

**Kindergarten Entry Assessment and Transition Practice
Final Report
December 2020 – December 2021**

Preface

This report addresses the *Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG 0-5) Implementation Grant, Activity 4, Sharing Best Practices*.

4.6 Support Kindergarten Transition

"NH will support the ECCE workforce that cares for children as they transition into the early elementary school grades through the Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA) Transition Project. To date, NH has lacked the capacity to collect and aggregate standardized, statewide data/information on children's preparedness for success in school upon entering Kindergarten. Based on the PDG Needs Assessment, there is a need to improve the Kindergarten entry process and strengthen the pre-Kindergarten entry connection with parents and local child care/early learning programs. NH aims to address the identified needs for standardized KEA; and strengthen transitions, family/community partnerships, and the alignment of standards, curriculum, assessment, and expected child outcomes."

Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA) and Transition Task Force

Process

A KEA Transition Task Force evaluated entry assessments and kindergarten transition practices. The Task Force included a broad group of representatives from private early childhood programs, cross-disciplinary professions, birth to five/public school program teachers and administrators, family organizations, policymakers, and parents. The list of participants is on page nine of this report.

The *Kindergarten Entry and Transition Practices: A Review for New Hampshire's Preschool Development Grant Birth to Five*, authored by Abt Associates (2020), served as a resource for the Task Force. Consultants from Abt joined several meetings and contributed additional research based on questions from the members.

Kindergarten Entry Assessment

Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA) tools measure children's skills and knowledge development across multiple domains. They are administered to children entering kindergarten, usually within the first 30 – 60 days. The information obtained provides a developmental profile of each child that teachers can use to plan learning activities.

Early in the process, the Task Force created Guiding Principles to evaluate and select assessments. In doing so, the group members identified shared values regarding the purpose of early assessment, the content, the involvement of families, and how to use the results.

Guiding Principles for New Hampshire Kindergarten Entry Assessment

1. Kindergarten Entry Assessment tools are evidence-based.
2. The reasons for using assessments for kindergarten entry are clearly articulated to teachers and families.
3. Assessment tools are accessible for all children. (Following Accessible Educational Materials - AEM Indicators.)
4. The scope of assessment includes the essential developmental domains:
 - Language Arts and Literacy;
 - Logic & Reasoning/Mathematics;
 - Science & Social Studies;
 - Approaches to Learning;
 - Social & Emotional Development; and
 - Physical Development & Health.
5. Kindergarten Entry Assessment is the primary tool, and every attempt will be made to selectively refer for screening, further assessment, or evaluation to avoid overwhelming (over-assessing) the children.
6. Results of the assessment are shared with families so they may better understand their child's development.
7. KEA results are used to create stimulating learning environments and activities, leading to positive child outcomes.

Abt Associates researched twelve KEA tools. They recommended three for New Hampshire. "We selected these tools based on their research evidence, use in New Hampshire and other states, alignment with New Hampshire's Kindergarten Readiness Indicators, and alignment with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework." (Abt Associates, 2020, p.2)

Kindergarten Entry Assessment Tools

- Teaching Strategies Gold® (TS Gold)
- Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP)
- Child Observation Record Advantage (COR Advantage)

Abt staff members presented their findings to the Task Force, including methodology and a summary of the research on the instruments. Following the presentations, many questions were raised about implementation. All three tools were recommended; what variables might affect adoption by a district? The Task Force then identified additional factors to research.

Criteria for selection:

- cost (affordability)
- the time needed for teacher training
- length of time to administer
- inclusion of developmental domains
- data sharing capacity
- authentic

- role of the family
- culturally sensitive
- impact of child's prior experiences
- data relevant to inform the design of classroom environments and activities
- ongoing technical assistance from the vendor
- reliability and validity

Abt Associates subsequently did a state scan and shared the findings with the Task Force members. The data included information from seven states using one or more of the three tools and provided valuable information on coordination, data sharing, family engagement, training, and administration. This information will inform the next phase of this project. (Attachments A1 and A2)

Sarah Henry, DHHS Bureau of Child Development and Head Start Collaboration PDG Coordinator researched costs for administration, training and data interpretation, time to administer, virtual options, and suitability for different languages and children with special needs. (Attachment B) Although there are some differences among the three, it became apparent to the Task Force members that all three tools were viable options for NH.

