



SUMMARY REPORT
Good Start, Grow Smart
State Early Learning Guidelines Roundtable
October 13, 2004
Omni Shoreham Hotel, Washington, DC

**From Blueprint to Reality:
Early Learning Guidelines Implementation**

PREFACE

On October 13, 2004, the *Good Start, Grow Smart* (GSGS) Interagency Work Group sponsored a State Early Learning Guidelines Roundtable in Washington, DC. Designed to build on the success of an earlier GSGS Roundtable held in 2002, the meeting brought together 10 States to share their experiences in implementing early learning guidelines¹ (ELGs) across early childhood programs. The States discussed how they have integrated ELGs into their training and professional development systems, and how their evaluation and assessment efforts are helping to show specific outcomes from these activities.

This summary report summarizes the highlights of information shared by the 10 States during the 2004 GSGS Roundtable. As each State has unique resources, legislative mandates, and goals for young children, ELG implementation activities vary and reflect the developmental stage of systems development in each jurisdiction. The information in this report is being shared to provide technical assistance to early care and education stakeholders as they work toward their own implementation of ELGs and undertake development activities to strengthen early learning. The insights offered by the State experiences described here can be helpful to other States and local communities as they continue to enhance their early care and education systems. In addition, the comments and suggestions shared during the Roundtable are helping to inform the work of Federal agencies as they continue to support the implementation of the GSGS initiative and work with States and communities to strengthen early learning.

ABOUT THE GSGS INITIATIVE

In April 2002, the Bush Administration announced the *Good Start, Grow Smart* initiative to help States and local communities strengthen early learning for young children. As a companion to the No Child Left Behind legislation, the goal of GSGS is to ensure that young children enter kindergarten with the skills they will need to succeed at reading and other early learning activities. GSGS provides a framework for a stronger Federal–State relationship to focus on school readiness within early childhood programs.

The GSGS initiative cuts across the domains of several Federal agencies and includes specific mandates for States. The key priorities or goals of GSGS include:

Partnering with States To Improve Early Childhood Education. Federal agencies are working in partnership with States to strengthen early learning in child care and other early childhood programs. GSGS calls on States to develop voluntary guidelines on early literacy and early math concepts that align with State K-12 standards. In addition, States must develop professional development plans and plans for coordinating early childhood programs. Spurred on by GSGS, many States have taken steps toward this goal:

- **48 States, the District of Columbia, and three territories** have drafted early learning guidelines (ELGs). Two States (North Dakota and Alaska) and two territories (Virgin Islands and American Samoa) are currently developing drafts of content domains for public review.
- **37 States and one territory** are implementing their guidelines through dissemination, training, and/or embedding the guidelines in their professional development system.

¹ In this document, “early learning guidelines” (ELGs) is used to mean guidelines for what children should know, understand, and be able to do. This term is consistent with language provided in the President’s original GSGS terminology, and encompasses a variety of names used by States for this concept.

- **All 50 States, the District of Columbia, and many of the territories** have created partnerships with at least four key early care and education programs in their States, as suggested in GSGS, and are coordinating with these stakeholders in the establishment of their professional development systems.

Strengthening Head Start: The Head Start program has developed a new accountability system known as the National Reporting System (NRS) to ensure that every Head Start center assesses student learning in language, early literacy, and premath skills. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) implemented a national training program that used a train-the-trainer approach and mentoring to reach all Head Start teachers with techniques to promote prereading skills.

Providing Information to Teachers, Caregivers and Parents: To close the gap between the best research and current practices in early childhood education, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) initiated a broad public awareness campaign for parents, early childhood educators, child care providers, and the public. In summer 2002, the First Lady and Education officials hosted Early Learning Summits and Early Childhood Educator Academies. In addition, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), the HHS Administration for Children and Families, and the Institute of Education Sciences and other ED offices collaborated on a 5-year, multimillion dollar research agenda to identify language and early literacy curricula and teaching strategies.

