



District of Columbia  
Office of the State Superintendent of Education

# CHILD OUTCOMES SUMMARY (COS) PROCESS GUIDANCE

Updated September 2024

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# Introduction

The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) issues guidance to support District of Columbia local education agencies (LEAs) in carrying out obligations under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Consistent with Section 618 of IDEA, LEAs must collect and report data to OSSE to support state-level data reporting. The US Department of Education (USED) Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) requires each state, including the District of Columbia, to report annually on performance measures outlined in the State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR). Indicator 7: Preschool Outcomes measures outcomes for preschool students in three areas: positive social-emotional skills, acquisition and use of knowledge and skills and use of appropriate behaviors.

To support Indicator 7 data collection and reporting, the District of Columbia adopted the Child Outcomes Summary (COS) process as defined by the Early Childhood Technical Assistance (ECTA) Center. This guidance document establishes state-level criteria and processes for data collection, analysis and reporting of student-level COS data. The COS process is a team-based process for summarizing information about a child's functioning in the three outcome areas to measure how students make progress following the provision of early childhood special education services<sup>1</sup>.

In the District of Columbia, all LEAs that accept IDEA funds and operate early childhood programs under IDEA Part B are required to gather and report data for children ages 3-5 who receive special education services. This data is collected twice for each student: (1) within 90 days of entry into the early childhood special education program and (2) within 60 days prior to or five days after the student's exit from the program. COS plays a crucial role in monitoring a student's developmental progress, ensuring a consistent approach to rating their functioning relative to age-expected behavior. COS is not an assessment tool itself. Using multiple sources of data, school teams assign a rating on a 7-point scale that summarizes a student's level of functioning within each of the three outcome areas. The COS process follows a predictable cycle that establishes a comparison between student functioning before and after receiving early childhood special education services.

## Purpose of the COS Process

The COS process enables the evaluation and monitoring of the developmental progress of students ages 3-5 who receive special education services under Part B of IDEA. This data aids LEAs, OSSE and OSEP in the following activities:

1. **Assess child progress at the individual level:** The COS process sheds light on the functional, academic and behavioral development of the individual student, which informs tailored interventions and the development of individualized education programs (IEPs).

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<sup>1</sup> Early childhood special education services, in the context of this guidance, include all special education services provided under Part B of IDEA in a school setting to students who are 3, 4 and 5 years old.

2. **Evaluate and improve programs at the school level:** The COS data collection process holds both LEAs and OSSE accountable for examining patterns and trends in child outcomes to refine instructional practices to ensure students are benefitting from early childhood special education programs.
3. **Allocate resources effectively at the LEA, state and national levels:** Monitoring child outcomes allows LEAs, OSSE and federal entities to assess the effectiveness of early childhood special education programs to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Understanding program performance patterns enhances accountability measures and ensures technical assistance and resources are allocated and targeted appropriately.

## Overview of the Three Outcome Areas

The COS process documents a student’s development and learning in the context of their everyday routines and interactions across settings. These outcomes cut across developmental domains to represent the integrated nature of how children develop, learn and thrive. Skills and behaviors from multiple developmental domains will contribute to a student’s functioning on a single outcome.

When evaluating a student on the three outcome areas, teams should consider how discrete skills lead to functional behaviors. Determining function is a process of asking *why* the discrete skill is being performed<sup>2</sup>. For example, a student might perform the isolated skill of using a finger to point, but this becomes a functional behavior when they point to their lunch to indicate that they are hungry. The assessments and observations used to evaluate a student’s development can often focus on isolated skills, so teams should put this information into context to evaluate how these skills impact the student’s daily functioning.

