

# School Readiness: Moving Toward a Shared Definition, Standardized Assessment, and Unifying Language

March 2014



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Early childhood education in South Carolina includes a diverse collection of families, early care and education programs, and schools where children have the opportunity to begin a lifelong love of learning. The quality of early care, development, and learning impacts both individual child success and the state's workforce as a whole. High quality early education is beneficial for all children, but research shows that it is especially beneficial for children at high risk for academic failure.<sup>1</sup> South Carolina invests in services to improve the quality of early childhood education with the short-term goal of increasing school readiness and the longer-term goals of enabling later academic achievement and creating a competitive workforce.<sup>2</sup>

Families, child care centers and homes, Head Start programs, pre-kindergartens, and early intervention programs each offer children opportunities to become curious about their world. While approximately 80% of children ages birth through four are at home with a family caregiver<sup>3</sup>, children may attend early care programs out of the home as young as six weeks old for forty or more hours per week.<sup>4</sup> Whether our state intentionally creates rich early care and learning opportunities depends largely on a shared understanding of what matters in early childhood education, why it matters, and what factors leaders should consider in making early care and learning policy decisions.

Because educational policy decisions can often be highly politicized, it is essential that policymakers, educational leaders, and community members have independent research-based information upon which to ground their decisions. This brief helps prepare decision-makers to understand the early care and learning environment, how other states are addressing early care and learning, and it lays out several key considerations in developing a statewide kindergarten entry assessment.

## (fragmented early care and learning)

Early learning experiences impact later academic success. Academic achievement in prior grades is one of the best individual predictors of academic success.<sup>5</sup> Mastering a range of cognitive, social, emotional, language and literacy skills also makes learning at later ages more efficient. This, in turn, makes learning easier and more likely to continue.<sup>6</sup>

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(by)

Gwynne B. Goodlett, J.D., M.P.A.

Leigh Kale D'Amico, Ed.D

(with assistance from)

Katy Sides, M.P.A.

Before they enter school, many young children are exposed to a variety of environments. For example, a child may be at home with a parent for a few years, in a child care center when the parent is at work, or in pre-kindergarten before entering five-year-old kindergarten. Typically, the personnel working in early care and learning environments do not communicate with each other on an ongoing basis. In particular, vulnerable children tend to shift among family, center-based, and publicly funded settings over time.<sup>7</sup> In many instances across the state, each setting provides children with different, and sometime conflicting, early learning skills. If each of these environments were aligned on how to help children achieve the specific skills needed for academic and lifelong success, then countless resources spent on teaching the most basic early literacy and numeracy skills—or worse yet, undoing poor habits—could be used to prepare children for future success.

Part of the reason early care and learning settings are fragmented is because child care centers, Head Start programs, pre-kindergartens, and early childhood intervention programs each have their own funding streams, mandates, and standards by which they are measured. Within a single state such as South Carolina, as many as thirty federal funding streams may support programs that impact young children and their families.<sup>8</sup> With the exception of Head Start and Early Head Start, home visiting programs supported by the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program, virtually all program and early learning content standards are designed and implemented by states.<sup>9</sup>

There are also numerous state agencies, private nonprofits, and faith-based organizations that fund or operate early learning programs in South Carolina. If a funder requires it, each program may have

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its own data collection and reporting requirements. Within the current early care and learning landscape, coordinated accountability measures, shared definitions, or procedures for maintaining reliable, valid data across early childhood programs are few and far between, and often non-existent.

Compounding this complexity is the fact that families, and in particular parents at home with children, have

very limited guidance on how to prepare their children for success in school. When South Carolina has a clear, shared understanding of what it means to be ready for kindergarten, we can consistently communicate that understanding in every early care and learning environment for children.

