Reaching Consensus on COS Descriptor Statements

Suggestions for Reaching Consensus

There may be instances when a team may have difficulty coming to an agreement on the selection of a descriptor statement. Follow the steps below to support meaningful conversation between team members to help reach consensus during the IFSP meeting.

- Structure the discussion to minimize the likelihood of reaching an impasse. This may include preparation for the parent to participate meaningfully, providing clear information regarding evaluation and assessment results and a clear explanation of the process.
- Use the COS decision tree to add structure to the conversation and bring consistency to the process.
- Focus most of the discussion on the child's skills related to the outcome; do not go to selecting a descriptor statement too quickly.
- Discuss the rationales for the differing descriptor statements; focus on concrete examples and explore how these support a rating.
- Include more discussion on what skills and behaviors you would see in a typically developing child of this age to provide more context for the descriptor statement discussion.
- If all steps above were taken and there is still disagreement among IFSP team members, choose the descriptor statement that the family feels most comfortable with.
- If unresolvable differences are occurring frequently, revisit how descriptor statements are selected.

Possible Conversation Prompts for Groups Having Difficulty Reaching Consensus

Suggest the team re-visit documents that give examples of the breadth of content covered in each outcome. Have they discussed the child's skills regarding those aspects of the outcomes? Are the comments being considered relevant to the outcome area being discussed?

Conversation prompts may include the following:

"I hear you describing the child's skills with regard to [insert content]. What information do you have about the child's skills in [insert another relevant setting or situation or outcome component that hasn't yet been discussed]?"

"Tell me about the kinds of evidence that suggest to you this child has [insert modifier] age-expected behavior or has [insert modifier] immediate foundational skills?"
- When have you observed or documented those skills?

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- In what situations?
- How frequently does that occur?
- Were the accommodations/supports available in that setting those that are usually available to the child? What were they?
- You identified this as an immediate foundational skill. Are there other steps in the sequence of development that need to occur between developing this skill and the age-expected skills in this area?
- Is there other information you need or want to be better equipped to make this decision?
- Has everyone on the team had a chance to talk about the skills they have observed and the evidence they are considering in reaching a decision? (Is any one person dominating conversation and that is part of the problem?)"

"What do most [insert child's age] year olds do with regard to this skill [or this outcome area]?"

"How does the child's disability/the child's delay/the change in the child's approach to these skills impact their ability to function in achieving this outcome **right now**?"

"Descriptor statements/ratings are based on the child's functioning **right now** at one point in time. Thinking about the child's skills that have been discussed…
- Right now, is the child showing skills that are expected for their age?
- Right now, is the child showing skills that are immediate foundations for the skills that other peers their age are showing?
- How often? Can you describe what they are and when and where they occur?"

"What is the key difference between the two descriptor statements being discussed? What skills (or lack of skills) stand out in making you choose that descriptor statement?"

"I hear a lot of discussion about wanting descriptor statements/ratings to agree with eligibility. Eligibility may focus a lot on testing done in contexts that differ substantially from those common in everyday functioning. Eligibility may or may not allow certain kinds of accommodations or supports; to the extent that these are available to the child in everyday situations, then they would be allowed in considering outcomes ratings. Eligibility usually is organized around specific domains whereas the global outcome areas are organized in a different way that could lead to different conclusions. Eligibility may assume corrections for prematurity, however, child outcomes ratings are based on chronological age. Taking all this into account, let's set eligibility decisions aside for a moment (though not necessarily the data you got to help make them), what do the child's skills and actions suggest about the child's functioning right now with regard to the outcome?"

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