

**Comments from the Early Childhood Outcome Center on
Proposed Indicators for Child and Family Outcomes
5/9/05**

The Early Childhood Outcomes (ECO) Center is responding to the Notice of Proposed Information Collection Requests published in the March 6, 2005 Federal Register. The document contains the recommendations of the ECO Center for revisions to the indicators to be requested from states by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) as part of their Part C State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR) Part C Indicator Measurement Table and Part B State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR) Part B Indicator Measurement Table. Recommendations are made with regard to four indicator areas: 1) Child Outcomes for Part C; 2) Child Outcomes for Part B Preschool; 3) Family Outcomes for Part C, and 4) Family Outcomes for Part B Preschool. These recommendations are based on what the ECO Center has learned in its work on outcomes and indicators and on input received on a previous draft of this document from its stakeholder groups (the Part C Coordinators Work Group, the 619 Coordinators Work Group, the Family Work Group, the Child Technical Work Group, and the Family Technical Work Group). The recommendations for the child indicators are discussed first followed by a discussion of the family indicators.

Indicators for Child Outcomes for Part C and Part B Preschool

From October 2003 until the present, the ECO Center has collected input on desired outcomes for young children with disabilities and their families. Various stakeholder groups, including parents of children with disabilities, state Part C and 619 coordinators, local administrators, providers, and researchers have been involved with this process. Based on this work, the ECO Center is recommending an overall goal and three outcomes for children with disabilities participating in early intervention and preschool special education. The overall goal is to enable young children to be active and successful participants during their early childhood years and in the future in a variety of settings. This goal will be achieved when children have good results for the following three outcomes:

1. Children have positive social relationships
2. Children acquire and use knowledge and skills
3. Children take appropriate action to meet their needs

Because of their unique needs and capabilities, young children with disabilities will demonstrate attainment of these outcomes in a variety of different ways. For example, children who are deaf and who sign will be increasing the number of signs in their repertoire. Children who use assistive technology will become increasingly proficient in using their particular technology to meet their needs. The provision of high quality early childhood services and supports maximizes the potential of each child with delays and disabilities to move toward attainment of the three outcomes which will increase the likelihood that they will successfully participate in kindergarten. Based on our work to date, we recommend that data be collected on each of these three child outcomes for participants in Part C and Part B Preschool programs.

One of the greatest challenges to designing an outcome system is the need to create a system that reflects the fact that these programs serve children with many different kinds

of delays and disabilities. These children can range from those who have only short-term difficulties in communication to children with disabilities that have extremely serious, long-term health and developmental consequences. For all children, early intervention and preschool programs are intended to produce better developmental outcomes than would have been attained without such services. For children with very serious conditions, the best possible outcome might be retaining whatever skills and capabilities the children have or even preventing or lessening regression of skills. For some children, intervention will help them acquire new skills at a faster rate so that they will move closer to or even achieve the kind of functioning displayed by their age peers. Other children acquire new skills but still will display some degree of developmental delay. In fact, some of these children, such as children with Down syndrome or other established conditions associated with a high probability of delay, will gain skills but at an increasingly slower rate. Even with good quality intervention, these children may fall farther behind their age peers each year. Intervention will be lessening the extent of delay that would be expected to emerge as these children get older.

Because children with different kinds of delays or conditions will experience different kinds of positive outcomes (e.g., prevention of regression, prevention of delay, change in rate at which skills are acquired, elimination of delay—to name but a few of the possibilities), it is not possible to capture meaningfully the outcomes of early intervention and preschool programs with one indicator per outcome. Because *there is no single indicator that every child participating in Part C or Part B would be expected to achieve*, the ECO Center recommends that data on several different indicators for each outcome be reported and used to track state and local progress.

We believe that indicators of progress (i.e., how many children have shown positive change over time), even though they require two time points of data, provide more meaningful statements about program effectiveness and are more consistent with the intent of IDEIA than status indicators (i.e., how many children have achieved a benchmark). Progress indicators also are better suited to the challenges inherent in accounting for the diverse needs of children served in these programs and the lack of an agreed-upon set of specific cross-state indicators of status. Our recommended progress indicators are shown in the Tables 1, 2 and 3 at the end of this document and are explained below.

