

Colorado’s Interagency Sequencing of Services 2024 Evaluation Report Public

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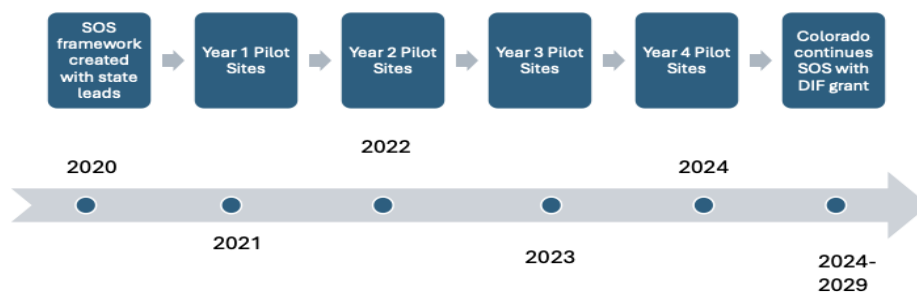
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Introduction

The Sequencing of Services (SOS) Framework was developed to “increase collaboration among schools and community partners to support students and youth with disabilities” in their critical transition years as they explore employment, post-secondary education, or other activities (Colorado Department of Education, 2024). SOS was designed to help participating communities build interagency teams consisting of partners from education, vocational rehabilitation, advocacy organizations, case management agencies, and other community programs and supports to provide coordinated and comprehensive transition services. Interagency team members represent the diverse communities they serve and are encouraged to identify local partners that are unique to that geographic area. Interagency teams focus on supporting students in the Six Core Student Outcomes of SOS, with the overall goal to improve post-school outcomes for students exiting secondary education.

Since 2020, SOS has experienced sustained growth through expansion to new communities across Colorado. Each year of the program, new pilot sites were added to the program with the goal of serving youth with disabilities through interagency collaboration and coordinated student planning. During the four years of pilot work, SOS sites received technical assistance to develop or sustain their interagency teams, understand best practices for transition services, and gain a greater understanding of shared topics through learning communities.

Figure 1: SOS Adoption Timeline



SOS Adoption by Years:

2021-2022 Denver, Mesa, Pueblo, Weld

2022-2023 Poudre, Canon City, Aurora

2023-2024: Fountain/Fort Carson, Aspen/Roaring Forks, Jefferson, Montrose

Future Sites for Colorado DIF: Pueblo, Steamboat Springs, Fountain/Fort Carson

This report presents an evaluation of the Colorado Sequencing of Services program during the 2023-2024 year. Evaluation activities focused on understanding the experience of implementing SOS in the 11 communities across the state that are currently involved in the program. Multiple evaluation activities informed this report including process evaluation meetings between the evaluation team and each community. These meetings focused on learning from each community about achievements, barriers, goals, and requests for technical assistance. SOS sites also completed the SOS Implementation Checklist to understand their progress in moving through critical areas of program adoption and implementation. The following section will discuss the key themes that were developed from the process evaluation meetings.

Key Themes

The first set of four themes (Transition Expertise and Buy-In for Adult Outcomes, Collaboration Values, School-Based Resources, and Innovation and Creativity), were developed by the evaluation team prior to the process evaluations. Overall, themes from the various evaluation activities over the year of the project included the following four areas. All of these themes impact implementation of SOS and the success of adopting and maintaining SOS. Sites that are further along in the implementation of SOS are experiencing success within these four themes.

- 1. Transition Expertise and Buy-In for Improving Post-School Outcomes**
 - a. The goal of SOS is to develop interagency teams that bring together diverse partners who provide exceptional transition expertise. While many of these partners serve students and youth, there is universal buy-in for adult outcomes such as employment, post-secondary education, and independent living.
- 2. Collaboration Values**
 - a. SOS interagency teams need to value collaboration to establish and maintain the project at the local level. However, administration and other agency leadership also need to value collaboration to support resources that go toward the overall project efforts.
 - b. Although turnover and staff changes to interagency teams will occur, teams need to be committed to collaboration to continue with SOS activities and maintain progress. As needed, members are incorporated into the teams as there needs to be an ongoing commitment to collaboration.
- 3. School-Based Resources**
 - a. Each site has different school-based supports and resources that can be leveraged for the project. Larger communities may have a district SOS representative trying to work at both the district and school-based levels, while smaller communities may have one SOS representative working across multiple schools. School-based resources translate to time available to work on the project, allocation of time for other activities like professional development, and resource fairs or other community events.

