

SRI International



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Kindergarten Assessment Process Planning Report

SRI Project 18631

Submitted to:

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INTRODUCTION



This report summarizes information gathered to help guide next steps in the planning of a statewide kindergarten assessment process in Washington State. The Washington State Legislature asked the State Department of Early Learning (DEL) and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), in collaboration with Thrive by Five Washington (Thrive), to research and make recommendations to the Legislature on a statewide kindergarten assessment process. DEL contracted with SRI International (SRI), a nonprofit research and consulting firm, to assist with the planning process. All three organizations collaboratively directed SRI's work by participating in weekly conference calls to regularly review progress made and documents produced, including this report. The information presented in this report was collected within a 2-month period (mid-September to mid-November 2008) so that the report could be shared with the State Legislature on December 15, 2008.

The findings and recommendations about whether and how a statewide kindergarten assessment process could be implemented in Washington State included in this report are based on consultation with a variety of stakeholder groups. Most stakeholder input came from an online survey that was conducted in the last 2 weeks of October 2008. This input was augmented by two focus groups held by phone, one with Washington-based early learning and assessment experts and the other with cultural competency experts. In addition, input was gathered by listening to Washington Indian Tribes discuss their perspectives on a statewide kindergarten assessment process at the Washington State Tribal Leaders Congress on Education meeting held on October 15, 2008. Finally, DEL staff gathered input by phone from 20 stakeholders.

SRI also reviewed the literature on best practices for the assessment of young children, including position papers, policy briefs, journal articles, and book chapters, and synthesized information and reports available on the Web about kindergarten assessment processes being used by other states and countries. The full bibliography used to inform this report is found in a separate document posted on the DEL Web site: *Selected Bibliography about Early Childhood and Kindergarten Assessment and School Readiness*. Finally, to gather information on current kindergarten assessment processes being used by schools in Washington State, SRI worked with OSPI to develop and implement an online survey that asked schools statewide about their current kindergarten assessment processes, and conducted telephone interviews with representatives from six Washington State school districts about their local assessment processes.

The goal of this report is to meet the requirement put forth in the 2008 supplemental state operating budget, Section 616 (14)¹:

\$150,000 of the general fund--state appropriation for fiscal year 2009 is provided solely for

The findings and recommendations about whether and how a statewide kindergarten assessment process could be implemented in Washington State included in this report are based on consultation with a variety of stakeholder groups.

the department of early learning to work with the office of the superintendent of public instruction, and collaborate with thrive by five Washington, to study and make recommendations regarding the implementation of a statewide kindergarten entry assessment. The department and the office of the superintendent of public instruction shall jointly submit a report with recommendations for implementing the kindergarten entry assessment to the governor and the appropriate committees of the legislature by December 15, 2008. In the study and development of the recommendations, the department shall:

- (a) Consult with early learning experts, including research and educator associations, early learning and kindergarten teachers, and Washington Indian tribes;*
- (b) Identify a preferred kindergarten entry assessment based on research and examples of other assessments, and which is sensitive to cultural and socioeconomic differences influencing the development of young children;*
- (c) Recommend a plan for the use of the assessment in a pilot phase and a voluntary use phase, and recommend a time certain when school districts must offer the assessment;*
- (d) Recommend how to report the results of the assessment to parents, the office of the superintendent of public instruction, and the department of early learning in a common format, and for a methodology for conducting the assessments;*
- (e) Analyze how the assessment could be used to improve instruction for individual students entering kindergarten and identify whether and how the assessment results could be used to improve the early learning and K-12 systems, including the transition between the systems;*
- (f) Identify the costs of the assessment, including the time required to administer the assessment; and*
- (g) Recommend how to ensure that the assessment shall not be used to screen or otherwise preclude children from entering kindergarten if they are otherwise eligible.*

Based on our research and input from stakeholders, the appropriate approach to doing this work is to talk about a “kindergarten assessment process,” which is how it is referred to throughout this report. Thus, this report includes recommendations and considerations about the following:

- How a kindergarten assessment process can be used to improve instruction, the early learning and K-12 systems, or for other purposes.
- What methodology or approaches could be used for conducting a kindergarten assessment process, including those sensitive to cultural and socioeconomic differences influencing the development of young children.
- How to ensure that a kindergarten assessment process is not used to screen or preclude children from entering kindergarten if they are otherwise eligible.
- How the information could be shared with parents, OSPI, DEL, and others.
- The costs, including time and funding required for a kindergarten assessment process.
- A plan for developing and implementing a pilot of a kindergarten assessment process in Washington State.

