In most states kindergarten entry assessments (KEA) are employed primarily to inform parents and teachers. KEAs can serve as a key indicator of child development at formal school entry to inform education, but also could serve as a baseline for assessing progress in the early grades. However, their usefulness for this purpose is limited because KEAs tend to be separate assessments that are neither integrated nor aligned with other state-required K-2 assessments.

Recently, NIEER was asked by a state’s Deputy Commissioner if there are any states using a consistent tool across the early learning grades. This state has a comprehensive KEA that is required to be implemented within the first six weeks of the kindergarten year. The Governor’s office is seeking to have a more comprehensive approach to assessment across the early childhood band that goes beyond “academic” areas such as reading and math but also includes social emotional, physical, and soft skills.

Student Assessments: Kindergarten through 3rd Grade

- Federal requirements do not require assessment of all students until 3rd grade. However, aligned assessments in the early elementary grades can help guide and inform coherent learning and teaching in the early grades that supports more optimal student growth in all domains.
- The federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires that states administer annual statewide assessments (reading/language arts and mathematics) to all students in grades 3-8 and once in high school. In addition, for English language learners, annual English language proficiency assessments in grades K-12.
- In The Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating P-3 Approaches (2019), the authors recommend using common and consistent assessments across age/grade levels as an example of a P-3 strategy. “Ultimately, comprehensive P-3 approaches hold the potential to improve child outcomes and to prevent or close achievement gaps.” (p. 3)
- In PACE’s 2020 report on PreK-3 alignment in California, it is recommended that school districts align curricula as well as child assessments across pre-K and the early elementary grades in order to “provide teachers with information on where their students fall along a developmental curriculum.” (p. 2)
- Alignment includes the integration of curriculum, instruction, and student assessment at the grade level (horizontal) as well as creating an aligned and coherent system throughout the grades (vertical). CCSSO has developed a framework to support states in assessing student assessments (K-12) that ideally will lead to a comprehensive statewide assessment system.

Sources:
- For more information about ESSA (2015) and a summary of final regulations of students assessments, see: https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/essaassessmentfactsheet1207.pdf

Kindergarten Entry Assessments (KEAs) within a K-2 Assessment System

GG Weisenfeld, Katherine Hodges, & Karin Garver
Who Requires KEAs & For What Purposes?

During the 2018-2019, 35 states (D.C is included as a “state”) required public schools to assess children’s learning and development within a few months of kindergarten entry.1 These KEA requirements varied in how much choice local education agencies have regarding the specific assessment tool, the domains of development to be assessed, and whether all children must be assessed.2

Requirement of a Specific Tool(s)

States varied in how many tools were required and/or if the tool used was able to be determined locally.3

- 25 states required one specific assessment
- D.C. and Kansas specified 2 assessments
- Louisiana had two assessments to select from
- Arkansas and Colorado provided a choice of 3 assessments
- Minnesota provided a choice of 4 assessments
- In Iowa, New York, Texas, and Virginia LEAs have free choice (IA requires state approval)

Federal Enhancement Assessment Grants

In 2013, three state consortia (led by Maryland, North Carolina, and Texas) were awarded federal Enhanced Assessment Grants (EAGs) to support the development or enhancement of high-quality kindergarten entry assessments that would collect valid and reliable information on each entering kindergarten child’s learning and development across the five essential domains of school readiness. For more information about the three EAGs, see:


Tools Used in KEAs

States have chosen a wide range of different tools for KEAs and relatively few states used the same assessment.4 Commercially developed tools were used in their original forms or adapted by the state. State-developed tools also were used. Two state-developed tools have been validated: the Desired Results Developmental Profile-K (DRDP-K) and the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment which was developed through the federally funded Enhancement Assessment Grant.

The most commonly used assessments were Teaching Strategies Gold®, DRDP-K, and the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment.

Eleven commercially developed tools used in 2018-2019:

- Ages and Stages (ASQ-3) (Kansas)
- Ages and Stages SE (ASQ-SE) (Kansas)
- Brigance K Screener (Kentucky, Nevada)
- Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) (D.C.)
- HighScope COR for K (Colorado, Minnesota)
- Istation (Arkansas, Idaho)
- NWEA-Map for Growth (Arkansas)
- Renaissance STAR (Arkansas, Florida, Mississippi)
- Text Reading and Comprehension (TRC) (D.C.)
- Work Sampling System (Minnesota)

What is a KEA?