### (defining and measuring school readiness)

A threshold step in unifying South Carolina’s diverse early care and learning system is to begin to speak a common language. A statewide definition of school readiness that early care and learning stakeholders agree upon is essential. Although there has been significant work across the nation, many states grapple with how to define school readiness. There is no common, nationally agreed upon definition of kindergarten readiness.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the work that still remains to be done, important groundwork has begun in South Carolina on this initial step. Legislation introduced in the 2013-2014 Session of the General Assembly defines school readiness as, “the level of child development necessary to ensure early school success as measured in the following domains: physical health and motor skills; emotional and social competence; language and literacy development; and mathematical thinking and cognitive skills.”<sup>11</sup>

“When South Carolina measures school readiness statewide and uses that data to continually improve early care and learning experiences for young children, we will systematically get children ready for school and ensure that they succeed once they get there.”

The bill also requires the state to adopt a description of school readiness that includes, among other things, specific characteristics of a child ready for school, requirements for schools, educators, and caregivers, and characteristics of the optimal learning environment. The bill also establishes benchmarks to be used by the First Steps Board, local First Step partnership boards, and agencies that administer programs to benefit preschool children.

To begin to put this conceptual definition and common language into action, several states are working on a specific type of school readiness measure, the kindergarten entry assessment. Kindergarten entry assessments are used to look backward—as a tool to improve programs to promote school readiness and to look forward—to ensure that children continue to grow and learn once they enter school.<sup>12</sup> When South Carolina measures school readiness statewide and uses that data to continually improve early care and learning experiences for young children, we will systematically get children ready for school and ensure that they succeed once they get there.

### (kindergarten entry assessments)

A kindergarten entry assessment is an important tool in helping to better understand and address achievement gaps earlier in children’s development.<sup>13</sup> Across the state, most school districts assess students at some point in kindergarten, first grade, or second grade.<sup>14</sup> Why, then, does South Carolina need a statewide kindergarten entry assessment? Simply, kindergarten is the first point in which virtually all children in South Carolina are located in a single setting. Since public school serves the vast majority of students in the state, kindergarten is the first opportunity to obtain a comprehensive statewide snapshot of students’ skills, thinking, and developmental status.

Measuring school readiness at the beginning of kindergarten also provides valuable information about the experiences children had prior to entering school—be they experiences in the home, in child care, or in pre-kindergarten. Also depending on the type of assessment instrument chosen, measuring school readiness at the beginning of children’s entry into the K-12 system can serve as a baseline for kindergarten instruction and for measuring future progress.<sup>15</sup> Finally, a uniform statewide kindergarten entry assessment can help provide information about young children who move among schools or from one district to another.<sup>16</sup>

South Carolinians have long understood the importance of a statewide school readiness assessment. Over three decades ago, South Carolina was one of the first states in the nation to develop a statewide school readiness assessment. In 1979 the Basic Skills Assessment Program required statewide testing and reporting for children in public schools. Part of this program was a readiness assessment administered at the beginning of first grade called the Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery (CSAB), which was administered between 1979 and 2001.<sup>17</sup> The results were used to guide teacher instruction and meet children’s individual learning needs.<sup>18</sup>

In 2001, the state replaced the CSAB with a new assessment tool, the South Carolina Readiness Assessment (SCRA). Unlike the CSAB, the SCRA was not a test given at a point in time, but instead was a year-long assessment during the kindergarten and first grade years of school.<sup>19</sup> The SCRA involved teacher observation and sampling of student work to measure an individual child’s performance. The SCRA measured three domains: English/language arts,

math, and personal and social development. It was administered for the last time in the 2008 school year as a statewide requirement.<sup>20</sup> Since that time, school districts across the state have used a variety of assessments at various points in the elementary years. Currently, there is no common, statewide measure and what data is collected is retained at the district level.

The reasons for developing a statewide kindergarten entry assessment tool are many. An ideal kindergarten entry assessment tool would provide this information on two different levels—the individual level and the aggregate level. It is important to keep both functions in mind while developing the assessment tool.

At the individual level, information about students’ strengths and weaknesses can enhance learning in kindergarten. An assessment that provides information on an individual level can also be valuable for teachers and parents. For teachers, the results can guide work with students to develop and learn during the coming school year. For parents, the results can provide key information to engage parents in an active role to help their children learn at home.<sup>21</sup>

**“Statewide kindergarten entry assessments alone do not provide a complete picture of how to continually improve early care and learning opportunities for young children.”**

At the aggregate level, a statewide kindergarten entry assessment can determine the extent to which children are ready for school and identify populations that need additional intervention.<sup>22</sup> This information can be used to determine overarching needs for specific populations.