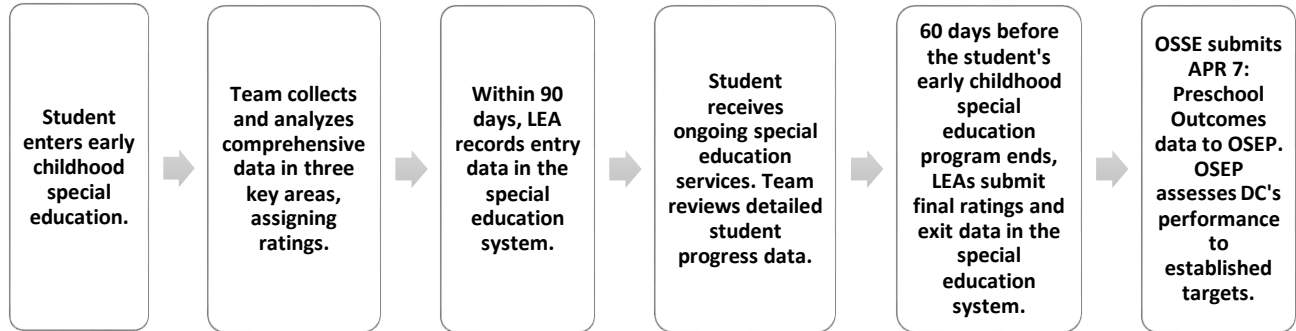
The following is a non-exhaustive list of the functional skills included in each of the three outcome areas<sup>3</sup>:

Positive Social-Emotional Skills	Acquisition and Use of Knowledge and Skills	Use of Appropriate Behavior to Meet Needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relating with caregivers</li> <li>• Attending to other people in a variety of settings</li> <li>• Interacting with peers</li> <li>• Participating in social games and communicating with others</li> <li>• Following social norms and adapting to changes in routine</li> <li>• Expressing own emotions and responding to the emotions of others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Showing interest in learning</li> <li>• Using problem solving skills</li> <li>• Engaging in purposeful play</li> <li>• Understanding pre-academics and literacy</li> <li>• Acquiring language to communicate</li> <li>• Understanding questions asked and directions given</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moving around and manipulating objects to meet needs</li> <li>• Eating and drinking with increasing independence</li> <li>• Dressing and undressing with increasing independence</li> <li>• Toileting and washing with increasing independence</li> <li>• Communicating needs</li> <li>• Showing safety awareness</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> ECTA; [Understanding Functional Skills: Background for the COS Process](#)

<sup>3</sup> ECTA; [Breadth of the Three Child Outcomes](#)

# The COS Outcomes Summary Process



## COS Data Collection: Entry and Exit

As students ages 3-5 enter or exit early childhood special education services, LEAs must use the COS process to document their functioning in the three outcome areas on an ongoing basis. LEAs are responsible for the COS process for students who establish Stage 5 enrollment<sup>4</sup> and meet the following criteria:

Score	Required Students	Timeline
<b>Entry</b>	Students who are ages 3-5 who are already eligible or become eligible for special education services, who are expected to receive at least six months of services before exiting their special education program.	Within 90 calendar days after the initial provision of special education services
<b>Exit</b>	Students who have received at least six months of early childhood special education services and are leaving the early childhood special education program because the student: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transitioned from preschool to kindergarten.</li> <li>• Turned 6 years old.</li> <li>• Is no longer eligible for special education services.</li> <li>• Transferred to an out of state, private or home school program.</li> </ul>	Within 60 calendar days before or five business days after a child's exit from the special education program <sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> "Stage 5 enrollment" occurs upon the student's receipt of educational services, which are deemed to begin on the first official school day. (5A DCMR §3099 "Enrollment") This is the student's first day of attendance.

<sup>5</sup> 5A DCMR §3029.2. Exit scores should be completed as soon as possible if an LEA is at risk of losing access to the student's electronic file.

## Sources of Information for Determining COS Scores

Ratings should be assigned by individuals who know the student well and are familiar with their data and skills. This team may be, but is not required to be, the IEP team and must include at least one professional with knowledge and expertise in early childhood development. Team members can include teachers, related service providers, family members and other individuals who are familiar with the student. The team must include a minimum of two individuals to ensure that ratings reflect a student's functioning across a variety of contexts. Collaboration and discussion of the outcome areas and ratings in real-time, such as during an IEP meeting, will lead to the most accurate scores.