OVERVIEW OF THE GSGS ROUNDTABLES

Toward the first GSGS goal, *Partnering with States To Improve Early Childhood Education*, a consortium of Federal agencies has hosted two *Good Start, Grow Smart* State Roundtables. The first, in September 2002, focused on the development of ELGs, including coordination across child care, Head Start, and State education agencies in ELG development. Based on insights gained at this meeting, the Child Care Bureau, through the Child Care Technical Assistance Network, delivered training over the past 2 years to assist States with research, strategic planning, and other efforts designed to ensure that ELGs are of the highest quality and are linked to coordinated systems of professional development. (The Summary Report from the 2002 GSGS Roundtable is available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ccb/policy1/current/ACF118/summary.pdf>.)

On October 13, 2004, a second GSGS Roundtable was held in Washington, DC, focusing on the implementation of ELGs. This meeting highlighted the expansion and extension of working relationships across Federal agencies, including the formal establishment of a *Good Start, Grow Smart* Interagency Work Group with representation from many offices in HHS and ED. (See Appendix for a membership list, 2004 Roundtable agenda, and participant list.) Ten States² (some of which had been present at the first meeting in 2002) shared their experiences in implementing ELGs across early childhood programs, described how they have integrated ELGs into their training and professional development systems, and explained how their evaluation and assessment efforts are providing outcome results. These insights into States' experiences will inform the work of Federal agencies as they continue to develop strategies to support State and local communities' efforts to implement the priorities of GSGS.

This summary report presents a brief overview of five key themes that emerged in the 2004 GSGS Roundtable:

- ✓ **Effective Collaboration**
- ✓ **Infrastructure for Support**
- ✓ **Dissemination of Information**
- ✓ **Integration of ELGs with the Professional Development System**
- ✓ **Assessment and Evaluation**

Content shared within these five themes builds upon the lessons learned in the first Roundtable, and reflects the growing knowledge in the States about how to effectively implement national goals in the context of State-specific needs and resources.

² States represented at the meeting included **Arkansas, California**, Florida, Georgia, **Maryland, Missouri, Ohio**, Oklahoma, **Rhode Island**, and West Virginia. (States in bold were also present at the meeting in 2002.)

For example, effective collaboration has been a key element in developing ELGs. Collaboration among all early care and education stakeholders within a State builds a coherent vision for young children and garners support for the value of the efforts to build or strengthen the infrastructure for quality early care and education. This report elaborates on the necessary elements of building effective collaboration to implement ELG, such as taking time to build relationships across agencies, linking to the private community as well as the legislature, and developing structures to encourage leadership and institutional support.

As States have continued their efforts to disseminate and implement ELGs, the necessity of building an infrastructure for support has become more urgent. Similarly, integration of ELGs with the professional development system is imperative. As noted in the 2002 Roundtable, to effectively disseminate ELGs, the early education workforce needs training and structural supports within licensing, higher education, and training organizations to build providers' skills and knowledge in supporting young children's learning.

These and other lessons learned by the States since the launch of GSGS in 2002 are captured below. Please note that this summary is based on meeting minutes and is an attempt to share key points made within these five themes. State-specific information provided may not be comprehensive or all-inclusive and is not fully developed in this report. It is offered to alert the field to the kinds of State activities that are ongoing, and to provide interested parties the opportunity for possible follow-up with State representatives. All information presented here was current in October 2004. For additional information, readers are encouraged to contact Roundtable participants directly.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

✓ **Effective Collaboration**

One of the key strategies States articulated for effective development and dissemination of ELGs is effective collaboration with a wide range of groups, both explicitly within the early childhood education community and with a variety of others who could offer aid and support. In particular, several States felt that long-lasting system change could be produced by bringing together representatives from several State agencies and other early care and education stakeholders around a common goal of developing ELGs applicable to all care settings. This is especially true if strong, positive, personal relationships among key people are cultivated as part of the collaborations. Key recommendations that emerged from State discussions include:

- *Collaborate across all sectors of the early childhood community.* States found strong allies in others in the field whose goals also relate to supporting young children's school readiness. This collaboration proved to be an essential factor in most States' ELG development and dissemination. A wide variety of agencies and groups worked together, including Head Start, State departments of education, child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs), child care centers and programs, early childhood education programs at institutions of higher learning, public and private prekindergartens, private special interest organizations for young children, government child care credentialing and training offices, and other interested State and local officials.

States indicated that working with such a variety of partners had challenges. However, engaging a wide range of agencies and organizations in the ELG development and implementation effort led to a more inclusive process and resulted in a more effective set of guidelines that considered the varied perspectives (i.e., health, education, care) that impact young children's development.

