Results Matter: Improving Preschool Outcomes for Children with Disabilities



Leadership

The purpose of this publication is to showcase preschool special education practices that support positive outcomes for children with disabilities and their families across Colorado's schools, districts, and Administrative Units. More than six decades of research demonstrate that children flourish in inclusive environments, particularly when they learn alongside non-disabled peers in general education preschool classrooms.

These practice profiles build on evidence-based approaches to enhance Preschool Outcomes, offering practical strategies and guidance for establishing a strong foundation of high-quality learning for children with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

Program Spotlight

Northeast Colorado BOCES serves 12 member districts across five counties. Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) are designed to provide specialized educational services that individual districts may find financially burdensome to deliver on their own. Through a cost-sharing model, BOCES supports a range of programs, including special education and other shared services.

Leadership at Northeast BOCES has established a clear expectation for data-driven improvement in Preschool Outcomes for children with disabilities. As part of a desired focus on enhancing children's learning experiences, the Director of Special Education prioritized sharing data with district leaders. Longitudinal data were reviewed and discussed during three separate sessions with the following groups:

- Early Childhood and Special Education Coordinators
- School principals
- Superintendents

Improving data quality emerged as a logical first step toward building consistency across programs. Early Childhood Special Educators were assigned responsibility for accessing *GOLD*® by Teaching Strategies to ensure all students with IEPs were entered into

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the system and to monitor ratings. Conversations with general education preschool teachers were initiated to strengthen program improvement efforts and reinforce how data informs instruction.

It was determined that each Early Childhood Special Educator (ECSE) needed increased access to Results Matter (RM) tools. Leadership ensured that *GOLD*® manuals were purchased and distributed to each ECSE. Given the size of the region—14 preschools across a large geographic area— three ECSEs support multiple programs. Access to *GOLD*® had been a challenge, so accounts were created to allow each ECSE to log into individual programs and view progress-monitoring data entered by the preschool teachers. Time was provided for monthly support meetings with their Northeast BOCES CDE RM Technical Assistance (TA) Specialist emphasizing ways to improve the accuracy of entry ratings and increasing the timeliness of data entry.

Preschool Cohort Training

The Northeast BOCES Leadership organized and delivered a series of three full-day trainings for Early Childhood Special Educators and the general education Early Childhood teachers they work with, all centered on Preschool Outcomes and continuous improvement.

Training content included:

- **Look, Think, Act:** A data-based decision-making model for program-wide use of data.
- **Autism and Accurate Ratings:** Guidance on collecting data for special populations, including the use of accommodations and identifying skill gaps.
- **Data Quality:** Classroom teams reviewed their own data to ensure accuracy of ratings for children with disabilities.

Transdisciplinary Play Based Assessment-2 (TPBA-2) Training

Baseline ratings for children with IEPs are a critical component of data quality, ensuring that the growth children experience from the time they enter special education to their transition into kindergarten is accurately captured. Using initial evaluation data is essential for informing these entry ratings.

The Special Education Director expanded capacity for this high-quality data collection by offering TPBA-2 training in authentic, play-based assessment for initial evaluation and eligibility for special education. This training broadened opportunities for additional Early Childhood Special Education personnel—including related services providers—to participate meaningfully in the Preschool Outcomes data collection process.

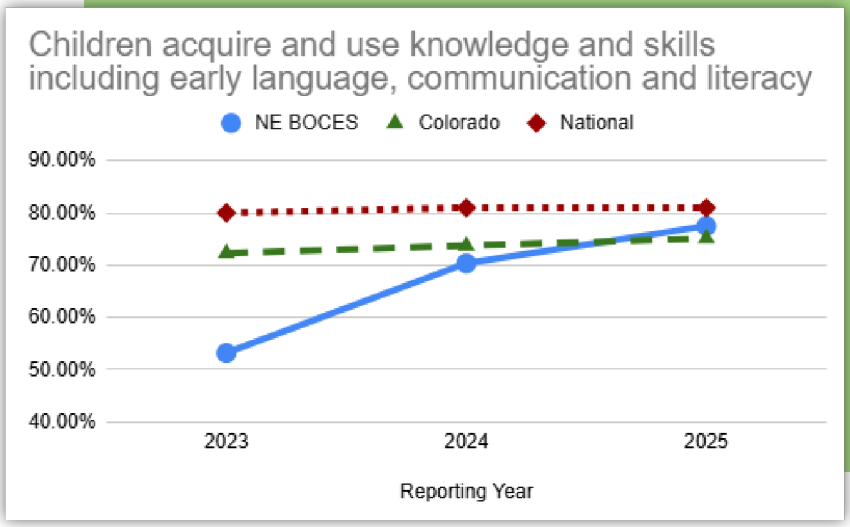
Contribution to Improving Outcomes

Leaders in Northeast BOCES have supported practitioners in addressing the question, *"Why is the progress of children with disabilities compared to expectations for same-aged peers?"*. Through shared learning and a common vision, age-level standards and trajectories of skill acquisition are utilized by staff in the progress monitoring of the development in all domains for young children. Inclusive classrooms are the foundation where high expectations for children with disabilities can be made. Teachers use the information from *GOLD*® to plan lessons, provide support, and scaffold learning.