Before assigning ratings, teams must gather and review student data. There is no assessment that directly measures the outcome areas. Teams should use a variety of available data sources to inform COS ratings and must document evidence of skills with a minimum of two sources of data for each outcome area. The following types of data should be considered as possible sources of evidence for ratings:

- Input from the student's family
- Input from the student's teachers and related service providers
- Formal assessments<sup>6</sup>, including evaluations from the eligibility process
- Informal assessments, including classroom-based assessments, curriculum-embedded assessments, observations and work samples
- School records, including report cards
- Special education data, including IEP progress reports, progress monitoring data and meeting notes

## Age-Anchoring

Once the student's data has been gathered, the team must determine whether their overall skills in an outcome area are age-expected, immediate foundational or foundational<sup>7</sup>. These categories summarize a child's abilities relative to age-expected developmental progressions for each of the three child outcomes.

Early childhood development progresses through several levels, with skills and behaviors becoming more complex and proficiency increasing as children get older. Age-expected skills are the set of skills and behaviors expected for the student's chronological age. Immediate foundational skills are those that occur developmentally just before age-expected functioning. Foundational skills are skills that are developed much earlier or farther from age-expected on the developmental progression.

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<sup>6</sup> LEAs may use the [Instrument Crosswalks](#) from ECTA, which draw connections between certain formal assessments and the three outcome areas.

<sup>7</sup> ECTA; [Age Anchoring Guidance for Determining Child Outcomes Summary \(COS\) Ratings](#)

The example below illustrates the age-anchoring process for social and emotional conflict resolution skills, as outlined in the DC Early Learning Standards (2019). When age-anchoring, it is important to start with descriptions of what the student is doing and a thorough understanding of what is expected for their chronological age. From there, consider the developmental progression of that specific skill to determine how close or far the student’s functioning is to age expected.

FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS	FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS	IMMEDIATE FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS	AGE EXPECTED SKILLS	ADVANCED SKILLS
At the foundational level, a pre-K child recognizes that adults can provide guidance and support during challenging situations. When faced with a conflict, the child may approach a teacher or caregiver for assistance.	At the foundational level, a pre-K child might demonstrate basic conflict resolution skills, such as taking turns, sharing toys and using simple language to express their feelings during disagreements.	Just before reaching age-expected functioning, a child might exhibit more advanced conflict resolution abilities. For instance, they could actively listen to their peers, negotiate solutions and use “I” statements to express their needs or concerns.	At the age-expected level, a pre-K child should be proficient in resolving conflicts. They might engage in cooperative problem-solving, consider others’ perspectives and find solutions during disagreements.	Advanced skills could include mediating disputes and demonstrating empathy and emotional intelligence.

Each outcome area encompasses a variety of different skills. Students may demonstrate functioning that is different across skills, even within the same outcome area. Teams should determine a rating that most accurately describes a majority of the student’s skills, or that reflects a mix of skills, within a single outcome area.

## The Rating Scale

A 7-point rating scale is used to quantify and summarize a child’s level of functioning in each of the three outcome areas. These ratings provide an overall picture of how the child behaves across a variety of skills, situations and settings. The proportion of a student’s overall skill level, based on age-anchoring in each outcome area should serve as a guide for selecting a rating, between 1 and 7, that most accurately describes the student’s level of functioning.