Recommendations

The KEA Task Force finds that all three assessment tools could be recommended for NH school districts to consider. Each of these is evidence-based and meets the Task Force's Guiding Principles. When districts evaluate their options, the criteria for selection would need to be considered. KEA is voluntary. It will be up to school districts to decide which tool best meets the needs of the school, the incoming children, and their families. The NH Department of Education (DOE) will assist districts pilot KEA initiatives. The DOE will provide resources and incentives for implementation and training. NH DHHS BCDHSC is committed to helping early childhood programs (child care, Head Start, private pre-k) collaborate with school districts on the KEA process.

According to the PDG Kindergarten Teacher Survey Summary Report (2019), 53% of teachers in NH use a formal screening or assessment, but there is no consistency. Other teachers may use a teacher-designed instrument, and many use none. The recommendation for districts to adopt one of these tools presents the opportunity to enhance training for teachers, collect comparable, essential data on children's development, create learning activities that lead to positive child outcomes. For the first time, create a state-level snapshot of children's skills and knowledge at kindergarten entry that informs early childhood policies, practices, and investments.

The Task Force recommends that a plan be developed to introduce the three tools to school districts that includes the benefits of conducting kindergarten entry assessment with details on the scope and administration of each tool. The research conducted by Abt Associates and Sarah Henry provides more than sufficient detail and can be easily adapted.

In addition, several specific considerations are summarized from the Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes, which has a library of resources on Kindergarten Entry Assessment. As the Task Force discussed these considerations, a framework for supporting the adoption of a KEA was clear. The DOE has the structure in place to build a professional learning hub to address the considerations, like the existing "Kindergarten Toolkit" webpage that provides "Resources, tutorials, and links for kindergarten educators and communities considering full-day kindergarten."

Considerations for KEA Adoption and Implementation

- Providing incentives (stipend or classroom materials) to complete the inter-rater reliability
- Offering classroom support for teachers (e.g., extended planning time, classroom coverage, substitute teacher, etc.)
- Providing in-person technical assistance in addition to the training offered by the tool developer
- Expanding professional development beyond how to conduct observational assessments to embracing multiple dimensions of child development
- Understanding developmentally appropriate practice and how to connect KEA data with their lesson planning and intentional teaching
- Creating professional learning communities for teachers to share strategies and experiences
- Identifying ways to use the KEA data such as differentiated instruction, IEP meetings, student support, and parent conferences.

Adapted from:

http://ceelo.org/wpcontent/uploads/2016/10/ceelo_fast_fact_gold_as_KEA_10_16.pdf

Kindergarten Transition

"The transition to kindergarten marks an important milestone for families and children. It may be accompanied by excitement, discomfort, and/or stress. ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education) settings, kindergarten classrooms, parents, and community groups may implement formal transition practices, which are activities that help children make the change from ECCE settings, including their homes and communities, to more formal school environments. These practices are meant to "serve as a bridge for children and families as they move into kindergarten" (Cook & Coley, 2017) and ideally include some level of participation from families, ECCE providers and teachers, and districts, including kindergarten teachers. The practices may focus on building children's skills, engaging families in the process, sharing information, and/or aligning practices between kindergartens and preschools" (Abt Associates, 2020, p.6).

Process

The Task Force reviewed the research presented by Abt Associates and thoroughly discussed each of the nine practices for transitioning before kindergarten begins that were outlined. We identified the benefits of each, resources needed, and

considerations. Many teachers and parents would comment on their own experiences in our conversations, giving a rich context to our deliberations, as in the following example:

"The kindergarten teachers in one of the Districts my Head Start program works closely with loved the idea of home visits, after talking to our Head Start teachers about the practice, so they started doing home visits before the start of school also. Then, after hearing about the value of the kindergarten home visits, the first-grade teachers started the practice as well."

A *Chart of Transition Practices* that summarizes the benefits of each, resources needed, and considerations can be found in Attachment C.

Transition Practices

The Task Force identified three categories of transition practices:

- 1. Practices that promote relationships with children and families** are at the core of successful transitions. These practices set the stage for family partnerships. "We're in this together; we want to work with you." Parents/caregivers will realize that we want to hear their voices, value them, and welcome their participation.

Readiness Camps

Elementary schools may host summer programs designed to teach rising kindergarteners the academic and social-emotional skills they'll need to succeed in kindergarten. This program is particularly suitable for students who did not participate in a formal preschool experience.

Family Visits "Meet and Greet"

Kindergarten teachers may host classroom visits, so parents//caregivers and children can explore the space and meet the teacher.

Orientation

Kindergarten classrooms may host orientation sessions, in which parents can visit the class and learn more about what to expect for their child's kindergarten entry.

Completing surveys

Schools may ask parents to complete surveys on their child. This may provide information on the child's educational background, family culture, strength, and areas where particular support is needed.