Oklahoma and Rhode Island exemplify two approaches to collaboration. Oklahoma worked to involve all stakeholders by including representatives from tribal child care and tribal Head Start, as well as the agencies and organizations noted above. Oklahoma recognized the importance of including tribal child care to ensure that State ELGs are culturally relevant to Tribes. In Rhode Island, the Steering Committee felt it was very important to include those who directly deliver services in the process of defining the standards. Meetings were scheduled at convenient times for all attendees, and stipends were attached to compensate attendees for contributing their perspectives and time.

A Rhode Island Task Force was charged with creating standards that were based on current research and reflected the priorities of Rhode Island practitioners. The Task Force included representatives of early care and education programs, Head Start, the public schools, family child care homes, higher education, and parents.

- *Partner with members of the business community and legislature.* States indicated that working with members of the legislature and the business community is essential. Specifically, legislators aim to maximize resources, stop duplication of effort, and build local coalitions. The business community is interested in children being ready to succeed in school and eventually contributing to the economic development of the community as productive, adult citizens. Thus, the legislature and the business community each can be a driving force in the development and dissemination of ELGs.
- *Collaborate to build momentum toward the goal of implementation.* In a time of limited funding and resources, it can be challenging to sustain efforts (in terms of both time and resources) from development through implementation of ELGs. States suggested that pooling resources and ideas across sectors of the early childhood community could serve to strengthen support when funding is limited. Members of partnerships identify barriers to implementation and address them collectively. Commonly, partners rotate expenditure of resources and/or leadership to resolve competing priorities in accordance with agreements negotiated among partners.
- *Institutionalize partnerships.* As partnerships matured, States observed that these relied less on the force of individual leadership and more on institutionalized practices of working together. What began as nascent partnerships to develop ELGs in more informal relationships between colleagues in separate sectors of the early childhood field evolved into institutionalized offices of early care and education or memoranda of understanding between State agencies. For example, Georgia established an Early Care and Learning Office, the purpose of which is to foster cooperation and collaboration among agencies with goals related to early childhood development. In Rhode Island, early care and education is being provided in a wide variety of settings and in programs governed by different regulations. Consequently, the Rhode Island Department of Education and Department of Human Services entered into an agreement to work in partnership to develop early learning standards for Rhode Island.
- *Hold realistic expectations.* States said they are working to make sure partners have a collective vision of goals and how long it might take to achieve them. States reiterated many times the need for perseverance, and the understanding that successful dissemination and implementation of ELGs in all sectors of the early care and education workforce will take a number of years.

A remaining challenge identified in the area of effective collaboration is:

- How can coordination and flexibility of Federal funding streams be improved, recognizing that specific statutory language governing different Federal agency initiatives and programs can be a barrier?

✓ **Infrastructure for Support**

In addition to collaboration, a key factor in the success of ELG implementation is developing and maintaining a strong infrastructure for support. This means garnering support from the early childhood learning community, as well as from the legislature, businesses, the general public, and key leaders. It is important not only to identify the “champions” of early childhood development and more specifically ELGs, but also to create new committed leaders through strong, persuasive communication. Key recommendations that emerged from State discussions include:

- *Identify and develop champions.* States indicated that one of the strongest ways to build momentum for ELG dissemination and implementation is to engage people in positions of power and authority in the legislature and business community who believe in the vision and will take a leadership role in promoting public awareness. In Oklahoma, for example, the Early Learning Team convened the business community to review brain development research in order to demonstrate how young children’s development and later school

success could be tied to a strong future workforce and economic development. Subsequently, the business community persuaded the governor to convene a taskforce on early education and school readiness. In West Virginia, the Secretary of the Department of Education and the Superintendent of Public Schools made a joint statement to the legislature about the importance of early learning, contributing to legislative support for improving the early care and education system.