These resources are critical for SOS to be successful in a community and are typically allocated from school and district leadership, demonstrating the importance of buy-in for SOS beyond the interagency team.

4. Innovation and Creativity

- a. SOS sites continue to demonstrate immense innovation and creativity through community outreach activities like parent nights, interagency team structure such as the adoption of shared leadership opportunities, marketing and logo development, and partnership with various levels of leadership. This innovation and leadership shows the strength of local communities and how adaptable the SOS framework is for various sites across the state.

The following themes emerged from the 2024 process evaluation meetings and are more specific to the shared experience of working within the SOS framework. Although sites experienced various success with implementation of the entire framework due to differences in time involved in the program, resource allocation, and other factors, these themes were present in all sites to different degrees. 2024 Evaluation themes included:

1. Team structure leading to success

- a. Interagency work is difficult to coordinate and sustain, especially after intensive technical assistance is phased out. Teams that established structures around shared leadership and meeting schedules reported high satisfaction with their partners and demonstrated increased capacity to work on initiatives such as parent engagement and coordinated student planning. This theme was also present in the 2023 evaluation.

2. Family/Student engagement priorities and difficulties

- a. Sites reported various activities focused on family and student engagement. Some sites described doing these activities for the first time in their community, which showed the impact of SOS and change in culture. However, within parent and student engagement came additional difficulties with outreach and family attendance at the events. Although the events were being held and included strong attendance from community agencies and organizations, some sites experienced difficulties getting parents and students to the events. This continues to be a focus area for many SOS sites.

3. Agency dynamics, changes, and their impacts

- a. Colorado experienced immense change in 2024 because of case management redesign, increased turnover, and limited resources. Because SOS relies on interagency team members, when these team members change, it creates disruptions in the SOS work and sustainability. This theme was also present in the 2023 evaluation.

4. Technical assistance requests and needs

- a. All sites described technical assistance as helpful and requested ongoing technical assistance. These needs varied from assistance in planning meetings and coordinating partners to filling out the workbook and understanding the 6

Core Student Outcomes.

5. Making the workbook work

- a. Sites have used and adopted the workbook to various degrees. Although the workbook format has the opportunity to be more user friendly, it is a critical component of the SOS framework. Because of the turnover represented in theme three, the workbook should be used to help onboard new team members and maintain continuity in project activities. There also appears to be missing connections to the 6 Core Student Outcomes. This theme was present in the 2023 evaluation.

Colorado's Interagency Sequencing of Services Implementation Checklist

Summarized below are key bullet points for what Colorado has learned related to each of the key components of the Implementation Checklist.

Build your Local Interagency Transition Team

Observations:

- Schools have taken the lead in team formation
- School personnel have been the primary lead for the team
- Having administrative buy-in and support for the development and ongoing work of the interagency team is vital, without it, team leaders have struggled
- Partnership Agreements have assisted in sustainability of the teams and understanding roles and responsibilities of team members. Some partners/schools are hesitant in creating partnership agreements based on potential legalities or seeing the agreement as more formal than it was originally intended
- Having an outside facilitator for initial meetings has helped ensure everyone can participate
- Partners believe there is value in being members of an interagency team and understand how their collective effort has an impact on student outcomes
- Creating vision and purpose statements has provided a common focus for the team – the use of specific questions everyone answers and then taking the information to start to develop the vision and purpose statements is helpful

Recommendations:

- Ensure administrative buy-in and support for SOS
- Encourage co-leads for interagency teams (from other partners/agencies/entities)
- Continue to provide guidance and support on the purpose of the Partnership Agreement

Have a Shared Understanding of Transition Services

Observations:

- Partners have created a better understanding of agency roles and responsibilities when sharing what services and supports they provide to SWDs
- Not everyone speaks the same language or has the same definitions so taking the time to understand each other and come to a shared understanding has been important.