For Part C, we recommend data be collected separately for each outcome as follows¹:

- *% of infants and toddlers with IFSPs who made progress in positive social relationships,*
- *% of infants and toddlers with IFSPs who made progress in acquiring and using knowledge and skills,*

¹These would replace the following Part C indicators being reviewed for public comment:

4. Percent of infants and toddlers with IFSPs who demonstrate positive social-emotional skills (including social relationships); acquire and use knowledge and skills (including early language/ communications); and appropriate behaviors to meet their needs.

- *% infants and toddlers with IFSPs who made progress in taking appropriate actions to meet their needs.*

We recommend a similar set for Part B Preschool²:

- *% of preschool children with IEPs who made progress in positive social relationships,*
- *% of preschool children with IEPs who made progress in acquiring and using knowledge and skills (including early literacy),*
- *% of preschool children with IEPs who made progress in taking appropriate actions to meet their needs.*

To be counted for an indicator, a child has to have acquired new skills or behaviors in the outcome area since the previous measurement.

Each of these indicators (children who make any degree of progress) should be further broken into four categories of progress:

- A. *the percentage of children who made sufficient progress to maintain their functioning at a level comparable to same-aged peers in the outcome area*
These children showed functioning comparable to same-aged peers at both measurement points. Included in this indicator would be children who do not have needs in an outcome area, for example, children who only have difficulty related to the acquisition of knowledge and skills but not with regard to positive social relationships or taking action to meet their needs. It also includes the children for whom services prevented their disability or delay from causing additional delays in other areas (for example, a child with a motor delay that ultimately could lead to a delay in acquisition of knowledge and skills because exploration has been inhibited).
- B. *the percentage of children who made sufficient progress to achieve functioning comparable to same-aged peers*
These children did not show functioning comparable to same-aged peers at the first measurement point but did by the second.
- C. *The percentage of children who moved nearer to functioning comparable to same-aged peers but did not achieve it*

² These would replace the following Part B indicators being reviewed for public comment:

7. Percent of preschool children with IEPs who demonstrate positive social-emotional skills (including social relationships); acquire and use knowledge and skills (including early language/ communications and early literacy); and demonstrate appropriate behaviors to meet their needs.

These children acquired skills and new behaviors at a faster rate after beginning services than they had before. There has been a positive change in their developmental trajectories but they had not attained functioning comparable to same-aged peers by the time of the second measurement.

D. The percentage of children who made progress but not sufficient progress to move nearer to functioning comparable to same-aged peers

These children acquired new skills and behaviors but there has been no positive change in their developmental trajectories. There has not been a positive change in their rate of acquisition of new skills.

The sum of the percentages in A, B, C, and D equals the percentage of children who made progress toward the outcome. These overall indicator and four sub-indicators (A, B, C, and D) provide considerable information about the kinds of progress being made by children who have received services. Note that the sum of A + B equals the percentage of children who achieved functioning comparable to same aged peers. The sum of B + C also provides useful information in that this number is the percentage of children who made greater than expected progress over the time period.

We are using the phrase “functioning comparable to same-aged peers” to mean the approximate capabilities of children of a given age, across a variety of settings and situations, however those capabilities can be demonstrated. Functioning comparable to age-level peers is **not** to be determined by only a single score on a norm-referenced test or any other assessment although such scores when used in conjunction with other sources of information could inform a decision on the child’s status with regard to an outcome or how much progress the child has made. *Early childhood services and supports are not meant and will not result in all young children with disabilities and delays functioning like typically developing children.* At the same time, the closer young children with disabilities can move toward functioning comparably to their age-level peers, the greater the likelihood they will be successful participants in kindergarten. Simply expressed, a child who enters kindergarten with the knowledge and skills of a five-year-old is more like to be successful than one who enters with the skills of a three-year-old. Early childhood learning and development proceeds through a sequence, and children who continue to move through the sequence at a slower pace compared to other children will be farther and farther behind their same aged peers as they get older. Also, although we know it is unrealistic to expect that all young children with disabilities will achieve a level of functioning comparable to their same-aged peers, we do not know how many can or are achieving this until valid data are regularly collected on outcomes.