- *Align internal efforts with external forces.* West Virginia has a legislative mandate for universal prekindergarten to be implemented by 2012. Each county must submit a yearly plan to indicate how it will reach this goal. Each county also must provide evidence that every 4-year-old, and every 3- and 4-year-old with special needs, in the county has access to a high-quality prekindergarten program. These external forces prompted the revision of the core knowledge and competencies and alignment with ELGs. The Departments of Health and Human Services and Head Start also jointly developed a credit-bearing course for use at the undergraduate and graduate level on curriculum implementation in early childhood education. The course was piloted with 40 participants from diverse backgrounds (public school, special education, Head Start, preschool, higher education, etc.). The course design includes representatives of all stakeholders as lecturers. Feedback received upon completion of the course indicated that participants benefited from seeing collaboration modeled by the lecturers. This approach was a successful strategy for extending to the local level the uniform philosophy and collaborative approach modeled at the State level across different early childhood groups.

At least one State mentioned that State courts had mandated education reform in a way that buttressed ongoing efforts to develop State ELGs. An example of another type of alignment is found in California, where the First 5 California initiative brings \$600 million through a tobacco tax to enhancing early childhood development. In some efforts the First 5 Commission leads the way in terms of establishing programs (e.g., universal prekindergarten in Los Angeles) and in other efforts the Commission works in partnership with State agencies, such as the Department of Education. Another outside force that can support the development of ELGs is press coverage of an early childhood issue.

In Oklahoma, the Department of Education conducted a survey of kindergarten teachers showing that 25% of children are not ready to succeed in school when they enter kindergarten. This study garnered extensive media coverage and helped drive public support for early care and education, including ELG development and implementation.

Continuing challenges identified in the area of developing an infrastructure for support are:

- How can States and local communities best engage members of the business community and legislature?
- What information or evidence is most useful and effective to present when cultivating an infrastructure for support?
- How can States and local communities strategize around the likelihood of limited resources?

✓ **Dissemination of Information**

The goals of ELG development and implementation include extending access to high-quality early childhood care and education programs for young children and increasing school readiness of entering kindergarteners. To make these goals a reality, it is essential to disseminate ELGs to a number of key groups, including child care centers; Head Start programs; prekindergarten programs; family, friend, and neighbor caregivers; credentialing institutions; 2- and 4-year colleges; parents; and the community at large. Key recommendations that emerged from State discussions are:

- *Agree on a clear, consistent message.* A well-articulated message is essential in promoting the dissemination and implementation of ELGs. Public awareness campaigns must make known the purpose of ELGs, as well as how to access and use them. Sending a strong, clear message about the importance of ELGs and early childhood care and education to businesses, policymakers, and legislators is also important as a first step in giving ELGs traction and momentum.

Broad public awareness campaigns try to leverage general public support for early care and education, whereas campaigns focused on ELGs are targeted at getting materials and information to key constituencies. (See below for examples of dissemination efforts aimed at parents and practitioners.)

- *Make ELGs available and accessible to a wide variety of stakeholders.* A key strategy is to make ELGs readily accessible to people of multiple cultures, in multiple regions, and with varied types of early childhood interests. The translation of ELGs and corresponding materials into multiple languages is important if they are to have widespread use. In addition to translating written ELG materials, States are making training on the guidelines available in the dominant languages of the State.

The State of Missouri has translated ELG materials into Spanish due to the prevalence of Spanish speakers in the State, and in St. Louis, materials have been translated into Bosnian to meet local needs.

In addition to language, another potential barrier to accessibility of materials and training is the remoteness of rural areas. Arkansas utilizes a distance-learning program to make sure training reaches child care providers in even the most remote areas. Making the information available via the Internet is another strategy for making ELGs available and accessible to wide groups of people in different areas of a State.

Additionally, assuring that ELGs and corresponding materials are appropriate for the full range of early childhood groups, such as special education or tribal child care, is key to their widespread use. For example, Oklahoma has worked to align ELGs with Head Start standards, as well as making them culturally relevant for tribal child care.

- *Develop focused materials for parents and practitioners so that ELGs are known and understood.* Parent involvement has proven vital to State ELG partnerships. Dissemination of ELGs to parents via activity packets, activity cards, and interactive calendars has been extremely successful in many States. Parent dissemination materials should provide clear information on development in each domain, benchmarks for this development, and strategies for encouraging it. Such materials are distributed mainly through early childhood care and education programs, but also through dentists' offices, libraries, community action agencies, and community health centers.

