

A Unique Opportunity to Support Success for Early Learners ●●●

Kindergarten entry is a unique moment in time for gauging children’s development and using assessment data to both look backward and look forward. Since public school systems serve most kindergartners, they have an opportunity to both obtain a statewide perspective on students’ developmental status at a critical juncture and to use that information to inform early childhood and early elementary practices and policies. Based on the BUILD Initiative’s review of the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTTT-ELC) plans, we have developed a top 10 list of recommendations for state leaders as they move forward in implementing Kindergarten Entry Assessments, or KEAs, with or without the support of the RTTT-ELC funding.

1 INVOLVE THE RIGHT PEOPLE; LISTEN TO DIVERSE VOICES:
– parents, early care and education providers, public education leaders, policymakers, researchers, child and education advocates, and researchers.

Different stakeholders can add valuable perspectives to the process of developing KEAs. For instance, parents can offer perspectives on how KEAs can help them further their child’s learning. Parents can also help ensure that KEAs are developed in ways that recognize, respond to, and are appropriate for children of different backgrounds and learning styles. Teachers can bring real-world perspectives to considerations of how KEAs can best be integrated into and aligned with classroom activities, parent-teacher conferences, and ongoing instruction and support to ensure children’s learning. Including diverse stakeholders in the KEA process can also help build broad ownership for the appropriate use of KEAs.



The BUILD Initiative helps states create comprehensive early childhood systems – coordinated, effective policies that address children’s health, mental health and nutrition, early care and education, family support, and early intervention. BUILD’s vision is at the center of an emerging and vibrant state-based policy movement in the early childhood development field. We work with those who set policies, provide services and advocate for our youngest children to make sure that they are safe, healthy, eager to learn and ready to succeed in school.

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LINK TOOLS TO GOALS.

Determine how to select or develop your KEA assessment instrument and related materials for professional development, and management and reporting of KEA data based on the goals your state has established for using the KEA.

This involves gaining clarity and consensus on the questions and audiences that the KEA is expected to address, as well as on the purposes it is meant to meet. Doing so will inform the design of the instrument; the data systems needed to capture, analyze, and report the results; and the guidance, training, and supports different audiences need to use the data. It will also help states weigh the relative advantages of various options about design and implementation, such as:

- Adopting an existing assessment tool, developing a new one, or collaborating with other states in a development effort;
- Requiring a common statewide KEA or giving districts choices about the instrument that best fits their needs; and
- Conducting the assessment with all kindergartners in the state or using a sampling approach.

States also need to develop safeguards against misusing the KEA. The National Research Council report, *Early Childhood Assessments: Why, What, and How*, provides research-based guidance for policymaking in this area.

Finally, policymakers should recognize that limitations exist on the potential for KEAs alone to answer some questions. For example KEA results generally are not enough to demonstrate which early childhood programs, kindergarten teachers, or curricula are effective or ineffective in helping students learn. These results can, however, suggest areas for additional attention and investigation, and certainly can help to identify specific issues of concern that need additional attention.



USE RESEARCH IN THE DESIGN:

The KEA assessment should include the five domains of physical, social/emotional, language/literacy, cognitive development (including early mathematics and science), and approaches to learning.

Relying on a strong research base, the National Education Goals Panel determined that these five domains of development are essential for preparing young children for future success. Efforts to establish expectations that the KEAs will cover all five domains should include reviewing:

- (a) your state's early learning guidelines for 4-year-old children,
- (b) kindergarten progress reports/report cards,
- (c) the Common Core end-of-kindergarten standards,
- (d) other state or local standards for kindergarten students,
- (e) research and guidance on appropriate standards and assessments for young Dual Language Learners, and
- (f) research on indicators that predict later success in school, including in the area of executive functioning.

The KEA assessment should include the five domains of physical, social/emotional, language/literacy, cognitive development (including early mathematics and science), and approaches to learning.

4 KEEP ALL KIDS IN MIND.

Ensuring that KEAs are reliable and valid instruments for all children involves, for example, designing and administering KEAs in ways that take into account the needs and circumstances of children who are dual-language learners, have disabilities or developmental delays, or belong to cultural groups that differ from the mainstream in their modes of communication and social and emotional self-expression.

5 THINK CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT.

Develop training and quality assurance mechanisms to make sure that KEA assessments are implemented and the data used consistently, accurately, and appropriately. This involves supporting and monitoring kindergarten teachers as they administer KEA assessments and use data to improve instruction through coaches, online platforms, regional centers, and higher education programs. Make provisions for periodic refresher training, oversight, spot-checking of how assessments are administered, and ongoing reliability and validity studies.

6 PUT KEA RESULTS IN CONTEXT:

Identify and use other information to complement the KEA, including reports from parents and information about neighborhoods and communities.

Using additional information to complement KEAs both can help place the KEA results in proper context, producing a more complete picture of the child and the child's background. Efforts to identify and use complementary information involve deciding how the KEA will be aligned with other early childhood and early elementary assessments and data efforts to allow for longitudinal analyses of children's development

from birth to kindergarten entry, for example, or from kindergarten through third grade. This work also involves deciding how KEA information may be used at a neighborhood level in conjunction with other information to identify geographic areas where particular attention to developing services and supports in the early years is warranted.

7 TIMING AND FORMAT MATTER: REPORT KEA RESULTS IN EASY-TO-USE FORMATS

If KEA results are to contribute to a continuous improvement strategy for early care and education providers, it is important to make the extra effort needed for these providers to receive assessment results about their children and their varied levels of proficiency in a timely manner. It is also important for states and districts to present the data in formats that are useful to early childhood teachers and directors (ask them!), and to offer teachers and directors the necessary time, training, and supports to analyze and use the data.

8 GET PEOPLE READY TO USE THE RESULTS:

States should work with school districts to develop materials that give parents guidance on how to use KEA data, to help their children to continue progress in all domains of learning and development, including success on the Common Core and other end-of-kindergarten standards.





9 ALIGN THE ASSESSMENT WITH EDUCATOR PRACTICES (AND VICE VERSA):

With a holistic orientation to child development, a KEA can be an opportunity to align early elementary curriculum and practice with the comprehensive standards found in high-quality early care and education programs – for example, standards for social-emotional development, approaches to learning, and physical and motor development. KEA results can be used as a focal point for joint professional development activities to stimulate dialogue between early care and education providers and public school teachers and administrators about how to improve practice in the preschool years and in grades K-3. The introduction of KEAs can also raise the possibility of expanding the scope of K-3 formative assessments so that local and state-level stakeholders have a more aligned and comprehensive assessment system to inform their practice and policies.



10 COLLABORATE WITH OTHER STATES IN KEA DEVELOPMENT.

This collaboration can include sharing resources to develop, pilot, and validate assessment tools; creating technology platforms to store, manage and generate reports; and developing training and materials to help varied audiences understand and use KEA assessment information. The work on training and materials may involve developing common, open-source guides and resources, and ensuring that KEA resources designed for parent and community use are both available in home languages and culturally appropriate and responsive to families and children from different backgrounds and cultures.

Looking Back – and Forward ●●●

An aligned assessment system from birth through third grade can provide a longitudinal perspective on children’s developmental status with respect to a common set of outcomes that are associated with or predictive of school success. In turn, knowing the factors that influence the birth-to-third grade trajectory allows states to identify practices and policies that support such success. In other words, KEAs can provide data that can be used to inform efforts to improve the array of programs designed to promote school readiness – looking back – and to promote children’s continued growth – looking forward – in all domains of learning and development through the early elementary years.