We recommend that the same set of child outcome indicators be collected for Part C and Part B Preschool with a possible additional phrase for the preschool indicator referring to knowledge and skills (Outcome 2). Early literacy skills have both policy and practical importance and are the focus of many early childhood programs. Early literacy skills are part of Outcome 2 but to insure that this is widely recognized, we would support the addition of the phrase to the outcome to clarify its intent. Thus, the overall indicator for Outcome 2 for Preschool Part B would read:

- *% of preschool children with IEPs who made progress in acquiring and using knowledge and skills (including early literacy)*

To provide data that can be meaningfully aggregated across states, states will need to follow similar parameters in their data collection as to who is to be included (for example, children who have received services for at least 6 months) and how much time has elapsed between the first and second measurement (for example, progress over a year or progress over the entire time receiving early intervention). These decisions merit additional input and research. Should OSEP elect to adopt this proposed set of indicators, the ECO Center will examine possible options and be prepared to make more detailed recommendations as to the specifics of the data collection in the future.

We know from our work that states are just beginning to build their capacity to produce outcome data. States will need a relatively sophisticated measurement system to produce reliable and valid data on the five recommended indicators for each outcome and it will take a number of years for states to build this capacity. We also are well aware of the pressing need to have national outcome data on Part C and Part B preschool. As an interim solution to this dilemma, we recommend that OSEP collect data only on the first indicator for the next several years, phasing in the other indicators over time. Data on the first indicator will provide a limited picture of outcome attainment in Part C and Part B Preschool but it can serve as an interim solution while state systems are being developed. The recommendations for the interim indicators for Part C are:

- *% of infants and toddlers with IFSPs who made progress in positive social relationships,*
- *% of infants and toddlers with IFSPs who made progress in acquiring and using knowledge and skills,*
- *% infants and toddlers with IFSPs who made progress in taking appropriate actions to meet their needs.*

The indicators for Part B Preschool would be:

- *% of preschool children with IEPs who made progress in positive social relationships,*
- *% of preschool children with IEPs who made progress in acquiring and using knowledge and skills (including early literacy),*
- *% of preschool children with IEPs who made progress in taking appropriate actions to meet their needs.*

Data on this kind of indicator will show how many children are acquiring new behaviors and skills in their movement toward each outcome. The data will provide no information on the different kinds of progress as discussed above but it is a reasonable indicator for states to report on as they move toward more sophisticated systems of outcomes measurement. This indicator also is less likely than some other possible indicators to be misinterpreted or misused in the early stages of building state and local capacity to report outcomes data.

Indicators for Family Outcomes for Part C and Part B Preschool

Based on work with stakeholders related to the development of family outcomes, the ECO center recommends that the overall goal for families with children in early intervention and/or preschool special education is to enable them to provide care for their child and have the resources they need to participate in their own desired family and community activities. The five family outcomes for Part C programs are:

1. Families understand their children's strengths, abilities, and special needs.
2. Families know their rights and advocate effectively for their children.
3. Families help their children develop and learn.
4. Families have support systems.
5. Families access desired services, programs, and activities in their communities.

We recommend that the following indicators be collected for these outcomes³:

- *% of families with IFSPs who report that they understand their children's strengths, abilities, and special needs,*
- *% of families with IFSPs who report that know their rights and advocate effectively for their children,*
- *% of families with IFSPs who report that they help their children develop and learn,*
- *% of families with IFSPs who report that they have support systems,*
- *% of families with IFSPs who report that they access desired services, programs, and activities in their communities.*