This type of information can also be used to design professional training for early childhood program providers and elementary teachers about the unique needs of specific groups. Looking at kindergarten entry assessments over time can also help communities determine what policies and practices are impacting school readiness. Kindergarten entry assessment data can assist in understanding patterns, and in a broader sense, whether specific early childhood community interventions are successful.

Ongoing training, quality assurance mechanisms, and continual evaluation are essential to implement and sustain a statewide kindergarten entry assessment. Without these assurances, there is no way to ensure kindergarten entry assessments are implemented properly and that data are used consistently, accurately, and appropriately.<sup>23</sup> Lessons learned from the South Carolina Readiness Assessment highlight the importance of supporting and monitoring kindergarten teachers as they administer the assessment. Using the data to improve instruction through coaches, online platforms, and higher education teacher training is of the utmost importance.<sup>24</sup> Periodic refresher training, oversight, spot-checking, and ongoing reliability studies are also key components of successful kindergarten entry assessment programs.<sup>25</sup>

The importance of ongoing evaluation and feedback loop for any kindergarten entry assessment cannot be overstated. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) specifically address the importance of evaluation. The Associations’ position paper emphasizes that a goal of evaluation is to determine intended as well as unintended results.<sup>26</sup> Ongoing evaluation ensures that the assessment is being administered properly, that the assessment is providing accurate data, and that the data are being used properly to inform services, especially instruction. Evaluation is a crucial step in ensuring usability and continually improving the information obtained from a kindergarten entry assessment.

Despite the important information that a statewide kindergarten entry assessment can provide, it is crucial to understand the limits of that information. There is national consensus in early education that assessments should not be used to determine whether children should be held back from kindergarten.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, kindergarten entry assessments should also not be used as the sole indicator of early childhood program performance. The reason is simple--the myriad of factors that influence a child’s academic success are nearly impossible to quantify and untangle. Factors may include traits intrinsic to the child, such as a natural curiosity or persistence. Academic success may also be influenced by family conditions such as significant economic hardship, limited parental education, and the presence of toxic stress in the home.<sup>28</sup> Using a kindergarten entry assessment as the sole high stakes tool to determine which early childhood care and learning programs are effective would do more harm than good.

A statewide kindergarten entry assessment is a necessary but not sufficient piece of information that can be used in combination with other data to explore which early childhood programs, kindergarten teachers, or curricula are effective.<sup>29</sup> However, statewide kindergarten entry assessments alone do not provide a complete picture of how to continually improve early care and learning opportunities for children.

### **(national kindergarten entry assessment movement)**

Nationally, there continues to be significant progress in developing and improving statewide kindergarten entry assessments. As of 2010, when the National Conference of State Legislatures published a state survey, 25 states had a kindergarten entry assessment system.<sup>30</sup> An additional four states were in the process of developing or implementing a kindergarten entry assessment system.<sup>31</sup> In 2012, just two years later, combined information from the National Conference of State Legislatures and the Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge<sup>32</sup> funding competition indicated that 42 states had developed or were in the process of developing a kindergarten entry assessment.<sup>33</sup> In short, the development of kindergarten entry assessments is a dynamic and rapidly evolving field.

Several states have joined forces to work on kindergarten entry assessments in formal and informal consortiums. South Carolina, eight other states and the District of Columbia, are a part of a US Department of Education grant that is exploring a kindergarten through third grade assessment system.<sup>34</sup> This North Carolina-led consortium is designed to develop kindergarten entry through third grade assessment recommendations, informed by the practices and needs of each state and also by national researchers who are part of the consortium. Meanwhile, participants continue to determine the appropriate direction for their state. While other states are receiving funding for their participation, South Carolina is not. South Carolina’s involvement in this consortium is an important first step in learning from other states, however significant work across time will be required to actually implement an assessment system.

