The Oregon Kindergarten Assessment

Helping Oregon track its progress and help all children enter kindergarten ready for school

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When Oregon children enter kindergarten, are they ready for school? How can the state direct its investment in early childhood services – whether prekindergarten, health care, child care or early intervention – to help more children start school with the skills and support they need to succeed?

Those are the questions that a new statewide kindergarten assessment will help the Oregon Early Learning Council answer.

About 270,000 children under the age of six live in Oregon. More than 100,000 of them are at-risk– and fewer than half receive the nutrition, health care, or pre-school services they need. Oregon's early childhood programs now don't always reach the children most at risk, the programs too often lack coordination and accountability, and they are not integrated with the K-12 system.

The Early Learning Council will streamline and strengthen more than two dozen state programs for children from birth to age six and help more children – especially those at-risk -- arrive in kindergarten with the skills and support they need to succeed in school. A statewide kindergarten readiness assessment (KRA) will allow the Early Learning Council to track progress and hold itself accountable for achieving this goal.

Common assessment to offer statewide look at youngest learners

Arriving in class rested, fed and healthy is a great start, but there's more to being truly ready for school. The assessment combines formal tools and teacher observations to take a snapshot of a child's readiness for school in three areas:

- **Academics:** Do students recognize letters, shapes and colors? Can they can count objects or write their names?
- **Social-emotional development:** Are students curious and eager to learn, do they demonstrate empathy for other children, relate well to adults and can they express their wants and needs?
- **Self -regulation:** Do students pay attention, follow directions and control their impulses? Do they handle frustration, negotiate solutions and comfort themselves?

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 for K-12.

The kindergarten assessment will help answer many questions:

- Are Oregon's children overall arriving at kindergarten ready for school?
- Are there particular ways in which Oregon students aren't ready for school?
- Are there differences in how ready students are – based on where they live, their race or culture, their family income?

These answers will help the Early Learning Council and our state deliver the right support targeted to help the students who need it most – so that all arrive in kindergarten ready to succeed.

(turn page for more)

Useful information for educators, schools, communities, and the state

The Early Learning Council intends to select an assessment that will help local educators target curriculum to meet their students' strengths and needs. It should also help them identify needed resources and community partnerships that help prepare children to learn when they enter school. And it should allow school districts and our state to make valid comparisons among communities and their schools.

Of course, kindergarten readiness is not just about schools. It is also a community issue that requires involvement of health, social services, childcare providers, families and others. Successfully chosen and deployed, the kindergarten assessment can serve as a community rallying point for school support and readiness expectations for students. It can spur collaboration between schools and their community partners, and it can guide future state investment in our youngest children by highlighting successful efforts and identifying the areas of greatest need.

Next Steps: Selecting an Oregon kindergarten assessment

In November 2011, the Early Learning Council assembled a team to develop a plan for the selection and implementation of a statewide kindergarten readiness assessment. This team is currently working with university researchers and local stakeholders to identify existing assessments, explore how results can be used, and examine other states' kindergarten assessments.

Input from early childhood educators, kindergarten teachers, district administrators, parents, and other stakeholders will shape the assessment. Oregon school district superintendents, through a survey, shared which assessment tools their districts now use in the early elementary grades and how they use the information about their young learners. In April and May, the kindergarten assessment team held five focus groups with early childhood educators, parents, kindergarten teachers, K-12 principals and superintendents. The kindergarten assessment team also will host five community forums in Portland, Pendleton, Redmond, Salem and Roseburg in May and June.

The team will present a limited number of possible kindergarten assessments to the Early Learning Council in June (these could be one of the tools now in use in Oregon schools, or a combination of various tools' elements). The Early Learning Council will select the assessment that best meets Oregon's goals.

At the same time, school districts are nominating schools as pilot sites to test the proposed assessment. Fifteen schools will be chosen by June 10, 2012, through a lottery-style process that ensures a diverse and representative set of schools and students participate. Staff will be trained to administer the assessment. The state will work with pilot sites and third-party evaluators and solicit feedback on the process. Adjustments will be made as the state prepares for statewide rollout in fall of 2013.

Learn more about the Early Learning Council online, www.education.oregon.gov,
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