Overview of the COS Process

Session 2 Presentation Transcript

In Session 1 of this training module, you learned about the child outcomes and why the data are collected. Now let's talk about how to measure the three outcomes. This is the second in a series of presentations designed to provide early intervention and preschool special education staff with the information needed to complete the Child Outcomes Summary process.

What is the COS Process?

The Child Outcomes Summary process was developed to reflect the content of the three child outcomes and to provide a systematic method for teams to summarize information from multiple sources about a child's functioning.

Why is the COS Process Needed?

There are no assessment instruments that measure the three child outcomes directly. Furthermore, recommended practice in early childhood assessment is to use multiple sources of information about a child. Summarizing multiple sources of information for statewide reporting is a challenge though. Also, different programs use different assessment instruments and processes. Sometimes, different tools are used within the same program. These reasons all speak to the need for an approach that allows data from different sources and assessment tools to be summarized into a common metric. The Child Outcomes Summary process was developed to meet this need. It allows programs to synthesize information about a child from multiple sources and across different assessment tools to produce data that can be summarized across programs in the state, and across states for a national picture. In other words, the Child Outcomes Summary process allows programs to take the apples and oranges provided from multiple sources and from different assessment tools and convert that information into a common metric.

Now let's look at the key features of the process.

Features

There are four key features of a quality Child Outcomes Summary process.

- First, the process produces a description of the child's functioning at a single point in time by synthesizing multiple sources of information.
- Second, this approach is a team process, involving professionals and family members contributing to decision-making.

- Next, the process involves team members using the information gathered about a child to rate his or her functioning in each of the three outcome areas on a 7-point scale. Using the 7-point rating scale requires the team to compare the child's skills and behaviors with those expected for his or her age.
- Finally, the Child Outcomes Summary process is completed at two points in time, at a minimum-- when the child enters the program and when the child exits the program. Each state has its own policy for when entry and exit data are collected, and some states are choosing to complete the ratings more frequently, such as at annual IFSP or IEP reviews.

Let's discuss each of these four features in more detail.

Division of Early Childhood (DEC) Recommended Practices for Assessment

The Child Outcomes Summary process uses information from multiple sources to describe how a child is functioning. The process of collecting information for decision-making is referred to as assessment. The 2014 Recommended Practices from our professional organization, the Council for Exceptional Children's Division for Early Childhood, include 11 key assessment practices. Recommended assessment practice is to include:

- multiple sources of information, such as the child's family and others who know the child; and
- multiple measures, including observation, interviews, and direct assessments that are appropriate for the child's level of development and individual characteristics

The COS process uses:

The Child Outcomes Summary process aligns with the DEC Recommended Practices because it involves synthesizing information about the child from multiple methods and sources. Here are examples of different kinds of information that may be used to inform the process in each of the three outcome areas. A quality Child Outcomes Summary process involves using methods of assessment that look at the ways in which children are using their skills in everyday settings and situations. Multiple methods and multiple sources are necessary to obtain a comprehensive picture of the child's functioning. Having this information available is critical because the Child Outcomes Summary process itself is **not** an assessment tool.

Team-Based Discussions & Decision-Making

The next key feature of the Child Outcomes Summary process is that it is completed by a team. Team members can include family members, professionals who work with the child, and others familiar with the child's functioning such as child care providers. Teams can range in size from two people to many more.

7-Point Rating

Another key feature of the Child Outcomes Summary process is the use of a 7-point rating scale. After reviewing and discussing how the child uses his or her skills across settings, the team identifies the rating that best describes the child's functioning for each of the three outcome areas. Identifying an accurate rating requires the team to compare the child's skills and behaviors with those expected for his or her age.

When to Complete the COS Process

The last key feature of the Child Outcomes Summary process is related to the timing of its completion. To provide data for the federal reporting requirements, the process must be completed when the child enters the program and again at program exit. The rating reflects the child's functioning at each of these time points and should be determined as close to the actual entry and exit as possible. The comparison of exit to entry ratings provides information about the child's progress.

Some states determine interim ratings at IFSP or IEP meetings and regularly scheduled reviews when a team is assembled, but it does not have to be done as part of one of these meetings. Some states also complete the Child Outcomes Summary process one or more times between entry and exit to provide richer information for program improvement. Check your state's policies and procedures for when and how often you are expected to complete the process.

Child Outcomes Summary (COS) Process Takeaways

In conclusion, the Child Outcomes Summary process involves team-based discussion and decision-making around multiple sources of information. The process produces a rating for each of the three child outcomes. The rating is determined, at a minimum, at program entry and program exit.

As you progress through this training module, you will learn more about how to identify a Child Outcomes Summary rating, including the criteria for each of the 7 points on the rating scale.