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ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION:
BECOMING AN EDUCATED CONSUMER
PART I: CHILD ASSESSMENT

This document is intended to provide basic information, examples or definitions, and resources on child assessment. An understanding of these issues and where to go for further information and expertise will assist policy makers as they participate in State discussions about school readiness, program evaluation, and accountability to ensure the quality of early care and education and promote the school success of all young children. This resource will help you become an "educated consumer" on this topic. There are two additional documents in this series—Part II addresses program evaluation and Part III addresses accountability systems.

Note: The term *assessment* can be used for a variety of purposes, such as needs assessment, assessment of property taxes, etc. This document refers to assessment of children. In the field of early care and education, assessment most commonly refers to child assessment, and evaluation is most often associated with programs.

What Is Assessment of Children?

Researchers refer to assessment of children as a systematic method of making decisions or judgments about children's progress toward achieving developmental goals. Assessment results provide information for decisions about the need for further services, specific classroom practices, or effectiveness of programs.

Key Points:
1. According to the research, assessments have separate and distinct purposes. Assessments can be used for the following:

   - Identify children for health or special services;
   - Track and promote children's learning and development;
   - Monitor trends and evaluate the effects of programs on child outcomes; and
   - Accountability of public funds.

2. Clearly articulating the purpose of the assessment is critical to determining that the appropriate measures are used.

3. Policy-makers must first ensure that appropriate standards have been met—including early learning guidelines—sufficient professional development and training have been conducted, and the program has been implemented well and for a sufficient length of time before reasonably expecting an impact on children's learning and development.

Examples:
...Of screening

- A vision or dental screen is used to identify children who may need further services.
- *Get Ready to Read* is a screening tool to identify children's strengths and developmental needs in literacy.
- Florida's Uniform School Readiness Screening System uses a combination of measures to determine the status of school readiness statewide.

...Of tracking children's learning

- *Work Sampling* tracks children's learning and development in their daily routines at multiple points in time.
- The *Creative Curriculum Developmental Assessment* is a "curriculum-embedded" assessment tool designed to be used by caregivers implementing the *Creative Curriculum* to track children's progress and plan daily activities.

...Of monitoring trends over time and evaluating the impact of the program

- The Perry Preschool Project tracks child outcomes over time to determine the long-term impact of the Perry Preschool program on later development.

...Of an accountability system

- The Head Start National Reporting System is an example of assessments of child outcomes being used as parts of an accountability system.

Resources:
For a detailed discussion of the purposes of early childhood assessments as well as a discussion of assessment systems and policy recommendations, see the most often quoted resource:

- *Principles and Recommendations for Early Childhood Assessments* (1998), eds. Lorrie Shepard, Sharon Lynn Kagan, and Emily Wurtz, prepared for the Goal 1 Early Childhood Assessments Resource Group, National Education Goals Panel. This resource is available at http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/negp/Reports/prinrec.pdf.

For brief articles on a variety of issues on assessment, such as school readiness assessments, comparison of methods of assessment, and assessing infants and toddlers, see the following:

- "School Readiness Assessment: Research in Review" (January 2004), in *Child and Program Assessment: Tools for Educators*, from the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) *Beyond the Journal*, by Kelly L. Maxwell and Richard Clifford. This issue of *Beyond the Journal* contains other articles related to assessment, such as infant-toddler assessment resources, Head Start, and a glossary of terms. This resource is available at www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/200401/.

Can Assessments Be Done Well With Young Children?

Assessments of young children in research and clinical settings have a relatively long history. However, the increasing call to assess young children in diverse early care and education settings and for purposes related to the general support of learning and development are new. The measures and approaches for assessing very young children and children from different cultures, who speak different languages, and have different abilities are still emerging. More research is needed on assessments for young children that can be administered by providers with various backgrounds and training in a range of early care and education settings. In addition, research is needed to identify the tools that can assess the impact of programs and practices on specific developmental outcomes.

Key Points:
1. It is important to be clear about the purpose of the assessment—whether it is to identify skills that have been acquired or to identify skills that are emerging.

2. New research is emerging that indicates that assessment measures of young children's learning should focus on the *process* (i.e., how children learn to recognize letters) of learning, not the *product* (i.e., the exact number of letters a child knows at a specific point in time) since young children's learning changes and progresses so rapidly and episodically in the first 5 years of development.

3. Multiple measures, conducted at frequent intervals over time, should be used to capture the dynamic nature of young children's learning and should include the families' views on children's learning and development.