In formulating our recommendations, we considered and sought input on several issues related to these indicators, including: a) whether the indicators should refer to families changing or families' status with regard to the outcome, b) whether the indicators should include phrasing that attributes the outcome to early intervention services, and c) whether there should be one outcome and one indicator, or alternatively, five outcomes and five indicators. Although there are good reasons to report on families who made progress (e.g., "families who reported they are now better able to help their children..."), we felt the more meaningful type of indicator is a reflection of where families are with regard to their status in achieving the outcome. Using an indicator of status also recognizes that some families will begin service already having achieved the outcome and thus have no need to change. Similarly, there are good reasons to include a phrase that attributes the outcome to early intervention (e.g., "families who report early intervention helped them to..."). Research on instrument development in this area has found that attributing change to early intervention is very complex and possibly too open to misinterpretation in a large scale data collection. For example, one respondent might

³ These would replace the following indicator being reviewed for public comment:

Percent of families participating in Part C who report that early intervention services have increased their capacity to enhance their child's development.

perceive early intervention only as therapy, whereas another would define it more broadly to include all the help and support received including referrals to other sources of assistance. Requiring attribution of a positive outcome to early intervention also raises the problem of how to characterize families who begin services already having achieved the outcome and so can not logically attribute change to services and supports received. Finally, without more research, it is not clear whether these five outcomes are distinct in so far as families can achieve one without the others. In the absence of sufficient empirical information on this issue, we believe it is appropriate to collect data on each outcome separately because the implications for program improvement may differ considerably across the five outcome areas.

In collecting input from our stakeholders, we heard several positions on the issues described above, including some who argued strongly for using a progress measure and a way to attribute change to early intervention. Without sufficient time to explore the implications of the various alternatives more thoroughly, we believe the safest course at this point are the indicators listed above. If OSEP elects to go with an indicator that includes attribution, we strongly recommend the collection of three indicators for each outcome in this form:

- A. % of families who report that early intervention services helped the family achieve [the outcome].
- B. % of families who report that early intervention services did not help them achieve [the outcome] and they wish that they had received help in this area
- C. % of families who report that early intervention services did not help them achieve [the outcome] and they did not need any help in this area.

If A is reported without B and C, the percentage cannot be interpreted because it is impossible to tell if those who reported early intervention did not help them are pleased or displeased.

As part of the ECO development work on the outcome statements, there was much discussion about whether Part C and Part B preschool should have the same set of family outcomes. The indicator for Family Involvement for Part B that OSEP has published for public comment does not have a unique indicator for families of preschoolers and we would strongly recommend that a preschool family outcome indicator be created distinct from the Part B school-age indicator. For Part B Preschool, the ECO Center recommends that data be collected on three indicators of achievement of family outcomes⁴:

- *% of families of preschool children with IEPs who understand their children's strengths, abilities, and special needs,*
- *% of families of preschool children with IEPs who know their rights and advocate effectively for their children,*

⁴ For families of preschool children with IEPs, these would replace the following indicator being reviewed for public comment:

Percent of parent who report involvement in their child's program facilitated improved results

- *% of families of preschool children with IEPs who help their children develop and learn.*

There was widespread consensus among stakeholders that the five outcomes listed for Part C also are important for families of preschool children. However, there was also a strong sentiment from many administrators, especially the state coordinators, that Part B preschool programs currently are not required and do not provide the kinds of services to families of preschoolers that would result in the achievement of the last two family outcomes listed for Part C. Because of this, they felt strongly that these outcomes should not be included in an accountability system. In response to this feedback, the ECO center recommends that OSEP request data from states on the first three outcomes for Part B Preschool programs. We further recommend that, in building their own systems, states give serious consideration to collecting data on all five outcomes for families of preschool children and to collecting data that can link family and child outcomes. The link between the achievement of the child outcomes and the achievement of the family outcomes along with the recognition of the importance of all five family outcomes underscores the importance of fully tracking how families are able to support their children before they begin kindergarten.

