

Indicator 7: Overview and Tips for Success



State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR) Indicator 7 helps the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the U.S. Department of Education understand the impact of Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) services on children with disabilities.

Each year, DESE analyzes Indicator 7 data submitted by districts and reports a summary to the U.S. Department of Education. In addition, Indicator 7 data are a valuable tool for districts and schools to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs for children with disabilities. This document provides an overview of Indicator 7 and tips to help district personnel effectively collect Indicator 7 data.

What does Indicator 7 measure?

Indicator 7 measures three important child outcomes:

- Children have positive social-emotional skills (including social relationships).
- Children acquire and use knowledge and skills (including early language/communication and early literacy).
- Children use appropriate behaviors to meet their needs.

For examples and more information about behaviors related to each outcome, see [Breadth of the Three Child Outcomes](#) by the Early Childhood Technical Assistance (ECTA) Center.

What is the Child Outcomes Summary (COS) process?

The [COS process](#) is a decision-making process that teams use to summarize a child's functioning relative to age-expected behavior at two key points in time: when the child enters and when the child exits ECSE services. The team should include family members as well as educators and related service providers who work with the child, including community-based providers. The team uses multiple sources of information about the child's functioning to determine a rating on a [7-point rating scale](#). DESE uses these ratings, along with the yes/no progress question, to calculate progress data for federal reporting.

What is the COS form and how do we use it?

The COS form is not an assessment. Instead, it is a tool that the team uses to document the COS ratings and evidence supporting the ratings. Documentation in the COS form should focus on the child's current functioning and describe how close to or how far from age expectations the child's skills are. For more information, see [COS Form and Documenting Evidence](#).

Which students require Indicator 7 data?

Districts must collect Indicator 7 data for all students who receive ECSE services. In addition to students receiving services within the district, districts are responsible for collecting Indicator 7 data for students receiving ECSE services in out-of-district placements, including community preschool programs and home-based settings. Exit data are not required for students who received less than 6 months of services between entry and exit.

What happens when a student receiving ECSE transfers between districts within the state?

When a student receiving ECSE transfers between districts, the receiving district may contact the sending district to request information that can help inform Indicator 7 entry ratings. This may include prior entry and exit COS ratings to provide context on the child's previous functioning. Districts may share Indicator 7 rating information; however, they should do so in a manner that protects student privacy. Sharing information through phone or secure video conversation is recommended rather than email. At the same time, the receiving district team must develop its own COS entry ratings based on multiple sources of current information about the child's functioning. Information from the sending district can serve as one reference point, but teams should not rely solely on prior ratings when determining entry ratings.

What is the timeline for Indicator 7?

The district must collect entry data within 4 to 6 weeks of the first day of services and exit data when the child exits ECSE (i.e., transitions to kindergarten, no longer qualifies for ECSE, or moves out of the state/district) or prior to the child's sixth birthday. The data should be collected throughout the school year, as students enter or exit. The data submission deadline is August 31 annually.

How do we submit Indicator 7 data to DESE?

Districts submit data within the MA Education Security Portal, using the Early Childhood Outcomes Summary (ECOS) database. Please refer to the following resources for more information:

- [District User Guide for Indicator 7 Data Submission](#)
- [School User Guide for Indicator 7 Data Submission](#)

Can we add or remove a student from the ECOS database?

Students coded in the Student Information Management System (SIMS) as receiving ECSE (i.e., DOE32 is other than 00, 01, or 05) are automatically added to the ECOS database. If students who should be listed are not listed in ECOS, check that they are correctly coded in SIMS as receiving ECSE.

Tips for Implementing the COS Process and Collecting Indicator 7 Data

Districts should establish a process to ensure that teams collect entry and exit data for all students with disabilities who are receiving ECSE. The following tips are based on conversations with districts that have established successful processes for collecting Indicator 7 data.

Tip 1: Use existing team meetings to complete the COS process.

Completing the COS process during existing meetings streamlines the process and improves the ratings. For example, entry rating discussions may occur during the student's initial individualized education program meeting or early intervention to ECSE transition meeting when the team is already discussing a child's use of skills. Similarly, the team may complete exit ratings when planning for the kindergarten transition.

Tip 2: Use multiple sources of information.

No single assessment directly measures the three child outcomes, and the team must consider a child's functioning across settings and situations. Therefore, COS ratings should be based on multiple sources of information. Teams should synthesize information from observations, formal and informal assessments, and parent reports, with a focus on how the child participates in everyday routines and activities across settings. For children who transition from early intervention, teams should consider the child's exit rating as a source of information to inform COS ratings.

Tip 3: Include family feedback to inform COS ratings.

Family input during the COS process is key because families are experts on their child's functioning at home and in the community. Teams should support family participation in COS rating discussions by explaining the COS process to families (e.g., describing the purpose and how data are collected and used; providing a family brochure) and inviting families to share information about their child's functioning in each of the three areas. If families are unable to attend these meetings, gather their feedback on the three outcomes through other methods such as questionnaires, checklists, or interviews. The team should include this information to inform the rating discussion, alongside other relevant data.

Tip 4: Anchor COS ratings to age-expected functional skills.

During COS discussions, teams should anchor their ratings to age-expected development. Using child development resources, the team determines whether the child is demonstrating abilities expected for their age (age-expected) in that outcome area. If the child is not using age-expected skills, the team determines whether the child shows the skills that develop just before age expectations (immediate foundational) and/or if the child demonstrates functional abilities like those of a much younger child (foundational). For more information on age anchoring, see [Gathering and Age Anchoring Information About Child Functioning](#) (ECTA Center).

Tip 5: Use a secure spreadsheet for tracking Indicator 7 data.

The ECOS database is updated three times per year following each SIMS data collection. Because the ECOS database is not updated in real time, it is helpful for the district to have a secure spreadsheet for recording Indicator 7 ratings as students enter and exit throughout the year. We recommend transferring the data from the internal spreadsheet to the ECOS database following each SIMS update and certifying the data in ECOS in August each year, following the end-of-year SIMS update.

Tip 6: Provide staff with professional learning on Indicator 7 and the COS process.

Providing staff with time and resources for professional learning on Indicator 7 and the COS process is essential to support quality Indicator 7 data. DESE and the ECTA Center offer a variety of professional learning resources, including the following:

- [Indicator 7 Data Collection Recorded Webinars](#) (DESE)
- [COS Process Online Module](#) (ECTA Center)
- [Professional Development to Strengthen COS Knowledge and Skills](#) (ECTA Center)
- [Frequently Used Resources](#) (ECTA Center)

Tip 7: Use the data reports within ECOS to analyze Indicator 7 data trends.

Once districts have an established COS process, teams may access summaries of their Indicator 7 data by clicking on View Reports on the district landing page in ECOS. These reports provide aggregate information about the progress of students receiving ECSE in the district and may be used to identify areas for improvement, evaluate program effectiveness, and [assess data quality](#) (ECTA Center). The reports include the number and percentage of students in each of the five progress categories, as well as the two summary statements. For more information on the progress categories and summary statements, see [Purpose for COS Data Collection](#) (ECTA Center, bottom of the page). For more information on using COS data for program improvement, see the ECTA Center's [Guidance Table for Analyzing Child Outcomes Data for Program Improvement](#).