Maryland, Arkansas, and Rhode Island each have developed and disseminated materials that help parents know how to support their children's development and how to seek out quality early childhood care and education. In Rhode Island, parents and early childhood professionals worked in partnership to develop family materials in both English and Spanish that have been widely disseminated to homes throughout the State. The materials are also available on the Department of Education website³ to provide more universal access. Professional development sessions with early care and education professionals emphasize how the materials can be used to strengthen partnerships between families and providers.

Maryland has sent "Ready At Five" packets home to parents of young children and distributed packets to child care centers and CCR&Rs. The packets and the Ready At Five website⁴ show parents signs of development in each important domain and help them choose developmentally appropriate and stimulating activities to do with their children.

Similarly, materials for providers should be clear and user-friendly and detail specific stages of development and activities to support them. One State noted that it is helpful to use "guidelines" language when disseminating materials to providers so that they will see the materials as a resource to help them in their work, rather than as another set of standards on which they will be regulated and evaluated. In Rhode Island, the Departments of Education and Human Services worked with Rhode Island KIDS COUNT to produce attractive materials that

³ <http://www.ride.ri.gov/els>

⁴ <http://www.readyatfive.org>

include a standards book and poster. Materials were mass-mailed to child care programs, Head Start, public preschool and kindergarten teachers, and family child care homes. This communication strategy helped to produce a groundswell of interest among providers and prompted many to take advantage of early learning standards professional development opportunities. Rhode Island now offers three levels of professional development, led by a group of trained consultants who follow an established curriculum. In this way, early learning standards information is shared consistently across and among providers.

If dissemination of clear information on early child development occurs simultaneously to providers and parents, then both are more informed and can reinforce each other's efforts towards supporting school readiness. In Ohio, efforts are made to ensure that Head Start program staff, child care providers, and parents are equally informed about early childhood development and early learning standards by integrating early learning content standards into training opportunities such as regional trainings, a statewide early childhood conference, a conference focusing on evaluation and assessment tools, and early literacy seminars where toolkits are disseminated. Many trainings are conducted on weekends and evenings to better accommodate parents.

- *Prioritize choices about target audiences for dissemination.* Given limited resources, many States face difficult choices with regard to which providers to reach out to first. Because it is relatively easy to reach licensed, center-based providers and teachers in early childhood education settings, they are usually the first target audience for dissemination, rather than family, friend, and neighbor care providers. Broad target audiences, such as the general public, are hard to reach successfully, given limited resources. Launching an expensive public awareness campaign is not always feasible within agency budgets. Partnering with multiple agencies and organizations to increase resources is a strategy for reaching all stakeholders over time.

Continuing challenges identified in the area of dissemination include:

- Which groups are not yet targeted for ELG information dissemination, and why not?
- How can these groups be reached? Who are the best partners, and what are the best methods?

✓ **Integration of ELGs into the Professional Development System**

Integrating ELGs into systems of professional development for the early childhood care and education community includes aligning trainings offered through CCR&Rs and other organizations, as well as formal educational activities in 2- and 4-year colleges. ELGs must be effectively “embedded” within preexisting curricula, and/or new curricula incorporating ELG information must be developed. For the success of this strategy, it is essential to develop and utilize strong partnerships with institutions of higher education and training organizations. Key recommendations that emerged from State discussions include:

- *Take inventory of the State's current professional development system.* This information is an important starting point for integrating ELGs into preexisting training and formal education of those in the early childhood workforce. Examples of existing State resources that could allow integration with State ELGs are Ohio's directory of early learning professional development opportunities, and the personnel and practitioner registries in multiple States. The registry system can make it possible to track the type of training a provider receives and identify strengths and deficits in a provider's training history, so that future training may be directed towards areas still needing development. Ideally, ELGs would be embedded within training received by practitioners in the registry. Although the utility of linking different administrative data systems (practitioners' registry, training registry, training, calendar, licensing, etc.) is widely recognized by States, many States are still finding this linkage a challenge.

