

## **History and Overview of the Child Outcomes Measurement System in Florida**

### **Background to the Accountability System under the 2004 Reauthorization of IDEA**

The current accountability system for early intervention and special education services is an outgrowth of a broader initiative on the part of the U.S. government to make agencies more accountable for results achieved through the expenditure of federal monies.

Under the reauthorized IDEA, state lead agencies for the Part B program serving children ages 3–21 and the Part C program serving infants and toddlers ages birth to 3 years were required to develop a State Performance Plan (SPP) that evaluates the states' implementation of the requirements and purposes of the statute. The SPP was to be submitted every 6 years, however, the first SPP was extended by OSEP for an additional 2 years, remaining in effect until FY 2012-13. The SPP requirements have undergone a number of modifications, including the streamlining of several indicators and the addition of an indicator for both Part B and Part C programs known as the State Systemic Improvement Plan. In accordance with the SPP, state Part B and Part C programs must submit an Annual Performance Reports (APR) each February for the fiscal year ending the previous June.

One indicator that is common to the Part B and Part C SPPs is an indicator addressing the progress that children make as a result of their participation in the program. Indicator 7 of the Part B SPP, related to children in the preschool program, and Indicator 3 of the Part C SPP, related to children in the early intervention program, are known as the “child outcomes” indicators and their requirements are very similar.

Specifically, states are required to report on the percent of infants and toddlers with Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs) or preschool children with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) who demonstrate improved:

1. Positive social-emotional skills (including social relationships);
2. Acquisition and use of knowledge and skills (including early language/communication [and early literacy]); and
3. Use of appropriate behaviors to meet their needs.

For each outcome, states must report the percentage of children exiting the program, who were served for at least 6 months, 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

In Florida, the data used to classify children into the above categories come from entry and exit administrations of the Battelle Developmental Inventory, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (BDI-2; Newborg, 2005). This assessment yields raw and standardized scores in 5 domains: personal-social, communication, adaptive, motor and cognitive. In Florida, only data from the first three domains are reported for accountability purposes, with data from the personal-social scale used to address the first outcome area, data from the communication domain used to address the second outcome area, and data from the adaptive domain used to address the third outcome area.

For federal reporting purposes, states must also provide the following “summary statement” percentages:

- *Summary Statement 1:* Of those children who entered the program below age expectations in each Outcome, the percent who substantially increased their rate of growth by the time they exited the program. Formula:  $(c+d)/(a+b+c+d)$
- *Summary Statement 2:* The percent of children who were functioning within age expectations in each Outcome by the time they exited the program. Formula:  $(d+e)/(a+b+c+d+e)$

As part of the federal reporting system, the above summary statements must be reported both for the state as a whole, in the state’s Annual Performance Report, and for individual programs, on the state’s Part B and Part C websites.

## **Development of the Florida Child Outcomes Measurement System (FCOMS)**

Development of the FCOMS began with an initiative of the Florida Department of Health (FDOH), Children’s Medical Services, Early Steps program. This initiative grew into a collaborative project across two state agencies—the Department of Health and the Department of Education—committed to creating a coordinated birth-to-5 system to measure child outcomes. This cross-agency system is now being implemented statewide, across all Local Early Steps (LES) programs and all Florida school district prekindergarten programs for children with disabilities.

The impetus for the development of a system to measure outcomes of special services for children with disabilities began in Florida prior to the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA. In December 2003, Florida Early Steps established the Early Intervention Systems Evaluation Workgroup to design a comprehensive evaluation system for Florida’s early intervention program. Florida Early Steps was successful in obtaining an OSEP General Supervision Enhancement Grant (GSEG) to support this work. Outcomes of the GSEG, which were shaped by the concomitant establishment by OSEP of the new accountability system under IDEA, included the establishment of guiding principles for evaluating child and family outcomes; the decision to create a unified child outcomes measurement system for children across the birth-to-3 and prekindergarten programs; the selection of a statewide assessment tool (the BDI-2); and the formation of a state leadership team that included representatives of Florida Early Steps, the Florida Department of Education (FDOE), and discretionary projects funded at the University of Miami (UM) and the University of Central Florida (UCF) by the FDOE.

**Phasing in of school districts and LESs:** OSEP allowed states to phase in local programs, with the proviso that all programs be participating by the 2009–10 fiscal year. Florida began implementation of the FCOMS in March 2007 with a group of school districts and LES that had already been using the BDI-2 in the context of eligibility evaluations. These programs were referred to as the state’s “early adopters.” Over the next 2 years, the rest of Florida’s LESs and school districts were phased in. (For a list of programs participating in each phase, see the document entitled, *Child Outcomes Phase In*, available on the TATS website at <http://tats.ucf.edu/outcomes.cfm>.) For each of the 5 waves of adopters, the Florida leadership team held a full-day “kick-off” meeting to introduce local administrators to the state’s implementation plan for the child outcomes indicator, to provide information and resources, and to problem-solve emerging implementation issues. Following each kick-off meeting, a day of training was provided to district staff on administration of the BDI-2.

Over subsequent years, the FDOE and FDOH supported development and implementation of the FCOMS in a variety of ways, including:

- affirmation of the Florida Early Steps guiding principles for outcomes evaluation (see the document entitled, Guiding Principles in Developing Florida's System for Measuring Child and Family Outcomes of Early Steps and Preschool Special Education and Related Services, accessible from the website of the Florida Department of Education's Technical Assistance and Training System (TATS) project at <http://tats.ucf.edu/outcomes.cfm>);
- establishment of a security agreement with Piedra Data Systems (PDS), a subcontractor to UM, that could process assessment data submitted for accountability reporting;
- the purchase of assessment materials, scoring forms, login accounts for the BDI-2's web-based scoring system (the BDI-2 Data Manager), and licenses for the Mobile Data Solutions (MDS), an electronic data collection system for BDI-2 assessments;
- development of a collaborative working relationship with Riverside Publishing Company, the publisher of the BDI-2;
- the provision of multiple regional informational training workshops on the BDI-2, conducted by Riverside-certified trainers;
- the provision of Train-the-Trainer Workshops conducted by Riverside-certified trainers to increase local capacity to train new assessors; development of a training video for administration of the BDI-2;
- establishment of a security agreement with the Riverside Publishing Company related to data stored in the BDI-2 Data Manager;
- the implementation of multiple webinars, conducted by a member of the Riverside technical staff, on use of the BDI-2 Data Manager for the purpose of data entry, available on at <http://tats.ucf.edu/outcomes.cfm>; and webinars conducted by PDS staff on the use of a Macro for analyzing data;
- development of a BDI-2 Data Manager Guide, available at <http://tats.ucf.edu/outcomes.cfm>
- production of a BDI-2 "refresher" video, available at <http://tats.ucf.edu/outcomes.cfm>;
- the development of multiple guidance documents that are available at <http://tats.ucf.edu/outcomes.cfm>
- provision of technical assistance and training by TATS staff for LES and school district staff to improve the quality of assessments and data entry.

Since 2009, implementation of the child outcomes system has been overseen by a combined Part B and Part C leadership team that includes representatives of LESs and school districts. A larger advisory committee provides guidance on data collection issues, quality assurance, target-setting, and other matters related to implementation of the FCOMS.