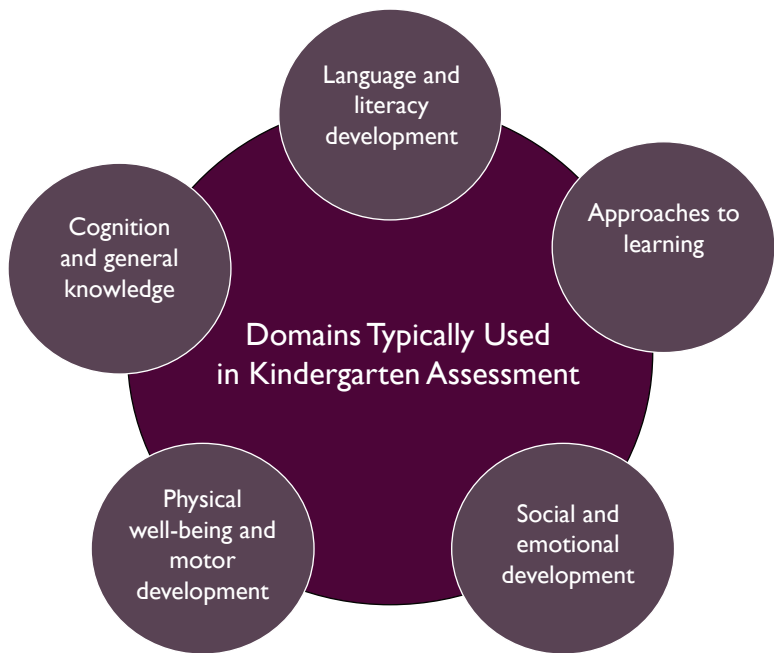
**“Developing and continuously using a statewide kindergarten entry assessment tool will significantly impact and focus the state’s attention on what matters for children.”**

Because most states across the nation have either developed, procured, or are in the process of developing statewide kindergarten entry assessments, there is a wealth of information available about other states’ experiences and plans.<sup>35</sup> Readiness assessments have varied across the nation regarding the number of children in the state who are assessed, the areas of child development that are assessed, and how the information from the assessments is used.<sup>36</sup>



(domains)

In 2010 there was no consensus among states on what areas of child development a kindergarten assessment should measure. Of the 20 states that required a particular statewide instrument, 11 states assessed between five and nine domains of kindergarten readiness. The remaining nine states only evaluated literacy readiness.<sup>37</sup>



By January 2012, however, consensus around five key domains emerged among many states.<sup>38</sup> Thirty-five of 37 states that applied for Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge proposed how they would revise or develop a statewide kindergarten entry assessment that covered five domains. The five domains include: 1) language and literacy development; 2) cognition and general knowledge, including early mathematics and early scientific development; 3) approaches to learning; 4) physical well-being and motor development, including adaptive skills; and 5) social and emotional development.

The South Carolina Readiness Assessment instrument measured over 40 indicators in three domains: English/language arts, math, and personal and social development.<sup>39</sup>

Legislation introduced in the 2013-2014 Session of the General Assembly outlines five kindergarten readiness domains: 1)Physical health and motor skills; 2)Emotional and social competence; 3)Language and literacy development; 4)Mathematical thinking and cognitive skills; and 5)Approaches to learning.<sup>40</sup>

Adding more domains to a kindergarten entry assessment requires a tradeoff. The more domains that are measured, the more expensive and time consuming the assessment becomes to administer. Additional domains also place a burden upon teachers to complete the assessment and students to take the assessment. When the state previously used South Carolina Readiness Assessment instrument, there were over 40 indicators and the assessment was given three times per year. A lesson from the state’s experience with the SCRA suggests focusing on fewer indicators and reducing the burden on teachers to administer the test. An additional concern about more detailed assessment is the burden on information systems in analyzing and interpreting the data produced. At least one state has articulated these concerns as important considerations in choosing its kindergarten entry assessment.<sup>41</sup>