4. Young English language learners should be assessed with culturally appropriate instruments in their native language, and/or in English by assessors trained in using the assessment and by assessors who speak the learners' native language. However, there are fewer valid and reliable instruments for this population, so care should be used when selecting instruments.

5. Young children with special needs can be assessed with the same (reliable, valid, and developmentally and culturally appropriate) measures used with young children who are developing normally, provided the appropriate adaptations for children with specific physical or other needs are made. In some situations, measures designed to assess or diagnose specific delays also may be administered.

6. Early learning occurs in many different places and, most often, in more than one place during the day. It is important to be reasonable in the approach to child assessment and the expectations of the significant impacts of early care and education environments on children.

Examples of State Approaches to Assessing Child Outcomes:

Kentucky
In 2003, the State of Kentucky developed the *Early Childhood Standards* for children birth through age 4. As part of a comprehensive plan to improve the quality of early care and education, the State subsequently revised core content areas to

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align with the standards. It developed a professional development framework, a continuous assessment guide, and materials for parents and program self-assessment. All of the system components are designed to be used in home- or center-based settings.

Continuous assessment as defined by the Kentucky guide includes both formal and informal assessments designed to support children's learning and development and inform curricula and caregiver practice. The guide is comprehensive, covering the purposes of assessment, various measures and their use, as well as extensive charts cross-walking various assessment tools with the early learning standards.

For more information about the *Early Childhood Standards*, assessment guide, and other resources, visit the Kentucky Department of Education, Early Childhood Development Web site at www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Instructional+Resources/Early+Childhood+Development/default.htm.

California
California has developed *Desired Results for Children and Families*, developmental observation profiles for children birth to age 14, to document children and families' progress in achieving desired results. The Desired Results Access project focused on ensuring that the Desired Results are as inclusive and appropriate as possible for the assessment of progress for young children with disabilities. Desired Results Access has also developed a system of adaptations and guidelines to allow practitioners to appropriately assess children with disabilities. Family surveys and program assessments, as well as extensive training, are part of the system. For more information, visit www.wested.org/desiredresults/training/.

Resources:
For a detailed discussion, including frequently asked questions and developmental charts for ages 0–8, on how to effectively assess young children when curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation and accountability are related, see the following:

- *Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation: Building an Effective, Accountable System in Programs for Children Birth through Age 8* (November 2003), a revised Joint Position Statement of NAEYC and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE). This resource is available at www.naeyc.org/about/positions/pdf/CAPEexpand.pdf.

For specific recommendations for assessing young English language learners for various purposes, as well as characteristics of assessors and the role of the family, see the following:

- *Screening and Assessment of Young English-Language Learners* (July 2005), published by NAEYC, was developed by a workgroup of experts in the field in collaboration with NAEYC staff as a supplement to NAEYC and NAECS/SDE's Joint Position Statement *Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation: Building an Effective, Accountable System in Programs for Children*

Birth through Age 8. This resource is available at
www.naeyc.org/about/positions/ELL.asp.

For information about the possible uses and misuses of data on children with disabilities, see the following:

- *Uses and Misuses of Data on Outcomes for Young Children with Disabilities, Draft* (July 2004), by Kathleen Hebbler, produced by the Early Childhood Outcomes Center. This resource is available at
www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/pdfs/ECO_Outcomes_Uses.pdf.

For information about the emerging research related to measuring the *process* of learning, including a discussion of appropriate measures, see the following:

- *Using Scientific Knowledge to Inform Preschool Assessment: Making the Case for "Empirical Validity"* (2005), in *Social Policy Report*, Volume XIX, Number 1, by K. Hirsh-Pasek. This resource is available at
www.srcd.org/Documents/Publications/SPR/spr19-1.pdf.

What Assessment Measures Are Appropriate for Young Children?

Once the purpose of the child assessment is clearly defined, assessment measures need to be identified that validly and reliably measure the expected outcome. This is often a challenge in early care and education because of the dearth of available instruments.

Key Points:
1. It is important to review the technical information for the specific measure chosen to determine the reliability and validity of the instrument, specific instructions for administering it, and to ensure it is the appropriate instrument for the purpose and population that will be assessed.

2. Because young children's learning is dynamic, assessments should be chosen that are sensitive to the growth and development of children over time.

3. It is important to distinguish between the various types of assessment tools and to be sure the tool is used for the purpose it was intended. Further, it is important to use measures that have been tested or developed with the characteristics of the children (and age ranges) that will be assessed.

4. The field is hampered by the fact that few instruments exist that reliably assess young children's social and emotional skills, and that few measures currently exist that are appropriate for young English language learners, especially children who speak languages other than Spanish.