Having each agency answer the same questions about their agency, i.e. in a ppt – has been a helpful structure for this conversation

- The mapping process has been difficult for most communities. Ones that have completed it, don't always know how to use it

Recommendations:

- Continuing to look at ways to simplify the mapping process will be helpful. It may be helpful to take a look at other examples of worksheets, to determine if there are other ways to capture the information.
- It might be helpful to continue to work with sites that are farther along in implementation of SOS to assist the state in learning how to not only complete resource mapping, but then how to use the information to guide student planning

Collaboration with Families is Essential

Observations:

- Having a Transition Night is something that pilot sites have found an easy win to initially do together. One of the benefits of doing this has been that agencies learn more about each other and the roles each agency can play in supporting students and families.
- Being purposeful and culturally responsive in messaging and outreach has increased family participation in attending transition night events

Recommendations:

- Continue to look at ways to sustain family engagement activities by incorporating into existing structures, such as parent-teacher conference nights to minimize the times a family/student has to come back to the school
- Broaden outreach to all families who have children that experience a disability, not just to families who have children that experience intellectual disabilities

Competitive Integrated Employment is an Essential Goal

Observations

- This hasn't been a major discussion of the interagency teams except when talking about the six core outcomes

Recommendations:

- This needs to be discussed as the major outcome at the start of the SOS process. Often teams may think SOS is about building a team or doing the workbook, coordinated student planning, but the end goal is to increase CIE outcomes for SWDs
- The importance of CIE outcomes should be incorporated into discussions within the other five areas, i.e. building a team, creating a shared understanding of transition services are all done to help students achieve CIE. Perhaps it should be more of a focus or be the first outcome that is talked about and then how the other five core outcomes support students achieving CIE

Shared Communication Practices Support the tracking of Student Growth

Observations:

- Folks have struggled with this because they see it as an add-on rather than part of their work and assisting the student in getting the services and support they need
- Some teams see coordinated student planning more for students with ID rather than a practice that would benefit all SWDs

Recommendations:

- Examining current structures that exist around coordinating planning (Project SEARCH, SWAP) should be an initial step in SOS - part of the baseline implementation checklist discussion. Taking more time to talk about this upfront could also identify if other folks need to be brought into the interagency team
- Continuing to examine how folks do their work and how to reimagine their work to facilitate more coordinating planning will be helpful
- Folks often start discussions on coordinated planning with students with more support needs, though this is important, starting with an array of students who experience disability is important to develop a holistic approach in serving all SWDs in the community

Utilizing a Student Driven Process to Support the Student's Vision/Goals

Observations:

- This is an area that the TA team and state continue to work with sites to identify ways to use the six core outcomes in student planning
- Some communities may want to chunk this work and focus on one or two outcomes of the six to start this process. Providing flexibility on where to start within the six core outcomes is important to provide an opportunity for the team to see growth in their work
- This is an area for the team to determine how student driven planning is already occurring within the school and within community partners and how those processes can be leveraged to incorporate the six core outcomes

Summarized Recommendations

Recommendations for Communities interested in Implementing Sequencing of Services:

The following are recommendations for new communities in Colorado that are considering implementing the Sequencing of Services framework:

- **Explore SOS Website:** Before starting the SOS initiative, communities should explore the ([Colorado's Interagency Sequencing of Services Initiative for Students and Youth with Disabilities | CDE \(state.co.us\)](https://www.cde.state.co.us/sos)) to learn more about the SOS Framework.
- **Talk with Current SOS Sites:** Take the time to discuss and learn from current SOS communities on the benefits of SOS and their experience from implementing the SOS

Framework. The end goal of going through each process of the SOS Implementation Checklist is to get to coordinated student planning, ultimately leading to more services through partnerships and improving student's post-school outcomes.

- Communicate with State Leadership: to understand the intentions and goals for implementing the Sequencing of Services framework. The SOS initiative is not just about building an interagency transition team, but rather building a community and network where education and the community work together to support students through coordinated service planning to achieve CIE.
- Leadership Buy-in: Include administration in discussions to gather their support in implementing SOS.
- Leverage Current Efforts: This work should not be thought of as a new project that you have to start at from the beginning but discuss what within your community and education system are already in place that teams can build from and enhance.
- Co-leadership: Consider who will lead the SOS work in your community. As co-leadership is developed, it is important that the ownership of overall SOS activities does not fall to one partner (ex: education). Although many activities occur in a school-based setting and apply to supporting students, co-leadership offers the opportunity for other community partners to take an active role in the facilitation and planning of SOS activities.