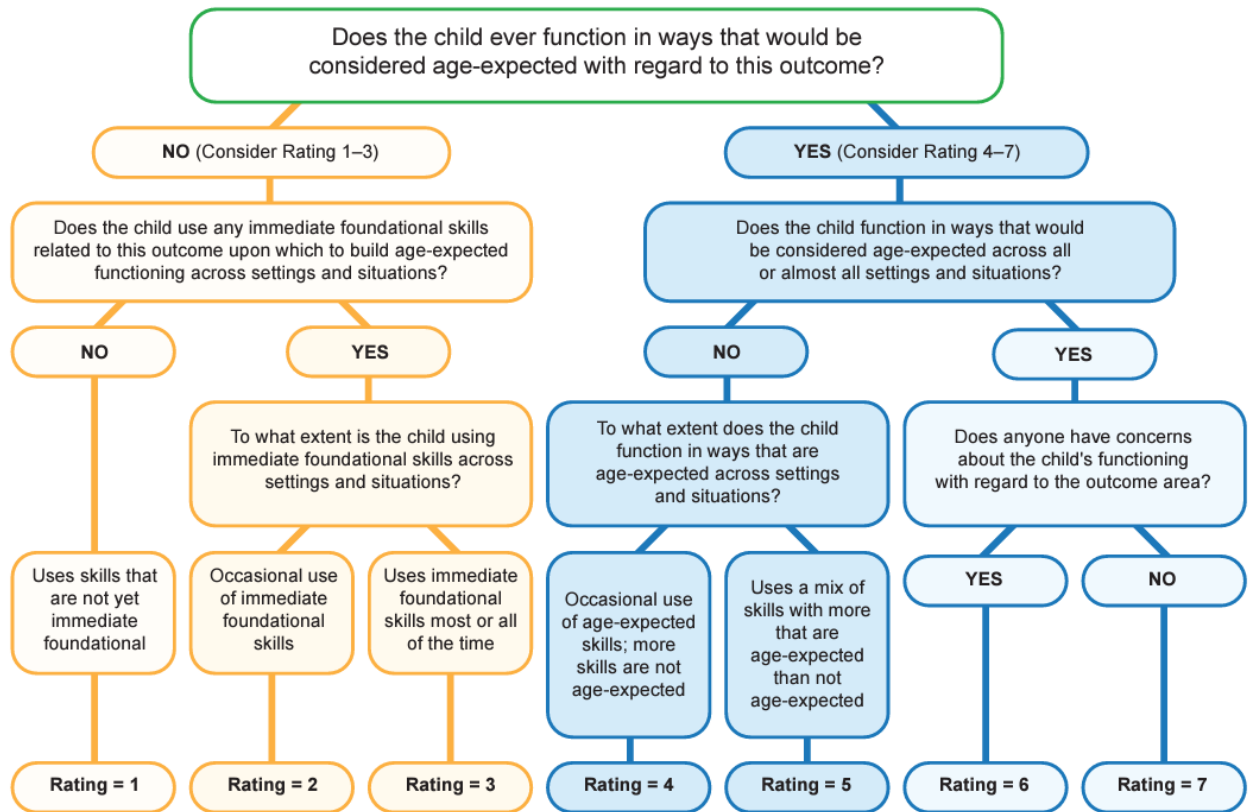
Ratings are based on the following definitions<sup>8</sup>:

<b>Overall Age-Expected Functioning</b>	
<b>7</b>	Child functions in ways that are age-expected in all or almost all everyday situations that are part of the child's life. No one on the team has concerns about the child's functioning in this outcome area.
<b>6</b>	Child's functioning generally is considered age-expected, but there are some significant concerns about the child's functioning in this outcome area. Although age-expected, the child's functioning may border on not keeping pace with age expectations.
<b>Some Age-Expected Functioning</b>	
<b>5</b>	Child functions using a mix of skills, with more skills that are age-expected than not age-expected, across settings and situations in this outcome area. Child's functioning might be described as like that of a slightly younger child.
<b>4</b>	Child occasionally uses age-expected skills across settings and situations in this outcome area. More functioning is not age-expected than is age-expected.
<b>Not Yet Age-Expected Functioning</b>	
<b>3</b>	Child uses immediate foundational skills most or all of the time across settings and situations. Child does not yet function in ways that would be considered age-expected in this outcome area. Functioning might be described as like that of a younger child.
<b>2</b>	Child occasionally uses immediate foundational skills across settings and situations. Child does not yet function in ways that would be considered age-expected in this outcome area. More functioning reflects skills that are foundational than are immediate foundational.
<b>1</b>	Child only uses foundational skills across settings and situations. These foundational skills are crucial to build immediate foundational skills. Child does not yet function in ways that would be considered age-expected or immediate foundational in this outcome area. Child's functioning might be described as like that of a much younger child.

