

*Family Outcomes Survey*  
-Overview and Status-  
February 2006

Background

In the Fall of 2003, the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education, funded the Early Childhood Outcomes (ECO) Center to work with parents, service providers, state agency directors, and federal program officers to develop and aid in the implementation of outcome measures that could be used by states and the federal government to evaluate infant and toddler programs operated under Part C and preschool programs under Part B, Section 619, of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act - IDEA of IDEA. A major part of this effort has focused on family outcomes: defining what is meant by family outcomes, developing a rationale for assessing family outcomes, reviewing existing frameworks, and meeting with numerous stakeholders. Based on these activities, five family outcomes have been identified:

- Families understand their child's strengths, abilities, and special needs.
- Families know their rights and advocate effectively for their children.
- Families help their child develop and learn.
- Families have support systems.
- Families access desired services, programs, and activities in their community.

Now that a set of family outcomes has been identified, the next step is to determine ways by which states and local programs can determine the extent to which outcomes have been attained. ECO Center is currently preparing a resource document for states, giving examples of alternative ways family outcome data can be collected. We have also developed a brief inventory that could provide an alternative from which states could choose. The scale, currently referred to as the *Family Outcomes Survey*, is in a revised draft form. This document describes the work that has been done on the scale thus far and plans for future work.

Step 1: Initial Scale Development

We initially developed an instrument called the Parenting Resources Inventory (PRI). The scale was intended to provide a tool for parents to describe the personal resources they have available to them as they fulfill their various roles as a parents of children with special needs. The five items reflected: *families' felt confidence and competence in knowing their child, working with professionals, advocating for their child's needs, and promoting their child's development.* They also reflected the *extent to which parents felt they had support systems and were a part of their communities.*

For each family outcome item, we developed a 7-point rating scale, with paragraphs to describe ratings of 1, 3, 5, and 7. Intermediate points on the scale (2, 4, 6) were used for those situations in which not all of the descriptors for any one level applied. In writing the statements, we incorporated 3-4 major themes related to each outcome and put them on a continuum where one end reflected a low level of "felt" parenting resources and the other end reflected a high level of "felt" resources. We tried to write the statements in ways that were easy to understand and stated in such a way that families would feel comfortable rating their present level of parenting resources, regardless of where they were on the continuum.

Step 2: Initial Feedback on First Draft of PRI

We sent a copy of the PRI, along with an overview document and several specific questions to our ECO advisory board and to the ECO Family Technical Work Group. Initial impressions were positive, but two primary reactions emerged. First, a number of reviewers did not like the name of the instrument. Second, a common reaction was that the descriptors in each item were too long and might be confusing to parents since there were multiple constructs included in each.

### Step 3: Major Revision and Renaming of Scale

This feedback led to a major revision of the instrument. We identified three primary constructs related to each domain, based on our prior literature reviews and suggestions from previous advisory groups. Three separate items were then developed for each domain, resulting in a 15-item instrument. An introductory statement was also written for each item to provide a context that might make it easier for parents to know what the item was intended to address. The initial draft of this instrument was circulated among ECO staff for feedback as well as with our GSEG partners in the Part C programs in Texas and Illinois. Feedback from these individuals was used to make minor modifications, mostly wording edits, to the various items.

In addition, three items were added at the end of the scale to allow states a format by which they could provide data in response to the OSEP required SPP/APR family outcome indicator. The three items incorporated the APR/SPP indicator language into three yes-no questions:

### Step 4: Field Test with Parents

Following this set of revisions, we worked with our GSEG partners in Texas and Illinois to do an initial field-test with parents. An ECO staff person (Don Bailey) went to Texas and led three parent focus group discussions in that state. In addition, the GSEG project coordinator in Illinois led a focus group discussion in IL. We agreed on a common format for each focus group. Parents were given only the briefest of introductions, following which they were asked to read the instructions and complete the instrument. [This was done to see if the written instructions were clear, rather than also having a set of oral instructions.] Parents were timed to see how long it took them to complete the measure. When all had completed it, a general discussion was held to get initial reactions to the format, content, and length of the scale. Following that discussion, an item-by-item review was conducted to get input on the wording and focus of each item. Finally, two alternative lay-outs for the scale were presented to determine whether they might be easier to complete or more attractive.

About 25 parents, all mothers, participated in the four groups. At least four were Hispanic, two of whom required a translator, which was provided (since at this point the scale had not been translated into Spanish). No African American parents participated. All mothers could read and probably few if any represented the lower end of the socio-economic status (SES) spectrum. Some of the mothers in one focus group had already “graduated” from early intervention and were serving on the agency’s early intervention advisory board. On average, the scale took less than 10 minutes to complete. The shortest time was 5 minutes. Two parents took 15 minutes, and the oral translations took longer, probably 20 minutes or more.

Overall the parents were very positive about the instrument. They felt it covered the areas of early intervention that they considered to be most important, and generally did not have recommendations for additional items or content. They liked the format of the scale, and when asked to contrast it with formats such as the agree-disagree continuum, they said they greatly preferred this format. Several parents said that the scale appeared too long and cumbersome at first glance, but once they started completing it, it was very easy and did not take long at all.

Parents understood the fact that scores of 2, 4, and 6 did not have descriptors associated with them; they liked having this option and used it a number of times as they completed their ratings. They characterized the items as “descriptive” or “factual” and generally reported that completing the scale did not make them feel judged or evaluated.

With regard to anonymity and use of the scale, most parents preferred that their responses be sent to a central state agency rather than to their local program, particularly in terms of personally identifiable responses.

Reviews of each item resulted in a number of recommendations for editorial changes. Parents preferred the original format to the alternative formats presented.

Based on these comments, ECO made a number of editorial changes to several items on the scale. A conference call was then held with the ECO Family Technical Work Group. Their primary recommendation was that we not use the yes-no format for the APR items. As a result, we revised the APR items to put them in a 7-point scale comparable to the other items.

### Step 5: Further Revisions

Throughout the fall of 2005, several groups reviewed the instrument and provided additional feedback. These included several additional parent focus groups in Illinois, teams of professionals in several states, and our advisory groups. Several revisions ensued. In late November, a near-final version was posted on the ECO Center web site and state coordinators were invited to provide additional comments. A final set of revisions was made and the pilot test version was posted.

### Current Status

The instrument is now available on the web sites for states to use in pilot studies this spring. Four versions are posted: Part C, Part B (619), Birth to Three, and Preschool. The instruments are virtually identical, with a few exceptions. The last three items related to the APR requirements are different for Part B and Part C programs due to different reporting environments. The generic infant and preschool versions provide “opt-out” options for items specifically related to disability, for use by programs that do not serve children with disabilities.

States and local programs are welcome to use all or some of the items. We ask that states not change the format of individual items, however, to maximize cross-state comparability.

Two Spanish translations of the survey have been conducted and we are currently hoping to have an agreed upon translation posted on the web-site by the end of February.

A systematic pilot study is currently underway in Illinois and Texas, and we hope to use information from this pilot to make any additional revisions in the summer of 2006.

We remain interested in feedback from states regarding usefulness of the scale and how it works in practice. Please email comments and suggestions to Don Bailey ([dbailey@rti.org](mailto:dbailey@rti.org)). We would also like to be kept informed as to which states are using the scale and whether your state would be willing to collaborate with ECO in systematic evaluations of its usefulness.

Thanks so very much for your help.