Simply documenting that a child made progress between entry and exit does not offer strong evidence of program effectiveness. One of the core goals of early childhood services is to prepare children for success in kindergarten and have maximum benefit from special education provided in preschool. Providing opportunities for staff to access support from the CDE RM TA specialist builds knowledge in the use of the progress monitoring assessment tool to plan for meaningful activities for children with disabilities to increase access and participation in the preschool classroom. These practices are successful in accelerating growth in many children in Northeast BOCES.

Practitioners in Northeast BOCES are encouraged by leadership to play an active role in helping families understand their child's functioning, how it aligns with typical developmental progressions, and what types of supports may be needed in the classroom and addressed by the IEP. All instructional staff are comfortable discussing children's strengths and developmental delays with families and are confident in explaining why understanding a child's functioning relative to age expectations is essential for maximizing participation in settings designed for same-aged peers.

What does the Preschool Outcomes data say?



Core Components: Expected Use in Practice

Leadership sets a clear vision for prioritizing improvement in Preschool Outcomes.

- Priorities and strategies for improving child outcomes "comes from the top" with superintendents, principals, directors, and other key administrators providing clear expectations of early learning connected to Colorado Academic Standards (CAS) for Preschool.
- Highly effective special education services and outcomes are dependent on highly effective universal instruction and a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS).

A culture of shared responsibility is developed by leaders that ensures high-quality early learning experiences.

- Provide authentic opportunities for shared learning, buy-in, and inclusivity that contribute to the use of Results Matter (RM) data for instruction across the program in support of effective teaching and learning.
- Plan, participate in, and support shared professional learning that includes both school-based preschool teachers and special educators, as well as community-based ECE teachers.
- Allocate resources for high-quality instructional materials aligned to the CAS and RM assessment for all team members who support young learners.

Leadership creates opportunities for teamwork between special and general education teachers.

- Facilitate trusting interactions and structured professional learning for teachers, special educators, and related services personnel responsible for instruction.
- Create and support both the time and space for teachers to work together and engage in data-based problem-solving with one another.
- Schedule weekly and monthly protected time for collaboration focused on shared learning and continuous improvement.
- Ensure collaboration for accurate reporting of data; classroom teachers maintain Inter-Rater Reliability on the RM assessment, consensus is made on entry and exit ratings between all team members, and every child is included in progress monitoring.



Getting Started: Developmental Use in Practice

Teams' data-based discussions focus on these strategies to build knowledge:

- Share how children develop in a predictable progression of age-expected skills and behaviors.
- Discuss the child's current skills relative to age-expectations.
- Discuss the child's developmental progression, what skills come next, and what skills are age-expected.
- Reach consensus on a rating in the progress monitoring tool that describes the child's functioning.
- Plan and implement individualized services that build skills in the developmental progression.
- Ensure the child has the supports needed to function in environments structured around age-expected skills.
- Celebrate the skills the child develops and incorporates into everyday activities.

Common Barriers

- Leaders in early childhood who are unfamiliar with early childhood systems.
- A lack of focus on distributed leadership needed to establish collaborative teamwork.
- Limited resources are allocated to time and materials needed for implementation of high-quality inclusive programs.
- Preschool and preschool special education is not well aligned with the K-12 educational system.

Measuring Progress

Improving child outcomes involves working with data relevant to children and families that promotes inclusion and shows progress in routines. Data culture is a part of the fabric of what we do, data helps us tell the story.

Critical Question

- How do outcomes for children differ between service-delivery models

Indicators:

- Visible Leadership
- Fostering Teamwork

Special Education programs serve young children with a full range of delays and disabilities, including children with severe disabilities and degenerative conditions. For children with severe disabilities, skill acquisition will proceed slowly; some children may even lose skills. For other children, specially designed instruction will help them catch up with or close the gap with non-disablied children their age.

The Preschool Outcomes data tell us about groups of children in any givien school year.

Resource Highlights

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Special appreciation goes to Northeast BOCES Special Education leadership for engaging in focused interviews and conversations around Preschool Outcomes improvement across multiple programs in member districts.

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Results Matter improves outcomes for Colorado's preschool children who receive special education services by helping teachers, administrators, families, and other education partners use authentic assessment data to inform classroom instruction as well as program and policy decision-making.