own needs.

Q. What information will be reported to OSEP about the three child outcome statements?

A. States are required to measure and report on the progress children make between the time they enter a program and the time they exit in each of the outcome areas. Data are to be reported for all children who stay in the program at least 6 months. Specifically, for each outcome, states are to report the percentage of children who:

- a. Did not improve functioning
- b. Improved functioning, but not sufficiently to move nearer to functioning comparable to same-aged peers
- c. Improved functioning to a level nearer to same-aged peers but did not reach it
- d. Improved functioning to reach a level comparable to same-aged peers
- e. Maintained functioning at a level comparable to same-aged peers

To report data in these reporting categories, states must have information about children’s functioning at two time points (entry and exit) and have a way to examine the level of improvement or progress in functioning between those time points.

The data collected will be aggregated to create an overall view of the progress made by *all* children in the state receiving Part C or Part B/619 services. It is this statewide progress data that will be reported to OSEP. No identifiable data on any particular child will be included in these reports. For more information on the OSEP reporting categories

go to http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/activities.cfm#SPP_templates and review indicators 3 and 4 for Part C and indicator 7 for Part B. (See also http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/activities.cfm#Revised_Requirements for information about implications from revisions that occurred in child outcome indicators). Note that, although only entry and exit data will be reported to the federal level, many states are obtaining this information at more frequent intervals to support statewide decisionmaking and program planning purposes.

Q. When are states required to begin reporting data on the outcome statements?

A. States have already begun collecting data and have reported data on the status of children at program entry in their February 2007 Annual Performance Reports (APR). States are required to report their first data on children's progress in the 2008 APR. (See question: [Q. What are the child outcomes that states need to report to the Office of Special Education Programs \(OSEP\)?](#)).

Q. Are states required to report on a child's progress for any outcome in which the child does not have a delay?

A. Yes. OSEP requires that states provide data on all three outcomes for every* child leaving Part C or Part B/619 services. Data are required for all outcomes even if there are no concerns about a child's development, or if the child only has delays in one or two outcome areas. This includes children receiving only a single service such as speech therapy.

* For states sampling children from their Part C or B population, ratings must be provided for every child being sampled.

Q. Why is the progress of children with special needs being compared to expectations for same age peers?

A. States are required to compare the functioning of children in Part C and Part B Preschool programs to age expectations because age expectations provide a common standard for all young children. To merely record that children made progress between entry and exit would not provide strong evidence for the effectiveness of the program. Also, one of the goals of early childhood services is to prepare children to succeed in kindergarten and, in kindergarten, children will be expected to meet grade level standards. OSEP recognizes that not all children will be able to function comparable to same age peers at the end of early childhood services, but the system will now be tracking how many have achieved or moved closer to functioning at an age expected level.

Q. Children with severe disabilities may never move toward typical development, but they often do make progress with the assistance of early intervention and preschool special education programs. How will this progress be reflected in the federal reporting?

A. Children who make progress but have not moved closer to functioning like same aged peers are counted in category "b" for OSEP reporting purposes. They are counted as children who made progress. Even small steps of individual progress, the very things we strive for and celebrate for children with more severe impairments, do count as progress for category "b."

Related link:

- OSEP Reporting Requirements: <http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/activities.cfm>

Q. Some disabilities become progressively more debilitating over time and some children may regress rather than make progress. Won't this negatively impact the results that states report and make programs appear as though they aren't effective?

A. We expect that a small percentage of children receiving early intervention or preschool special education services will not make any progress during their time in the program. For state purposes, it will be helpful for states to be able to describe the types of children who are reported in each of the OSEP "a" to "e" categories, especially those in category "a," children who do not make progress. Many states are collecting additional information or linking child outcomes data to existing information collected so that they can understand more about how child and family outcomes observed are related to key child, family, and service characteristics. OSEP acknowledges that there will be children served in Part C and Part B Preschool programs who do not make any progress, but until states report the data, we do not know the percentage of children in category "a."

Related link:

- OSEP Reporting Requirements: <http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/activities.cfm>

Q. Can't we already judge the effectiveness of Part C and Part B Preschool programs through the exit data that reports the number of children who exited the program and the number of children who reached their IFSP or IEP goals?

A. Using exit data, we can identify which children left Part C and Part B/619 programs because they reached their goals, but we don't know anything about the progress of those who transitioned into special education programs. A more complete picture of the effectiveness of the programs can be obtained by looking at the extent of progress made by *all* children who received services.

Q. Is the federal government requiring that states submit data on family outcomes?

A. The Office of Special Education Programs requires that Part C programs report on the percentage of families who report that early intervention provided help in three areas. (See question: [What information are states required to report to OSEP about families?](#)). Part B programs are to report the same information for all programs preschool through secondary school, which is the percentage of families who report that the school facilitated parent involvement. Neither of these requirements address family outcomes because they ask for information about services provided rather than whether an outcome was actually achieved.

