Oregon Prepares to Adopt a Statewide Kindergarten Readiness Assessment

The goal of Early Learning Council is to ensure that Oregon's children enter kindergarten ready for school[1]. A statewide kindergarten readiness assessment (KRA) will allow the Early Learning Council to track progress and hold itself accountable for achieving this goal. Current and accurate data will help the Early Learning Council effectively direct resources to getting children ready for school.

In addition, HB 4165 directs the Early Learning Council and the Department of Education to jointly develop a KRA to be piloted in the fall of 2012 and ready for statewide implementation by the fall of 2013.

The KRA is a critical component of Oregon's efforts towards an integrated Preschool to Workforce (P-20W) system. The KRA will measure areas of school readiness, which could include physical and social-emotional development, early literacy, language, cognitive (including mathematics), and logic and reasoning. The tool selected will be appropriate for all children including children with high needs and English language learners, and will align with Oregon's early learning and development standards as well as the adopted Common Core State Standards.

Results of the KRA will help answer the following questions:

- Are Oregon's children (as a population) arriving at kindergarten ready for school?
- Is their level of school readiness improving or declining over time?
- Are there disparities (geographical, cultural, racial, and socio-economic) between groups of children that must be addressed?
- Are there particular areas of school readiness that Oregon must target?

Results of the KRA will be included in Oregon's statewide longitudinal data system. This data collection will provide an opportunity for examination both backward and forward, to inform how Oregon has prepared children for school entry and identify strategies important to support those children once they are in school. It is important to note that the KRA will absolutely not be used for determining whether a child is eligible for entry or access to any public kindergarten.

History of Oregon Kindergarten Readiness Data Collection

In 1993, the Oregon Progress Board identified school readiness as a critical Oregon Early Childhood Benchmark. The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and the Oregon Progress Board agreed that a survey would provide an overview of Oregon kindergarten teachers' perception about the readiness of Oregon children to succeed in school. The survey questions were selected from characteristics rated by kindergarten teachers in the 1995 National Household Education Survey as essential to school readiness. Oregon's first Kindergarten Teachers Survey on School Readiness was conducted in 1997 with subsequent surveys in 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, and 2008.

In October 2009, due to concerns about the reliability and validity of the survey and ease of access for responders, ODE suspended the survey and partnered with the Children's Institute to adopt a new process.

As a first step toward reengineering the kindergarten readiness assessment, the Children's Institute and ODE, in consultation with elected officials, K-12 leaders, education researchers, early childhood professionals, relevant state agencies, and other advocates for education and children developed

[1] As legislated by Senate Bill 909 and House Bill 4165

guiding principles for measuring, collecting and reporting school readiness data. In 2010, twenty-one stakeholders from across the state participated in meetings, resulting in unanimous endorsement of a school readiness assessment tool as having high value and the potential to drive positive change for Oregon children.

Current Process for Adopting a Kindergarten Readiness Assessment

In November 2011, the Early Learning Council assembled a team to develop a plan for the selection and implementation of a statewide KRA. This team is currently working with university researchers to identify existing assessments, explore how assessment information can be used, and examine how other states are using KRA tools. The team is also looking at whether and how tools can be used for formative assessment purposes.[2]

The process of selecting and implementing a KRA includes soliciting input from early childhood educators, kindergarten teachers, district administrators, parents, and other stakeholders. In order to understand what tools are currently in use in the early elementary grades and how districts are using the information, a survey will be distributed to Oregon school district superintendents. The committee is working with the Oregon Education Investment Board and staff from the Early Learning Council to develop and implement a public engagement plan that will include community forums, as well as more targeted focus groups.

The KRA team will present a limited number of kindergarten readiness assessment scenarios[3] to the Early Learning Council. The Early Learning Council will select the assessment or assessment scenario that best meets Oregon's needs.

Of course there is much more work to be done to prepare for the fall 2012 pilot. Schools will be selected as test/validation sites and staff will be trained to administer the assessment. The state will work with pilot sites to evaluate and solicit feedback on the process. Adjustments will be made as the state prepares for statewide roll-out in fall of 2013.

The input and feedback process includes:

1. Statewide Superintendent Survey - complete
2. Six Focus Groups for each stakeholder group:
    - April 16th early childhood educators
    - April 20th parents
    - April 30th kindergarten teachers
    - May 15th superintendent/principals
3. Five Community Forums:
    - May 29th NE Portland, Self Enhancement Inc.
    - May 30th Pendleton, Intermountain ESD
    - May 31st Redmond, Lynch Elementary School
    - TBD – Salem
    - TBD – Grants Pass or Medford

[2] Formative assessments are assessments tied to the curriculum and used for instructional purposes that allow teachers to immediately adjust teaching and instruction.
[3] Assessment scenarios may include, but are not limited to, a single assessment, selected elements from a single assessment, the combination of multiple assessments, or parts of multiple assessments.