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<sup>8</sup> ECTA; [Child Outcomes Summary \(COS\) Definitions: 7-Point Rating Scale Criteria](#)

The following decision tree provides a consistent framework for assigning the appropriate score that describes a student’s overall functioning in each outcome area<sup>9</sup>.



In addition to reviewing high-level student data, team members can also use discussion prompts<sup>10</sup> to guide collaboration in determining appropriate COS ratings. If there is disagreement on a rating for an outcome area, the team should use a similar approach to what the IEP team would use to navigate different perspectives and opinions to reach a team consensus. Ratings should take several variables into account, including the perspectives of multiple individuals and functioning across different environments, so scores will reflect a generalization of a student’s skills in each outcome area.

## Local, State and Federal Reporting

The overarching goal of improving educational outcomes for children enrolled in preschool or pre-K special education programs is a shared responsibility among federal, state and local agencies. OSEP establishes the regulatory framework by requiring COS ratings during a student’s program entry and exit. Meanwhile, OSSE implements policies and procedures to assess children’s progress in key areas, and LEAs actively collect and

<sup>9</sup> ECTA; [COS Decision Tree for Summary Rating Discussions](#)

<sup>10</sup> ECTA; [COS Process Discussion Prompts](#)

assess data, contributing to the overall evaluation of state performance and ensuring effective educational support for students with disabilities.

### **Local Reporting Requirements**

LEAs must report the COS data in the state-identified special education data system. LEAs must summarize a student's progress in each outcome area and assign a rating that reflects their functioning. Entry data must be entered into a student's record within 90 days of program entry and exit data within 60 days prior to program exit.

### **State Reporting Requirements**

As part of the SPP/APR, OSSE must report on five progress categories and the percentage of preschool students with IEPs who demonstrate improvement in the outcome areas. These categories include:

- A. Preschoolers who did not improve functioning;
- B. Preschoolers who improved functioning but not sufficient to move nearer to functioning comparable to same-aged peers;
- C. Preschoolers who improved functioning to a level nearer to same-aged peers but did not reach it;
- D. Preschoolers who improved functioning to reach a level comparable to same-aged peers; and
- E. Preschoolers who maintained functioning at a level comparable to same-aged peers.

Additionally, OSSE must set targets for the SPP/APR Indicator 7: Preschool Outcomes, allowing OSEP to measure state performance. OSSE analyzes and reports state-level performance data, focusing on the percent of students below age expectations and those functioning within age expectations.

OSSE also uses LEA level COS data as an important contributor to the Special Education Performance Report (SEPR). The SEPR assesses how well LEAs provide special education services by evaluating both IDEA compliance and student progress measures. The COS process provides valuable information about the developmental progress of young students with disabilities. By including COS data, the SEPR ensures a comprehensive evaluation of an LEA's special education program and helps identify areas for improvement.

### **Federal Reporting**

USED utilizes the SPP/APR data, as reported by OSSE, to assess the District of Columbia's implementation efforts under IDEA. OSEP evaluates whether the District meets requirements, requires assistance, or needs intervention based on this data and our progress toward meeting state level targets.

## **Additional Guidance**

For additional guidance, please reference OSSE's [COS Data Collection](#) site and [the ECTA Center's COS Process](#) webpage.

Please direct any questions regarding this document or the COS process to [osse.cosfaq@dc.gov](mailto:osse.cosfaq@dc.gov).