Q. What family outcome statements did the ECO Center recommend that OSEP adopt?

A. As a result to the ECO stakeholder process (See question: [Where did these outcomes come from?](#)), the following five outcomes were identified as desired outcomes for all families participating in early intervention:

- Families understand their child's strengths, abilities, and special needs
- Families know their rights and advocate effectively for their children
- Families help their children develop and learn

- Families have support systems
- Families access desired services, programs, activities in their community

Consensus was achieved for all five of these outcomes as relevant for families participating in Part C early intervention services. For families with children receiving preschool special education services, there was consensus that outcomes 1, 2, and possibly 3 apply. Consensus was not reached as to whether outcomes 4 and 5 apply to families receiving services through preschool programs.

Related links:

- Family and Child Outcomes for Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education: http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/pdfs/eco_outcomes_4-13-05.pdf
- Guidance for States in Documenting Family Outcomes: http://www.fpg.unc.edu/%7Eeco/pdfs/guidance_for_states.pdf

Q. What information are states required to report to OSEP about families?

A. For Part C, states are required to report the percent of families participating in Part C who report that EI services have helped the family

- Know their rights
- Effectively communicate their children's needs
- Help their children develop and learn

For Part B, states are required to report the percent of parents with a child receiving special education services who report that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities. States also may choose to collect additional information about family outcomes that resulted from the services and supports received in EI and ECSE.

- For more information on the ECO Center's work and resources related to family outcomes, go to <http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/tools.cfm>
- View the SPP/APR Indicator Measurement Tables for: [Part C indicators 3 and 4, and Part B \(619\) indicator 7](#)

Child Outcomes Summary Form (COSF)

Q. What is the Child Outcome Summary Form (COSF)?

A. The COSF is a process developed by the Early Childhood Outcomes Center that provides a common metric for describing children's functioning compared to age expectations in each of the three outcome areas. The COSF provides a way for a team to summarize the child's level of functioning using information from many sources including assessment tools and parent and provider reports.

Related links:

- Child Outcomes Summary Form (COSF) http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/pdfs/Child_Outcomes_Summary_Form_4-21-06-2.pdf
- Overview of the Child Outcomes Summary Form http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/pdfs/COSF_overview_9-29-06.pdf
- Instructions on the use of Child Outcomes Summary Form

http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/pdfs/Instructions_for_COSF_rev_11-6-06.pdf

Q. Is the COSF an assessment tool?

A. No. The COSF is a technique for consolidating information from multiple sources including one or more assessment tools. It is not an assessment tool. The COSF process requires looking at multiple sources of information (including that from assessment tools) about a child's functioning and making an informed decision (usually in a team setting) regarding how the child's functioning compares to age expectations. The form generates a common rating, even when knowledge about children's functioning comes from different sources.

Q. Are states required to use the COSF?

A. No. States have the option to collect the OSEP data in any way that produces valid and reliable data. Many states have chosen to use the COSF because it allows them to aggregate information from programs that use different assessment tools or from teams who want to consolidate information about a child's functioning from multiple sources. However, the COSF is not the only way that states can gather progress information to address the OSEP child outcome reporting requirements.

Related links:

- For more information on what options are available to states go to: http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/pdfs/State_Approaches-9-28-06.pdf
- For more information on state activities regarding the child outcome requirements at <http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/whatstates.cfm#whatstates>

Q. Where can I find information on developmental expectations for children of different ages?

A. For more information on child development and developmental milestones, go to http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/pdfs/Age-expected_child_dev10-11-06.pdf

Q. Can a state adapt the Child Outcomes Summary Form (COSF)?

A. A state can adapt some features of the COSF. For example, a state can change the formatting so all three outcomes fit on one page. Some states have elected not to use numbers and are only using words to describe the seven points on the scale. Features of the COSF that cannot be changed include the number of points on the scale (i.e., states cannot make it a 5-point scale) and the definition for each point.

Crosswalks

Q. What are “crosswalks”?

A. ECO “crosswalked” some of the most commonly used assessment tools in Part C and Part B Preschool to the three OSEP child outcomes. The crosswalks show which items or areas on assessments tools address each of the three outcomes. The crosswalks were developed because currently available assessment tools are organized around domains. As noted above, domains are not the same as functional outcomes. (See question: [How are the functional outcomes different from domains?](#)). The ECO Center's extensive dialogue with stakeholders that resulted in the development of the child outcomes

provides us with a unique perspective on the intended content for each outcome. (See question: [Where did these outcomes come from?](#)). In developing crosswalks, we have applied a consistent set of rules to map assessment tool content to the outcome content. The crosswalks are *not* meant to be used as a checklist to determine level of functioning in an outcome area,

Related links:

- For information about the specific rules used in the development of crosswalks, contact staff@the-eco-center.org
- Introduction to Instrument Crosswalks:
http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/pdfs/Crosswalk_intro_10-2-06v2.pdf

Family Outcomes

Q. What is the Family Outcomes Survey (FOS)?

A. The Family Outcomes Survey (FOS) was developed by the ECO Center to provide an assessment tool for states and programs to use to determine the extent to which the five family outcomes were attained. Even though programs are not required by OSEP to examine these outcomes, many states are interested in learning about family outcomes. The tool consists of 18 items. Fifteen of these items address the five family outcome statements recommended by the ECO Center. The last three items provide the data that programs are required to report to OSEP about families. These three questions differ on the Part C and the Part B Preschool versions of the survey because the programs have different OSEP reporting requirements. Parallel versions of the FOS have also been developed for families of children birth to 3 years or 3 through 5 years participating in general early childhood services who may not have children enrolled in Part C or Part B Preschool services. All versions of the survey are available on our website (see link below) and can be downloaded and reproduced free of charge. On survey reproductions, include the following citation: “Developed by the Early Childhood Outcomes Center with support from the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education.”

Related links:

- Family Outcomes Survey Overview:
http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/pdfs/fos_overview.pdf
- The Family Outcomes Survey for Part C and Part B (Section 619) programs:
<http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/tools.cfm#FOSurvey>

Q. Can a state or program adapt the Family Outcomes Survey to fit its needs?

A. States and programs can adapt the Family Outcome Survey to meet their needs; however, they are encouraged to consider the nature of the changes carefully. Research currently is underway on the Family Outcomes Survey items as written, so any change to the item wording means that current research on the survey will not apply. Formatting changes that do not change the content, such as putting the state’s program name or logo on the survey, are of no consequence to the research on the items and are encouraged. For further questions about types of adaptations a state is considering, please contact us at staff@the-eco-center.org

Q. Do you have the COSF or the FOS translated in other languages?

A. The COSF and the FOS are posted on our website, including any currently available translations. Please contact us at staff@the-eco-center.org if you have already developed or are interested in developing translations of these forms and tools in additional languages.

Related links:

- Child Outcomes Summary Form: <http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/outcomes.cfm>
- Family Outcomes Survey: <http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/tools.cfm>

Acronyms

Q. Can you define some of the acronyms and abbreviations that are used throughout the ECO Center website?

A. Many common acronyms and abbreviations are listed below. Let us know if there are others that would be helpful to include as well.

- **COSF** – Child Outcomes Summary Form. See also <http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/outcomes.cfm>
- **ECO Center** – The Early Childhood Outcomes Center, funded by OSEP. See also <http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/overview.cfm>
- **ECSE** – Early Childhood Special Education services, as defined in Part B, Section 619 of IDEA
- **EI** – Early Intervention, as defined in Part C of IDEA
- **FOS** – Family Outcomes Survey, developed by the ECO Center. See also <http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/tools.cfm>
- **GPRA** – The Government Performance and Results Act (1993) requiring that each federal agency establish measurable performance indicators for its programs aligned with the program’s purpose and documented in a strategic plan. See also <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/mgmt-gpra/gplaw2m.html>
- **IDEA** – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Legislation funding services for individuals with disabilities from birth through 21 years. IDEA components authorizing services for children birth through 5 years include the Part C (Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities) Program and the Part B Preschool Grants program.
- **IEP** – Individualized Education Program developed to guide services for a child who receives services under Part B of IDEA legislation.
- **IFSP** – Individualized Family Service Plan developed to guide services for a child and family who receive services under Part C of IDEA legislation.
- **NECTAC** – National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center. See also <http://www.nectac.org>
- **NEILS** – National Early Intervention Longitudinal Study. See also <http://www.sri.com/neils/>. NEILS provided some outcome data for several GPRA indicators for Part C, but does not have ongoing data about child and family outcomes.
- **OMB** – The Office of Management and Budget. The federal office conducting the PART reviews.
- **OSEP** – Office of Special Education Programs in the U.S. Department of Education. It is the federal agency responsible for administering IDEA and for developing GPRA indicators and collecting the relevant data for programs

supported under the law. See also

<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/index.html>

- **PART** – The Program Assessment Rating Tool conducted by OMB. The use of the PART has put pressure on federal agencies to gather outcomes data. See also <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/part/#partweb> and www.ExpectMore.gov
- **Part B Preschool** – Part B, Section 619 section of the IDEA legislation, addresses services for children 3 through 5 years. Sometimes these services are referred to more generally as early childhood special education services.
- **Part C** – Portion of the IDEA legislation addressing services for children birth to 3 years and their families. Sometimes these services are referred to more generally as early intervention services.

Contact ECO

Q. How do I contact the ECO Center?

A. E-mail your questions or comments to staff@the-eco-center.org. To locate contact information for individual ECO staff members, visit the [ECO Staff](#) page.