In Missouri, the training calendar, practitioner registry, and trainer registry are all funded by State contracts. In the implementation of these projects, opportunities for connections are identified and used. For example, when Missouri has trainer approval criteria in place, a trainer might be required to post his/her sessions on the training calendar and to identify the core competencies and ELGs addressed. The training calendar session information would be linked to the trainer registry training history. The practitioner registry would link to the

providers' participation in these sessions. The key to linking this effort to the early learning guidelines is to make sure trainers understand both the core competencies and the ELGs and categorize the training sessions appropriately. In Missouri, this is still in the early planning phase and is dependent upon the trainer approval criteria being in place.

Another factor to assess is the level of articulation between 2- and 4-year institutions of higher education with regard to professional development of early childhood teachers. Often, someone with an AA degree will find that her previous education does not “count” when she enters a 4-year institution seeking a Bachelor's degree; she has to start accumulating credits from scratch. States are employing various strategies to address this area. With funding made available by the Child Care Bureau and the Florida Head Start State Collaboration Office, Florida is using case studies of instances where articulation between 2- and 4-year colleges has worked as a tool to help community colleges replicate this success. Florida is also developing a searchable database that will allow prospective students to find a college credit earning program in an area of interest and in an institution near them. In Maryland, the K-12 leadership council has worked with higher education for 9 years to develop a new Associate of Arts in Teaching (AAT) degree, which became available for the first time in September 2004. Course credits towards an AAT will matriculate to any higher education institution in the State of Maryland.

- *Develop strategies for integrating ELGs into the existing system.* This goal involves close collaboration with partners in training agencies and higher education. For example, the Rhode Island Early Learning Standards Project helped spearhead a meeting of representatives of the early childhood field from institutes of higher education across the State. The group came together to discuss how to infuse the early learning standards into their curriculum and decided at that time to formalize their group to continue this and other important conversations. Taking a different approach, Maryland has embedded ELGs into the Maryland child care credential, which now emphasizes ELGs in training.

Ohio has placed Early Learning Specialists within institutions of higher learning across the State in order to facilitate the embedding of ELGs within higher education coursework.

In a related manner, if the content of courses in both 2- and 4-year colleges is explicitly related to the ELGs, this will facilitate the transfer of credits across these institutions. Articulation agreements can be structured around the content covered by courses in relation to the guidelines. Furthermore, once classroom teachers receive professional development focusing on ELGs, the guidelines may naturally become more permanently integrated into early childhood care and education organizations. Some States are beginning to focus on the content of the training and education received and whether or not information gets turned into practice; information on content is available in some State registries.

- *Align ELGs for children with core knowledge and competencies for providers.* West Virginia, for example, has rewritten the core knowledge and competencies for early care and education professionals—what adults who work with children should know, understand, and be able to do—aligning them with the more recently completed ELGs. Partners from all early childhood sectors worked on the new edition, creating a framework and common language that applies to child care, Head Start, and public education. The revised core knowledge and competencies provide the foundation for the West Virginia State Training and Registry System (WV STARS). Trainings and pathways are linked to the tiered competencies, ensuring that providers and teachers receive sufficient training in the core domains of the ELGs. The new core content is also being used to write the curriculum for a collaborative college-level summer institute for prekindergarten staff.
- *Develop effective training on ELGs.* Effective training is essential for ensuring that all adults who touch children's lives have the skills and knowledge they need to effectively support their development. In addition to integrating ELGs into existing training and education programs, including those in institutions of higher education, new training programs are being created that are specifically geared toward ELG implementation. Such training, as stated earlier, must not be solely directed at teachers in formal early care and education

settings (such as child care centers, preschools, prekindergartens, and Head Start programs), but also to informal care providers and parents. It should also be designed to include non-English-speaking providers. Such training and education ideally should contribute to ongoing training requirements or be credit-bearing, so that providers will have added incentive to attend.

Continuing challenges identified in the area of integrating ELGs into the professional development system include:

- How can linkages to systems of higher education be improved?
- How can results of training be tracked, connecting training with provider knowledge, provider practice, and child outcomes?