In 2011, Congress authorized the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) program. RTT-ELC awarded $1 billion to 20 states via four-year grants in three phases. One of the absolute priorities of RTT-ELC was to use a KEA to promote school readiness. This requirement has provided a common, and widely-used, definition of a KEA and its characteristics.

- The assessment instrument is valid and reliable.
- It is administered within the first few months of kindergarten.
- It covers the five Essential Domains of School Readiness (physical well-being and motor development, social/emotional development, approaches toward learning, language development, and cognition and general knowledge) and is aligned to the state’s ELDS.
- The goals include using data to inform parents and support instruction in the early grades.

For more information about RTT-ELC see:

Eleven state developed tools used in 2018-2019:

- Alaska Developmental Profile
- Connecticut Kindergarten Entrance Inventory
- Desired Results Developmental Profile-K (DRDP-K) (California, Colorado, Illinois, Louisiana, Minnesota, Tennessee)
- Georgia Kindergarten Entry of Developing Skills
- Kindergarten Entry and Exit Profile (KEEP) (Utah)
- Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (Maryland, Michigan, Ohio, South Carolina)
- New Mexico Kindergarten Observation Tool
- North Carolina Kindergarten Entry Assessment
- State Kindergarten Entry Assessment (Oregon)
- Pennsylvania Kindergarten Entry Inventory
- WA KIDS (Washington)

**Content of the KEA**

Child assessments are considered to be “comprehensive” if they cover the five Essential Domains of School Readiness, see text box.

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**Essential Domains of School Readiness**

In 1991, the National Education Goals Panel identified five domains of child development that were considered to be “essential” in supporting school readiness. The five domains (physical well-being and motor development, social/emotional development, approaches toward learning, language development, and cognition and general knowledge) have been integrated into states’ early learning and development standards and quality rating and improvement systems. The five Essential Domains of School Readiness have been integral parts of federal funding opportunities, including RTT-ELC which defines an assessment as comprehensive if it contains all five domains.

For more information, see:

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Upon review of state statutes and/or the required assessment tool(s), we were able to determine that in the fall of 2018:

- 20 states implemented a comprehensive KEA (covering all five domains of child development)
- 34 states assessed children’s language development (including literacy)

**Children Assessed**

Even though 35 states require a KEA, not all required that every incoming kindergarten children be assessed. Some of the possibilities were:

- Schools can opt out (Arizona, California, Minnesota, New Jersey)
- Charter schools are not required to use a KEA (D.C.)
- The KEA is administered to a sample of students (Maryland)
- The KEA is administered regionally (Michigan)
- KEAs requirements are tied to receipt of specific funding (Tennessee)
- Only some schools are required to have a KEA (Pennsylvania)

**KEA is included in K-2 assessment system**

**Kindergarten-2nd Grade Assessments.**

Most states employ some form of assessments in kindergarten through 2nd grade (primarily in reading) even though this is not required by federal law. A little more than two-thirds of states (35 out of 51) require statewide student assessments in kindergarten and first and/or second grades. We looked more closely at these 35 states to see how these assessments were aligned.

**KEAs aligned with K-2 Assessments.**

In seven states, the identified KEA tool(s) were aligned with assessments for students up to 2nd grade, see Table 1. In six of these states, the assessments were literacy-based, such as Istation (ISIP) or Renaissance Star (STAR).

In Iowa, the Early Literacy Implementation law requires all kindergarten through third grade students to be assessed at the beginning of the school year, and intermittently throughout the year, using an approved, universal screening assessment. Most districts reported using the
Formative Assessment Systems for Teachers (FAST), which is supported by the state.\textsuperscript{10}

Not all states have one assessment, such as Texas, which had 14 approved kindergarten assessments and 12 approved 1st and 2nd grade assessments, with seven assessments common between the two lists.\textsuperscript{11}

Only North Carolina was found to have a K-3 assessment that was inclusive of its KEA and was comprehensive, covering all five domains of child development (see Text Box). In addition to the K-3 Formative assessment, see Text Box, North Carolina had a separate K-3 aligned reading assessment system.