Regardless of whether three, four or five domains are measured, any kindergarten entry assessment must be linked to the standards being taught in kindergarten. Every state that applied for the Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge aligned the state’s early learning standards and kindergarten entry assessment.<sup>42</sup> South Carolina’s Good Start, Grow Smart Early Learning Standards were developed by a multi-organizational taskforce led by the Office of Early Childhood Education at the South Carolina Department of Education. These

voluntary standards for preschool children include five domains of development:

- Approaches to Learning
- Social and Emotional Development
- Mathematics
- Language and Literacy
- Physical Development and Health

An important step in developing a South Carolina kindergarten entry assessment is to take state early learning standards into account.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) have also underscored the need for a systematic approach to link assessments with curriculum and instruction.<sup>43</sup> Aligning assessment instruments with early learning standards helps to reinforce the concept that the skills children need to be ready to enter school should be closely aligned with skills being taught in school.

(direct assessments vs. teacher observational assessments)

Another consideration in creating a statewide kindergarten entry assessment is whether the assessment will be administered directly to children, or measured by teacher observation of students’ work or performance over time.<sup>44</sup> Both direct and observation assessments have been used in South Carolina. The Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery (CSAB) was a direct assessment given at a point in time and the South Carolina Readiness Assessment (SCRA) was a series of teacher observations of student work during the kindergarten year of school.

Nationally, there has been a dramatic movement towards observational assessments. Almost all of the 37 states submitting applications for the Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge proposed using an observational or “authentic” assessment instrument administered by kindergarten teachers during the first two months of school.<sup>45</sup>

There are several disadvantages of direct assessments.

- Direct assessments often require schools to purchase testing kits and tools
- Some direct assessments for young children, if given one-on-one to the child, may also require specialized knowledge to administer
- Often these assessments are adaptive and require the person administering the test to ask different questions depending on the answers a child gives
- A single point-in-time test cannot comprehensively capture all of the cumulative experiences in the home, in programs, and in the community that a young child has experienced<sup>46</sup>
- At times, direct assessment of child performance require some young children to use objects less familiar to them, such as using a pencil and paper or computer

Observational assessments, on the other hand, can provide more complete information about a child because the child is in a familiar setting with familiar people. However, observational or “authentic” assessments can be expensive to administer in both the time it takes to observe a child and also in the time it takes to train teachers to give the assessment instrument consistently. Observational assessments may also be biased depending on the person conducting the assessment and may not be standardized if completed in different contexts for different children.<sup>47</sup> Ultimately, the quality of data from observational kindergarten

entry assessments depends on teachers' ability to administer assessments and record the results appropriately, accurately, and consistently across multiple children and school-related circumstances.<sup>48</sup>

Both types of assessments may have costly licensing, reporting, and analysis fees. Often these fees are associated with the expenses of the materials necessary to administer the assessment, conducting ongoing research about the assessment, and updating reporting and analysis features.

With finite financial and human resources, it is important to balance the expense of assessment with the quality of information provided. States that are confronting this decision consider the desired use of the data as well as the feasibility and costs of implementing these major types of assessments. Pilot testing of differing assessments can lead to better decision making related to the type of kindergarten entry assessment to select. In addition, an understanding of assessments currently used in the early grades may identify commonly administered direct or observational assessments across the state.

### (professional development)

Most kindergarten entry assessments require significant professional development for teachers who administer the assessment. Professional development is needed to ensure that those administering the test understand the purpose and guidelines of conducting the assessment. If appropriate professional development is not provided, assessment results are compromised and cannot be used to effectively make local or state-level decisions. Picture-based, paper-pencil, and computer-adapted direct assessments generally require the least professional development because most of the assessment content is given directly to the child.



questioning or direction-giving by the administrator. Observational assessments typically require significantly more professional development as observers gain an understanding of attributes that they are observing and methods of scoring those attributes. While this professional development may be time-consuming, it is necessary to promote a better overall understanding of the child's skills and abilities and potentially lead to more focus on areas in future classroom interactions and instruction.