“What is so awesome about this opportunity [to discuss a statewide kindergarten assessment process] is that we are given a chance to teach people that there is a way to do this that honors each child.”

—A Tribal Congress member

This report begins with a summary of the information gathered on best practices for the assessment of young children, examples of other state and national kindergarten assessment processes, kindergarten assessment processes used currently in Washington

State schools, and the priorities of various stakeholders for a statewide kindergarten assessment process. Recommendations and considerations for next steps in developing a kindergarten assessment process, and a suggested implementation plan, are provided in the later part of the report. First, however, we provide a brief definition of kindergarten readiness and an explanation of what a kindergarten assessment process is.

Definition of kindergarten readiness. DEL, OSPI, and Thrive believe that kindergarten readiness is much more than whether a child is ready for school. They define kindergarten readiness as an equation including four concepts: Kindergarten readiness = Ready children + Ready schools + Ready parents and families + Ready communities. This equation stipulates that many people and contexts play roles in ensuring children enter kindergarten ready to learn.²

Definition of a kindergarten assessment process. A kindergarten assessment process is an organized way to learn what children know and are able to do, including their disposition toward learning, when they enter kindergarten and possibly at other points in time (e.g., before leaving preschool or throughout the kindergarten school year).^{3,4} It is not a single test or an assessment tool. Rather, it is a *process* that includes the activities that happen *before* any type of assessment takes place, such as training and professional development of those giving the assessment; the activities that happen *during* an assessment period, such as the administration of the tools and methods used to collect information on children’s skills and knowledge; and the activities that happen *after* the assessment period, such as how the results of an assessment are analyzed, shared, and used to support children and inform policies. Designing a kindergarten assessment process presents opportunities for Washington’s children, educators, and policy-makers. However, designing a kindergarten assessment process is complex because there are many interrelated decisions to be made about its purpose(s), focus, methods, and implementation. For example, a kindergarten assessment may have a single or multiple purposes and audiences; it may focus on one or several areas of children’s skills and development; it may include a variety of methods to gather information about children’s abilities; it may use information collected from a variety of sources, including kindergarten teachers, caregivers, parents, and assessors; and results may be shared with a variety of stakeholders in a variety of formats.

Defining what a kindergarten assessment process will look like for Washington State is complex and takes time because it requires defining local priorities and then making decisions based on them, building on knowledge about best and current practices, and designing a process that is feasible given the available resources. Further, defining a kindergarten assessment process for Washington State will require broad stakeholder involvement to ensure that the decisions being made about the process will benefit children with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and competencies. With thoughtful consideration and planning, a kindergarten assessment process could provide reliable information about the skills, development, and competencies of the nearly 72,000 children entering kindergarten in Washington State each year. This information could be used in a variety of ways to support families, parents, schools, and communities in helping children succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

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BEST PRACTICES FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN



Because assessing young children can be challenging and complex, many organizations dedicated to supporting young children have identified best practices to ensure that assessments of young children are conducted, interpreted, and used in ways that help children and do not harm them in any way. Best practices articulate the characteristics of an assessment process that are most likely to lead to accurate and useful information about children’s skills, abilities, and competencies that can then be used for a variety of beneficial purposes.

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To provide a context for the recommendations and considerations presented at the end of this report, we reviewed and summarized the substantial literature related to assessment of young children, including position statements from organizations focused on assessment practices.⁵ These organizations include the National Research Council, the American Educational Research Association and the American Psychological Association, the National Center for Measurement in Education, the National Education Goals Panel, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education, the National Association of School Psychologists, the Division for Early Childhood, and the Pew National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force. Recommendations for best practices and guiding principles when assessing young children are summarized and outlined below. In general, an assessment process should do the following:

Assessment data should never be used to deny children opportunities or services.