Home Visits

Kindergarten teachers may visit children's homes or natural setting to meet them and their family.

- 2. Practices that build relationships with Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs** to benefit the children. Communication founded on strength-based approaches enables children to have a strong start in kindergarten.

Classroom Observations

ECE providers may observe kindergarten classrooms to understand the expectations for their children. Kindergarten teachers may observe early care classrooms to learn more about incoming students.

Transferring Children's Records

ECE providers may share children's records, including IEP's and assessments, with kindergarten teachers.

Supporting Kindergarten Enrollment

ECE providers may set up events or distribute information to parents and caregivers to support kindergarten enrollment.

- 3. A timely, ongoing practice** occurs early in the teacher and parents/caregivers relationship and can continue throughout the kindergarten year.

Sharing information

Kindergarten teachers can share information with parents and caregivers via phone, email, or mail.

Recommendations

The Task Force believes that each practice has value and that schools should decide which ones best fit the needs of their children, families, teachers, and community. We recommend that schools as an entity select the practices to implement and not individual teachers. This approach assures that children and families receive a similar experience regardless of placement. Teachers working together can choose, implement, and evaluate which practices have the most benefit for their children. Based on data and outcomes, a school can decide which practices to continue or replace.

Schools would benefit from identifying a coordinator who will work with all the teachers and provide guidance and direction. To ensure that there is a plan, one individual needs to take the lead. Realizing that placements are made after registration, we understand issues such as families moving in the summer, registering later, teacher hiring and contracts, scheduling rooms, and ratios, but the earlier, the better for some practices enabling the children to meet their actual teacher. There are concerns about reaching families who place children in ECE programs closer to work than home and children who do not attend a preschool program. Schools could network more with more agencies, physicians, preschools, childcare, etc., about early registration.

The NH Department of Education and DHHS BCDHSC are committed to helping school districts and ECE programs implement transition practices. As mentioned in the

recommendation for KEA, toolkits for schools and teachers will best provide the support needed to implement these practices successfully.

The Task Force recommends designing web pages that are formatted or have a formatting option that allows pages/sections to be print-friendly. If the site were built to enable teachers to upload materials, it would encourage peer learning and build on the contributions of others. For example, one district begins kindergarten three days after the other children start. Kindergarten teachers can focus on implementing their transition practices during those days.

Include a dedicated section on each practice in a "Teacher's Toolkit for Kindergarten Transition."

Within each section, samples of materials used by teachers would be included, such as:

- Surveys for families
- Schedules for Readiness camps
- Outline for Orientation
- Systems for transferring records
- Permission forms for school visits
- Strength-based records from ECE programs
- ECE Assessments
- Welcome letters from teachers
- Guidelines and sample questions for a home visit
- Simple approaches to evaluate the effectiveness of your transition practices

Several web-based resources were located, including relevant information that may also be included.

Future Considerations

In addition to benefits to child outcomes, KEA also can provide evaluative data on overall performance. NH uses the Preschool Outcomes Measurement System (POMS).

There may be connections with the Play-Based Kindergarten initiative.

There are plans to pilot the DRDP in Preschool Special Education programs that will provide an opportunity to evaluate results.

Resources

Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center - website which includes videos, guides, and other helpful resources to support program and school efforts to understand the importance of the transition to kindergarten. Learn how to strengthen the four points of connection and implement transition practices that ensure all children and families are ready to engage and succeed in school.

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/transitions/article/transition-kindergarten>

NH DOE Kindergarten Toolkit - *"Resources, tutorials, and links for kindergarten educators and communities considering full-day kindergarten."*

<https://www.education.nh.gov/who-we-are/deputy-commissioner/kindergarten-tool-kit>

Henry, Sarah, Kimberly T. Nesbitt, Morgan Sansing, Meredith O'Shea, and Debra Nelson, *Understanding the New Hampshire Birth through Five System: Kindergarten Teacher Survey Summary Report*, Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire, 2020

Kindergarten Entry and Transition Practices: A Review for New Hampshire's Preschool Development Grant Birth to Five, authored by Abt Associates (2020)

Attachments

Attachment A1 – KEA State Scan Slides, Abt Associates, 2021

Attachment A2 - KEA State Scan Excel, Abt Associates, 2021

Attachment B - KEA Adoption Considerations and Comparisons, Sarah Henry, BCDHSC PDG Coordinator, 2021

Attachment C - A Chart of Transition Practices, KEA Transition Task Force, 2021

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1oes3qY2KBM0cgGFVi-Fx139tltjCNyQA?usp=sharing>

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