School Readiness: Moving Toward a Shared Definition, Standardized Assessment, and Unifying Language

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INSTITUTE *for* CHILD SUCCESS

(early care and learning in south carolina)

Early childhood education in South Carolina includes a diverse collection of families, early care and education programs, and schools where children have the opportunity to begin a lifelong love of learning. Early learning experiences impact later academic success. Yet, the early learning experiences that children encounter vary significantly. Early care and learning settings are fragmented in South Carolina as they have a variety of funding streams, mandates, and standards by which they are measured.

(defining and measuring school readiness)

A statewide definition of school readiness that is connected

> "When South Carolina measures school readiness statewide and uses that data to continually improve early care and learning experiences for young children, we will systematically get children ready for school and ensure that they succeed once they get there."

to early learning and K-12 standards, and that early care and learning stakeholders agree upon, is essential to unifying the diverse early care and learning system. Legislation introduced in the 2013-2014 Session of the General Assembly provides a definition of school readiness and requires the adoption of a description of school readiness.[1]

To begin to put this conceptual definition and common language into action, several states are working on a specific type of school readiness measure, the kindergarten entry assessment. Kindergarten is the first point in which virtually all children in South Carolina are located in a single setting. Kindergarten entry assessments are used to look backward—as a tool to improve programs to promote school readiness and to look forward—to ensure that children continue to grow and learn once they enter school.[2] When South

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"We need a standardized statewide definition of school readiness and an assessment tool that can be used with every child, whether they are in private or public kindergarten or none at all."

– Charles Patrick
Board Chair, Trident United Way

1 Senate Bill 291, 120th Session of the General Assembly of South Carolina, 2013.
2 "BUILD Strong Foundations For Our Youngest Children: Top Ten Recommendations for State Leaders Implementing Kindergarten Entry Assessments," Early Learning Challenge Collaborative, accessed December 28, 2013, http://www.elccollaborative.org/

Carolina measures school readiness statewide and uses that data to continually improve experiences for young children, we will prepare children for school and ensure they succeed once they get there.

WHY USE A KINDERGARTEN ENTRY ASSESSMENT?

- To BETTER UNDERSTAND and address achievement gaps earlier in children's development.[3]

- To SUMMARIZE the experiences children had prior to entering school.[4]

- To SERVE AS A BASELINE for kindergarten instruction and for measuring future progress.[5]

- To help PROVIDE INFORMATION about young children who move among schools or from one district to another.

- To IMPROVE INSTRUCTION and ENHANCE LEARNING in kindergarten at the individual level.

- To DETERMINE THE EXTENT to which children at the aggregate level are ready for school and identify populations that need additional intervention.[6]

- To help the state and local communities determine what POLICIES AND PRACTICES are impacting school readiness.

(essential considerations for a kindergarten entry assessment)

- Ongoing training, quality assurance mechanisms, and continual evaluation are essential to implement and sustain a statewide kindergarten entry assessment.

- There is national consensus in early education that assessments should not be used to determine whether children should be held back from kindergarten.[7]

- Kindergarten entry assessments should also not be used as the sole indicator of early childhood program performance.

- Statewide kindergarten entry assessments alone do not provide a complete picture of how to continually improve early care and learning opportunities for children.

assessment/77-kindergarten-entry-assessment.html.

3 Albert Wat; Charles Bruner; Andrea Hanus; with Catherine Scott-Little, and Tom Shultz, "Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA) Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Fund Information (E1)," Build Initiative, accessed January 5, 2014, http://www.elccollaborative.org/assessment.html.

4 "Discussion Guide to Responding to Focused Investment Area (E)(1) and Competitive Priority 3: Kindergarten Entry Assessment," Early Learning Challenge Collaborative, accessed December 28, 2013, http://www.elccollaborative.org/assessment/77-kindergarten-entry-assessment.html.

5 "Needs Assessment for Nevada's Kindergarten Entry Assessment Project 2012," Nevada Early Childhood Advisory Council, accessed January 1, 2014, http://www.socialent.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/1Kindergarten-Entry-Assessment.pdf.

6 "Discussion Guide to Responding to Focused Investment Area (E)(1) and Competitive Priority 3: Kindergarten Entry Assessment," Early Learning Challenge Collaborative, accessed December 28, 2013, http://www.elccollaborative.org/assessment/77-kindergarten-entry-assessment.html.

7 "Discussion Guide to Responding to Focused Investment Area (E)(1) and Competitive Priority 3: Kindergarten Entry Assessment," Early Learning Challenge Collaborative, accessed December 28, 2013, http://www.elccollaborative.org/assessment/77-kindergarten-entry-assessment.html.

• An assessment must be linked to the standards being taught in kindergarten.

• Nationally, the trend is to assess all entering kindergarteners rather than using a random sample of students. The approach of using a random sample significantly limits the usefulness of a kindergarten entry assessment for teachers and parents. However using a random sample of students makes the assessment significantly less expensive to administer.

• Kindergarten entry assessment data are most useful when the data are reported at the state level and connected with other data about similarly situated children.

(domains that are commonly included in a kindergarten entry assessment)

• Language and literacy development;

• Cognition and general knowledge (early mathematics and scientific development);

• Approaches to learning;

• Physical well-being and motor development, including adaptive skills; and

• Social and emotional development

Language and literacy development

Approaches to learning

Cognition and general knowledge

Domains Typically Used in Kindergarten Assessment

Physical well-being and motor development

Social and emotional development
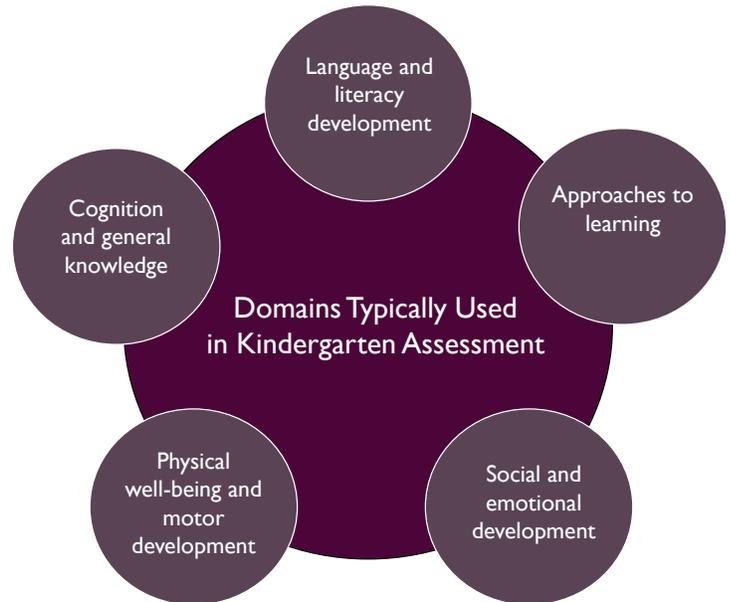
NEXT STEPS

• CONVENE a stakeholders group to finalize a kindergarten readiness description.

• IDENTIFY assessments that are aligned with the state's definition of school readiness and provide data necessary to understand children's progress in key domains.

• PILOT TEST multiple kindergarten entry assessments to gain feedback

This brief is a summary of an Institute for Child Success white paper of the same name, authored by Gwynne B. Goodlet and Leigh Kale D'Amico. This brief was compiled by Katy Sides. To view the white paper, please visit www.instituteforchildsuccess.org/research.

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