\textbf{North Carolina’s K-3 Formative Assessment}

The K-3 Formative Assessment process includes the state’s Kindergarten Entry Assessment. With federal funding from Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge and an Enhancement Assessment Grant and state legislative support, North Carolina was able to create, pilot, and implement a comprehensive assessment system. The KEA, aligned with the NC Foundations for early Learning and Development, is gathered within the first 60 days of school.

For information about the Enhanced K-3 Formative Assessment, see: https://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/classroom-resources/early-learning-read-achieve/implementing-enhanced-assessment-other-states

\textbf{KEA is required, but there is not a statewide assessment for 1st and/or 2nd graders.}

In 11 states, a KEA was required, but child assessments were either not specified or required for 1st and/or 2nd grade.

- Required child assessments started in 3rd grade (following the KEA) in Florida, Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Vermont.
- In California and Washington, after the KEA, required child assessments began in 2nd grade.
- In Arizona, assessments used in the early elementary grades, beyond a KEA, were determined locally.

\textbf{Conclusions and Looking to the Future}

Our study reviewed the 2018-2019 school year. However, some states have reduced and/or ended the use of their KEAs since then, often due to the ending of federal funding.\textsuperscript{16} Prior to the ending of these funds, states were struggling with the reliability of their KEA data due to the limited capacity (both time and knowledge) of teachers to serve as data collectors/observers and assessors.\textsuperscript{17} In order to gather accurate student development and skills, more attention must be paid to supporting teachers in understanding how to efficiently and correctly implement the KEA.

States also need to examine the content of their KEAs and what is being assessed. Perhaps with the pressure to improve outcomes on 3rd grade reading assessments, there has been a surge in the implementation of “3rd grade reading laws.” In 2019, at least 26 states implemented laws that required not only an assessment, but also the implications of what happens to students who do...
not achieve particular levels of proficiency. These laws vary in terms of focusing solely on retention (5 states); delegating decision making to the local level (9 states); and being comprehensive and including elements of prevention, intervention, and retention elements. It is understandable that there has been a push to assess students’ literacy attainment, beginning in kindergarten. However, knowing students’ skills and development, including how they approach learning (e.g. Are they problem solvers? Creative?) beyond literacy are critical for supporting all students in being successful. Research also suggests that early math knowledge is connected to later reading achievement. Therefore, it is crucial to move beyond limiting kindergarten (and 1st and 2nd grade) assessments to just collecting data on language and literacy.

**Conclusion**

States are continually examining their child assessment policies, and in particular for students in kindergarten through 2nd grade. It is critical for policy makers to remember that assessments should not solely focus on literacy in these early elementary grades, but also be more comprehensive and look at all areas of child development, including social and emotion domains, as well as other academic areas, such as mathematics. Unfortunately, only North Carolina had an aligned K-3 comprehensive assessment system.

In this brief, we only examined the assessment tools used in kindergarten through 2nd grade and their content. Next steps will be to examine how data collected from these assessments are used as well as how pre-K child assessments align with state KEAs.

**End Notes**

2. To see links to each state’s website(s), see: Weisenfeld, et al. (2020).
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.

https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/5738_Issue_Brief_State_Adoption_of_K-2_Assess_WEB_secure.pdf

9. For information about Iowa's early literacy law, see: https://educateiowa.gov/pk-12/instruction/literacy/early-literacy-initiative
11. For information about Texas’s approved assessments, see: https://teatexas.gov/student-assessment/testing/student-assessment-overview/state-approved-group-administered-achievement-tests
14. Ibid.
15. U.S. DOE (n.d.a; n.d.b)
19. Ibid.
Table 1. Alignment of K-2 Required Assessments with KEAs in 2018-2019 (n = 35)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>KEA is included in K-2 Aligned System</th>
<th>KEA &amp; Separate K-2 Aligned System</th>
<th>KEA &amp; Separate Grades 1-2 Aligned System</th>
<th>KEA &amp; No Required 1st and/or 2nd Grade Assessments*</th>
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*Includes when decision to select an assessment tool is locally determine