**Indicators recommended by the ECO Center to track child outcomes for
Part C**

Table 1. Positive Social Relationships

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1. % of infants and toddlers with IFSPs who made progress in having positive social relationships | _____ |
| 1A. % who made sufficient progress to maintain their functioning in having positive social relationships at a level comparable to same-aged peers | _____ |
| 1B. % who made sufficient progress to achieve functioning in having positive social relationships comparable to same-aged peers | _____ |
| 1C. % who made sufficient progress to move nearer to a level of functioning comparable to same-aged peers in having positive social relationships but did not achieve it | _____ |
| 1D. % who made progress in having positive social relationships but not sufficient progress to move nearer to functioning comparable to same-aged peers | _____ |

Table 2. Knowledge and Skills

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 2. % of infants and toddlers with IFSPs who made progress in acquiring and using knowledge and skills | _____ |
| 2A. % who made sufficient progress to maintain their functioning in acquiring and using knowledge and skills at a level comparable to same-aged peers | _____ |
| 2B. % who made sufficient progress to achieve functioning in acquiring and using knowledge and skills comparable to same-aged peers | _____ |
| 2C. % who made sufficient progress to move nearer to a level of functioning comparable to same-aged peers in acquiring and using knowledge and skills but did not achieve it | _____ |
| 2D. % who made progress in acquiring and using knowledge and skills but not sufficient progress to move nearer to functioning comparable to same-aged peers | _____ |

Table 3. Taking Action to Meet Needs

3. % of infants and toddlers with IFSPs who made progress in taking appropriate action to meet their needs

3A. % who made sufficient progress to **maintain** their functioning in taking action to meet needs at a level comparable to same-aged peers

3B. % who made sufficient progress to **achieve** functioning in taking action to meet needs comparable to same-aged peers

3C. % who made sufficient progress to **move nearer** to a level of functioning comparable to same-aged peers in taking action to meet needs but did not achieve it

3D. % who made progress in taking action to meet needs but not sufficient progress to move nearer to functioning comparable to same-aged peers

Note: % 1A+ % 1B+ % 1C+ % 1D = % 1
 % 2A+ % 2B+ % 2C+ % 2D = % 2
 % 3A+ % 3B+ % 3C+ % 3D = % 3

**Indicators recommended by the ECO Center to track child outcomes for
Part B Preschool**

Table 1. Positive Social Relationships

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1. % of preschool children with IEPs who made progress in positive social relationships | _____ |
| 1A. % who made sufficient progress to maintain their functioning in having positive social relationships at a level comparable to same-aged peers | _____ |
| 1B. % who made sufficient progress to achieve functioning in having positive social relationships comparable to same-aged peers | _____ |
| 1C. % who made sufficient progress to move nearer to a level of functioning comparable to same-aged peers in having positive social relationships but did not achieve it | _____ |
| 1D. % who made progress in having positive social relationships but not sufficient progress to move nearer to functioning comparable to same-aged peers | _____ |

Table 2. Knowledge and Skills

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 2. % of preschool children with IEPs who made progress in acquiring and using knowledge and skills (including early literacy) | _____ |
| 2A. % who made sufficient progress to maintain their functioning in acquiring and using knowledge and skills at a level comparable to same-aged peers | _____ |
| 2B. % who made sufficient progress to achieve functioning in acquiring and using knowledge and skills comparable to same-aged peers | _____ |
| 2C. % who made sufficient progress to move nearer to a level of functioning comparable to same-aged peers in acquiring and using knowledge and skills but did not achieve it | _____ |
| 2D. % who made progress in acquiring and using knowledge and skills but not sufficient progress to move nearer to functioning comparable to same-aged peers | _____ |

Table 3. Taking Action to Meet Needs

3. % of preschool children with IEPs who made progress in taking action to meet needs

3E. % who made sufficient progress to **maintain** their functioning in taking action to meet needs at a level comparable to same-aged peers

3F. % who made sufficient progress to **achieve** functioning in taking action to meet needs comparable to same-aged peers

3G. % who made sufficient progress to **move nearer** to a level of functioning comparable to same-aged peers in taking action to meet needs but did not achieve it

3H. % who made progress in taking action to meet needs but not sufficient progress to move nearer to functioning comparable to same-aged peers

Note: % 1A+ % 1B+ % 1C+ % 1D = % 1
 % 2A+ % 2B+ % 2C+ % 2D = % 2
 % 3A+ % 3B+ % 3C+ % 3D = % 3