### (random sampling vs. administering to all kindergarteners)

Nationally, the trend is to assess all entering kindergarteners. In 2010, of the 25 states with kindergarten entry assessments, 21 assessed every entering kindergartener and three included a large percentage of kindergarteners.<sup>49</sup> Two states that did not require assessments enacted legislation for the assessments to become mandatory in the future.<sup>50</sup> Minnesota is the only state in the nation that has reported using a representative sample of students.<sup>51</sup>

Using a random sample of students makes the assessment significantly less expensive to

administer. Furthermore, sampling reduces the potential for misuse of the data produced.<sup>52</sup> However, administering a kindergarten entry assessment to a random sample of children

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limits the ability to use the kindergarten entry assessment to inform instruction on an individual basis.<sup>53</sup> This significantly limits the usefulness of a kindergarten entry assessment for both teachers and parents. Nevada's Early Childhood Advisory Council found that if a kindergarten entry assessment adds value for educators and school districts, then the assessment is more likely to be successful.<sup>54</sup> Also, not administering a kindergarten assessment to every child means that data from the test may not be useful to evaluators who later want to examine the impact of not being ready for school on other poor educational outcomes later in life.

While there are several considerations in determining whether to administer a kindergarten entry assessment to all children or a random sample, if decision makers want to use a kindergarten entry assessment to inform individualized teaching at home and in the school, then the assessment should be administered to all students.

### (state-created vs. proprietary assessments)

Several high-quality nationally-recognized kindergarten entry assessments have been designed by companies that specialize in assessment instruments. Many have particular strengths and are appropriate for children with differing cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Some assessments measure development in a particular domain such as literacy skills. Others assess multiple areas of child development.<sup>55</sup>

Some of the more widely recognized assessments include Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning (DIAL-3), Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), Early Development Instrument (EDI), Teaching Strategies Gold, Work Sampling System (WSS), and Measures of Academic Progress (MAP). Almost all of these instruments are used in school districts in South Carolina.

Many proprietary assessments have a research base that supports how the assessment should be used. For example, the EDI was specifically designed to provide information at the neighborhood level to specifically plan community-based interventions and prevention strategies.<sup>56</sup> Much of the research is from studies in Australia where the EDI has been implemented nationwide since 2009.

Several states have created their own assessment tools.<sup>57</sup> State-created assessment instruments can be tailored to better reflect state-specific learning standards and can be less costly than proprietary assessment materials. However, state-created instruments should also meet reliability and validity standards. Reliability is the degree to which an assessment provides the same result when different people administer the assessment to the same child. Validity is the degree to which an assessment measures what the assessment is intended to measure.<sup>58</sup> Ensuring that state-created assessments meet these standards permits results to be analyzed for trends over time. However, reliability and validity testing is often time and labor intensive.<sup>59</sup> Minimizing the importance of reliability and validity standards can result in data that may not predict kindergarten readiness and may not truly reflect a child's development in various areas.

Whether South Carolina chooses to develop its own assessment or use a proprietary



kindergarten entry assessment, or a combination of both, it is crucial to understand costs, flexibility, validity, and reliability of either a state-created or proprietary assessment.

(reporting data)

As mentioned above, assessments can provide valuable information about children’s educational trajectories. This type of information may be particularly helpful in looking at educational outcomes over time for groups of children by race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. However, kindergarten entry assessment data are most useful when the data are reported to the state level and connected with other data about similarly situated children.

Many states have a state longitudinal educational data system, or SLEDs. Several states have recognized the need to integrate kindergarten entry assessment data into the state’s longitudinal data system.<sup>60</sup> A state longitudinal education data system can link data from pre-kindergarten through postsecondary and into the workforce, to help decision makers to answer a broad range of program and policy questions and target improvement strategies.<sup>61</sup>

While housing the data in the state longitudinal educational data system is critical for longitudinal analysis and the inclusion of multiple factors in analyses, counties and local decision-makers need access to these data as well. Data dashboards that allow decision makers to look at multiple data points related to their program, school, or community are gaining popularity for their ease of use and provision of clear data points.

South Carolina is fortunate to have the significant expertise of the Budget and Control Board’s Office of Research and Statistics Data Warehouse. Much of the data needed for a state longitudinal educational data system is already collected and reported at the state level. Nevertheless, efforts to improve access to these data are an important component of an effective kindergarten entry assessment system.