✓ **Assessment and Evaluation**

A final theme that emerged from the Roundtable was the importance of assessment and evaluation, and the approaches that States are taking to (1) assess children's development and evaluate programs in relation to the ELGs, and (2) link ELGs to academic outcomes in elementary school (usually third-grade outcomes). While this type of assessment is not required under GSGS, many States are pursuing assessment as an important part of their school readiness infrastructure. Evaluation data is necessary to assess the effectiveness of continued program funding, and to sustain involvement and interest of the legislature and the public. However, obtaining accurate data that can be used in this way is challenging. Key recommendations that emerged from State discussions are identified below:

- *Reconcile different definitions and vocabulary used within the early childhood community to describe accountability and assessment.* Currently there is a lack of consensus on such key terms as "school readiness." Some use this term to refer specifically to early reading and cognitive development, while others use it to mean a broader approach, focusing on development across multiple domains. This lack of consensus hinders agreement on the focus of early childhood assessments in the accountability process. Should these assessments focus only on early language and literacy development, on cognitive development more broadly, or also include a focus on social and emotional development, approaches to learning, and physical and motor development? Differences also exist in the early childhood community in views of appropriate practices for early childhood assessment (i.e., which kinds of assessments are appropriate to use in the accountability process, and which assessment methods to employ). Participants felt that States need to be clear on the goals for assessment and address issues of sample size, measurement tools, and data analysis and reporting, as well as the training necessary to effectively conduct assessments of young children. States suggested working towards a set of principles to guide their practices on accountability and assessment.
- *Weigh alternatives when selecting approach to assessment and evaluation.* There is a general recognition that different approaches are taken by different States and by different sectors of the early childhood community with regard to assessment and evaluation. Some States, such as Florida, are conducting universal screening at kindergarten entry as mandated by the legislature. In other States, school districts are under local control, and/or participation in assessment may be voluntary. Each of these situations may make it difficult to train teachers to administer assessments uniformly and to establish universal assessment across a State. Several States noted that training providers and teachers in the reliable use of assessment tools was essential to obtaining useful assessment data. Teacher turnover creates a challenge in providing adequate training.

Some States are using "home-grown" approaches to measuring quality, while others apply well-established measures of the quality of early care and education programs. Maryland has used the Work Sampling system developed by Sam Meisels to gather data on all kindergarten children in the State. This has been very helpful in providing 30 indicators that can be tracked for multiple cohorts of children. However, Maryland and other States stressed the considerable time required for adequate training of teachers and providers in the use of a system in order to support valid and reliable data collection. This experience suggests that States would be prudent to use at least the first 2 years of data collection to establish reasonable validity and reliability of data, before using the data for assessment and/or program evaluation purposes.

Several States, including Arkansas and Ohio, are using pre/posttest designs with standardized measures. California is using the early childhood environment rating scales (the ECERS-R, ITERS, and FDCRS), in addition to parent surveys, and teacher observation profiles as part of an accountability system. Ohio is piloting the use of an assessment of the literacy environment in the classroom (Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation - ELLCO) in programs in which a sample of prekindergarten children participates.

States voiced concern over feeling pressure to gather evaluation data using tools that are not appropriate for that particular use. There was general agreement among the States that standardized measures, rather than “home-grown” measures, should be used whenever possible to measure domains addressed in the State’s ELGs. There was also agreement that screening tools used to identify developmental needs of individual children, and assessments intended for informing teacher practice should not be used for program evaluation purposes.

- *Align assessments with content of ELGs.* Another issue regarding assessment and ELGs is how to match what is assessed with the content of ELGs. For example, although ELGs stress multiple aspects of young children’s development, such as social-emotional development and health, many of the assessments of young children used in States focus primarily on literacy and numeracy. Partly, this problem is due to a lack of adequate measures of young children’s social-emotional development. However, a related issue is the strong focus on tracking children’s academic progress, even at a young age, with not as much regard to other important aspects of development.
- *Communicate to policymakers and funders realistic expectations of evaluation results from a 1-year intervention.* Arkansas is required by legislation to carry out longitudinal research, starting in kindergarten and following the children into the fourth grade. There is some concern among the States about the use of results from longitudinal studies in drawing conclusions about a 1-year preschool program. Specifically, there is a concern that comparisons might not be useful, or that conclusions about a preschool program’s effectiveness will be based on whether noticeable differences in performance occur years later. It was pointed out that longitudinal data do not always take into account changes in teachers, curriculum, or instructional practice across the years, all of which could affect outcomes over time.