Definitions of Terms Associated With Assessment:
What is a *Test*? A test is one form of an assessment tool. It is usually a formal, systematic instrument administered individually or given to groups of children, according to the instructions of the publisher. For example, the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT)* is an example of an individually administered test that measures vocabulary development in young children. The *Iowa Test of Basic Skills* is

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a group-administered test for school-age children yielding results that are used for instructional purposes.

What is *Reliability*? *Reliability* refers to the consistency of a result from an assessment measure that is given at any point in time to the same child, even if by different assessors.

What is *Validity*? *Validity* is the degree to which an assessment actually measures what it is supposed to measure. *Developmental validity* refers to whether the assessment is developmentally appropriate for the children to whom it is given. *Predictive validity* refers to the association between the current performance being measured and its ability to predict children's future performance.

What are *Naturalistic* assessments? *Naturalistic* assessments, sometimes referred to as functional or authentic, are assessments that occur within the normal routines of the child over many points in time. An example of a naturalistic assessment is the *Work Sampling System* for preschoolers and the *Ounce Scale* for infants and toddlers.

What are *Standardized, Norm-Referenced* assessments? *Standardized, norm-referenced* assessments have been developed in research and usually undergo psychometric testing to compare children with similar characteristics. *Norm referencing* refers to the average performance on a test around which most children are expected to fall. Examples of standardized, norm-referenced assessments include the *PPVT* as mentioned earlier and the *Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test*.

Resources:
For a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of naturalistic and standardized, norm-reference assessments, see the following:

- "School Readiness Assessment: Research in Review" (January 2004), in *Child and Program Assessment: Tools for Educators*, from NAEYC's *Beyond the Journal*, by Kelly L. Maxwell and Richard Clifford. This resource is available at www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/200401/Maxwell.pdf.

For a comparison of the major assessment tools for children ages 3–5, including information about the domains assessed, the type of measure, sample items, preparation required to administer, and contact information for ordering measures, see the following:

- "Choosing An Appropriate Assessment System" (January 2004), in *Child and Program Assessment: Tools for Educators*, from NAEYC's *Beyond the Journal*, by Amy Shillady. This resource is available at www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/200401/shillady.pdf.

For a brief discussion of research regarding assessing young children and the policy implications, including commonly misunderstood terms and assessment methods, see the following:

- "Preschool Assessment: A Guide to Developing a Balanced Approach" (July 2004), *NIEER Preschool Policy Matters* Issue 7, by Ann Epstein, Lawrence

Schweinhart, Andrea De Bruin-Parecki, and Kenneth Robin, published by the National Institute of Early Education Research. This resource is available at http://nieer.org/docs/index.php?DocID=104.

Related Research and Policy Web Sites:

Child Care and Early Education Research Connections promotes high-quality research in early education and use of the research in policy making. Information is available at http://childcareresearch.org/discover/index.jsp. The Web site includes the following:

- Information about "understanding research" that addresses issues such as research quality, methods, other research information, and child care and early education glossaries.
- The 50-State Data Tool, which allows users to create their own tables of State data.
- An Instruments and Measures Section, which allows users to review measures that have been used in previous research and search for specific measures by key words or phrases.

The **Council of Chief State School Officers**, Early Childhood Education Assessment Consortium, offers a number of resources for State policy makers on standards and assessment. Information is available at www.ccsso.org/projects/SCASS/Projects/Early_Childhood_Education_Assessment_Consortium/. The Web site includes the following:

- A Microsoft PowerPoint presentation, "Building a System for Successful Learners: The Role of Standards, Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability"
- Brief fact sheets that are linked to a glossary and resources that are available on topics such as key considerations in system design, the role of child assessment in program evaluation, and related topics.

The **National Institute for Early Education Research's** Assessment Database is a resource for finding information about a variety of assessments and identifying assessments appropriate for specific uses. A variety of related links are also identified. Information is available at http://nieer.org/assessment/. The database can be used in the following ways:

- Users can search the database by answering the following questions: What does the assessment assess? How is the assessment used? Which children use this assessment?
- Users can select a number of variables related to the above questions to find information that most specifically meets their needs.

CD-ROM
This technical assistance tool, produced by the Child Care Bureau, contains video clips, documents, and links to online resources related to assessment and program evaluation, as well as a variety of other topics.

- *Leading the Way to Quality Early Care and Education* (2005). This resource is available free and may be ordered at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ccb/ta/pubs/cd/ltw_cd.htm

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