Next Steps

- CONVENE a stakeholders group to finalize a kindergarten readiness description. A statewide definition and description of kindergarten readiness will provide a common framework for understanding and promoting kindergarten readiness across the spectrum of early care and learning environments. Including families, early education programs, and schools will also help align a statewide kindergarten readiness definition and description with South Carolina early learning standards and K-12 learning standards.
- IDENTIFY kindergarten entry assessments that are aligned with the state’s definition of school readiness and provide data necessary to understand children’s progress in key domains. This will allow for resource planning and promote longitudinal analysis of progress at the state and community levels.
- PILOT TEST multiple kindergarten entry assessments and gain feedback from local assessment experts, instructional leaders including teachers, and county and state-level early childhood decision makers. Input from teachers who will be administering the test, will be key to sustaining and ensuring the success of any assessment that is adopted.
- Most important, a pilot process allows decision makers to EVALUATE the professional development needs related to the assessments, feasibility of the assessments within school settings, effective reporting processes, and the appropriate data to guide resource planning and analysis of progress.

(conclusion)

This is an encouraging time to improve early care and learning in South Carolina. State and national attention has never been greater and data driven decision making is becoming more commonplace. The General Assembly’s recent expansion of the Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP) and current attention being given to the importance of early literacy skills make this an auspicious time to examine ways to improve children’s kindergarten readiness and systems that support school services.

A common understanding of the concept of kindergarten readiness will afford more children the opportunity to enter school prepared to succeed. Convening a group of knowledgeable education and early childhood development leaders to guide a readiness definition is important. This group of stakeholders could include representatives from various early care and learning programs, family representatives, kindergarten and elementary school teachers, administrators, and researchers from across the state. Input from public and private practitioners, researchers, and community leaders will ensure that a description of school readiness and kindergarten assessment produces information that is useful for families, teachers, and early childhood programs to strengthen their work with young children.



A kindergarten entry assessment allows for continual quality improvement in the educational system. From South Carolina’s past history, we know that what gets measured gets done. The early Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery administered at the beginning of first grade showed the power of a statewide readiness measurement tool. In 1980, 36.3% of entering first graders scored “not ready.” Ten years later, the “not ready” rate had declined to 25.6% and a decade later the “not ready” rate declined to 13.6%.<sup>62</sup> This consistent and dramatic reduction over time is clear evidence that developing and continuously using a statewide kindergarten entry assessment tool will significantly impact and focus the state’s attention on what matters for children.

South Carolina was on the forefront to understand children’s skills and abilities at school entry in the late 1970s. The state maintained a focus on capturing information about children in their earliest years of school until 2008. Across that time, children’s experiences prior to school entry have become more diverse with larger numbers of children attending some type of early childhood education program or receiving early intervention.

South Carolina programs, resources, and strategies related to early care and education have grown, providing numerous opportunities for families and young children. However, lack of common understanding of kindergarten readiness and no method for assessing strengths and areas for improvement have left South Carolina and her early childhood programs without a common metric for measuring progress. A common school readiness definition and a kindergarten entry assessment have the potential to allow South Carolina to focus on data-based quality improvement across the next several years for its youngest citizens and to encourage higher levels of academic success in their early academic years and beyond.

Please visit [www.instituteforchildsuccess.org/research](http://www.instituteforchildsuccess.org/research) to download full listing of endnotes.



INSTITUTE *for* CHILD SUCCESS

105 Edinburgh Court Greenville, SC 29607  
1201 Main Street, Suite 1980 Columbia, SC 29201  
w: [instituteforchildsuccess.org](http://instituteforchildsuccess.org) | p: 864.382.3329

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The Institute for Child Success is a non-profit, non-partisan research and policy organization that fosters public and private partnerships to align and improve resources for the success of young children in South Carolina. A partnership of the Children's Hospital of the Greenville Health System and the United Way of Greenville County, ICS supports service providers, policy makers, and advocates focused on early childhood development, healthcare, and education to build a sustainable system that ensures the success of all children, pre-natal through age five.