In addition, States are using opportunities to educate legislators and policymakers about the research on effective assessment and evaluation to help them establish clear purposes and reasonable expectations for early care and education programs. Several States felt that politicians do not understand the difference between an intensive intervention with many resources, such as the Abecedarian or Perry Preschool project, and the associated results achieved, and the much more modest 1-year interventions being implemented currently in their States.

At the same time, there was acknowledgment that data needed to be gathered and shared on program performance in order to track progress and sustain funding for early childhood programs. The key was being clear on what a program is capable of accomplishing. Several success stories were shared. Maryland is conducting a universal assessment with Work Sampling, where data has indicated that children in child care did as well or better than children in Head Start and public prekindergarten. The self-image of child care providers was raised by these results. Another outcome is that funding for 4-year-old education of high-risk children was included in the State budget based on these assessment results. The view of Maryland’s education system now encompasses children from birth to Pre-K. These developments have strengthened the collaboration among child care providers and other early childhood educators.

In Georgia, a study began in 2001 utilizing probability samples from three groups of children attending preschool (Georgia Pre-K, Head Start, private preschool). The study followed the children through their first-grade year. Results from the first year and a half of the evaluation showed that children who attended preschool made gains of at least four points against the national norms on standardized assessments from preschool to kindergarten. An additional finding of the study was that summer learning loss was especially substantial for African American children.

In Georgia, during the summer of 2004, skills of children from economically disadvantaged households were studied through an enrichment program that served 173 children. Children enrolled in the program gained on standardized scores in expressive language, number skills, and story comprehension. These are skills where previous research indicates that Georgia's children are behind upon kindergarten entry. Results will be used to support requests for more funding to expand summertime enrichment programs.

Remaining challenges identified in the area of assessment and evaluation include:

- What is appropriate content to assess when children are in preschool?
- What approaches to assessment are appropriate with young children?
- How can States best respond to pressures to gather and use data in ways inconsistent with best practices in assessment?
- How can States effectively assess the mediating effects of curriculum and teacher practice on the relationship between ELGs implementation and outcomes for children?

CONCLUSION

The 2004 *Good Start, Grow Smart* State Early Learning Guidelines Roundtable provided a valuable opportunity for States to share their recent experiences in the implementation of ELGs. The Roundtable served as a unique forum for peer-to-peer exchange of successful State strategies, lessons learned, and brainstorming around common challenges. Federal partners in the *Good Start, Grow Smart* Interagency Work Group benefited from this dialogue and will use information shared by participant States to design technical assistance and inform future Federal efforts in working with States to strengthen school readiness within early childhood programs.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Appendix



Good Start, Grow Smart State Implementation Roundtable

Omni Shoreham Hotel, Washington, D.C., Thursday, October 13, 2004

AGENDA

9:00 a.m. **Welcome, Introductions, and Overview**

Shannon Christian, Associate Commissioner, Child Care Bureau

Joan E. Ohl, Commissioner, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Administration for Children and Families

Doug Klafehn, Deputy Associate Commissioner, Head Start Bureau

Jacquelyn Jackson, Director, Student Achievement and School Accountability Programs, U.S. Department of Education

9:40 a.m. **Mapping of Key State Activities**

What Have Been Your Top Recent Implementation Priorities?

Gene Gousie, Facilitator, National Child Care Information Center

10:30 a.m. **BREAK**

10:45 a.m. **Breakout Groups: Strategic Approaches for GSGS Implementation**

Driving Forces, Capacity, Goals, and Strategies

(Groups divide into State teams; approximately three States per group)

11:30 a.m. **Report Back/Discussion**

Noon **LUNCH**

Jacquelyn Jackson, Director, Student Achievement and School Accountability Programs, U.S. Department of Education

1:30 p.m. **Breakout Groups: Challenges and Successes**

Training and Support for Users of Early Learning Guidelines

Embedding Early Learning Guidelines Into Professional Development Systems

Evaluation and Assessment

(Individual participants self-select into topic areas)

2:15 p.m. **Report Back/Discussion**

2:45 p.m. **BREAK**

3:00 p.m. **Federal and State Dialogue**

Next Steps, Lessons Learned, Key Resources, and Advice to Others

Shannon Christian, Leader

4:00 p.m. **Closing**





Administration for Children and Families
Good Start, Grow Smart State Roundtable II
Omni Shoreham Hotel
Washington, DC
October 13, 2004



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