- **Benefit children and do no harm.**

An assessment process must be carried out in ways that bring benefits to children, and they must be done in ways that support children’s self-confidence and learning. There is universal agreement that using assessments to understand and improve children’s learning is a beneficial use; however, there is also universal agreement that using assessment data to keep children from entering kindergarten or to determine their placement in kindergarten is harmful.⁶⁻¹⁰ Assessment data should never be used to deny children opportunities or services. In addition, the implementation of assessment procedures should not harm a child’s self-esteem by negatively labeling a child or focusing exclusively on deficits or failures. Rather, the assessment process should identify a child’s positive skills and unique strengths that then can serve as the basis to build new and better skills.

- **Be used only for the purpose(s) for which the assessment process is designed.**

Defining the purpose(s) of a kindergarten assessment process up front is important because assessment tools are typically developed for a single purpose and can not be easily used for other purposes. This means that the purpose(s) of the assessment process must be clear before tools can be selected. It may also mean that multiple tools are needed to address multiple purposes. For instance, an assessment intended to inform classroom instruction requires different tools and methods than an assessment intended to screen for developmental delays or disabilities.

The purpose(s) of the assessment process must be clear before tools can be selected.

- **Be appropriate for the population being assessed, including being culturally and linguistically responsive.**

The literature on best practices for assessment of young children universally asserts that it is unfair to subject children to an assessment process that does not accurately tap into their knowledge, skills, or potential. Assessment processes should be designed and validated for use with the ages, cultures, languages, socioeconomic levels, abilities and disabilities, and other characteristics of the children who are being assessed. Using assessment tools or processes that are linguistically or culturally inappropriate may underestimate children's true abilities and competencies, thus leading to inaccurate conclusions.¹¹⁻¹³ Also, the individuals conducting assessments should be knowledgeable about the children's cultures and be able to assess children in their primary language. Inclusion of parents in the assessment process can provide more accurate information about children, especially if teachers and assessors do not reflect the child's culture or linguistic background.

Assessment processes should be designed and validated for use with the ages, cultures, languages, socioeconomic status, abilities and disabilities, and other characteristics of the children who are being assessed.

- **Include accommodations for children with disabilities.**

Assessment processes involving young children with disabilities should include a variety of adaptations that allow children to demonstrate their skills and competencies in alternative ways (e.g., a child who cannot hear or speak can sign) or with accommodations (e.g., a child with a physical limitation can demonstrate verbal understanding using eye gaze; a child may need more time to complete a task). Best practices position statements highlight that this issue is particularly challenging because few assessment tools include such accommodations. They also recommend the inclusion of parents in the assessment process to gather more accurate information about the full extent of children's skills and knowledge.

Assessment processes involving young children with disabilities should include a variety of adaptations that allow children to demonstrate their skills and competencies in alternative ways.

- **Provide useful, valid, and reliable information.**

An assessment process should include a variety of methods that are technically sound and validated for the purpose(s) for which the assessment process is intended, including the provision of norms for children from diverse backgrounds and children with disabilities or other special needs. Useful, valid, and reliable information means that the assessment process provides the types of information needed, correctly gives information about children's skills, and is able to produce the same results when used by different assessors. Best practices position statements note that although numerous early childhood assessment tools are available, many of them are limited in terms of validity and reliability, particularly for children from diverse cultures, English learners, and those with disabilities.

Most best practice guidelines and early learning standards recommend use of a comprehensive assessment approach that incorporates all five NEGP areas of development.

- **Collect information on multiple areas of development.**

Research suggests that a process to assess what children know and can do when they enter kindergarten should be multifaceted and include measures of a range of skills, across multiple areas of development. The widely cited National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) identified five areas of children’s development and learning that are important to school success: physical well-being and motor development; social and emotional development; language development; approaches to learning; and cognition and general knowledge.¹⁴ Most best practice guidelines and early learning standards recommend use of a comprehensive assessment approach that incorporates all five NEGP areas of development. More narrowly designed assessment approaches may underestimate some important competencies. Furthermore, understanding children’s skills and behaviors across all domains will give better information for planning future instruction.

Research also suggests that the areas of learning development are closely related to each other.^{11, 15, 16} For example, how well a child has learned to communicate affects how well the child can demonstrate thinking skills and knowledge about math or colors. Similarly, a child who is shy with adults or who has trouble paying attention may not be able to show what he or she really knows during the assessment process.

- **Include multiple sources of information, including family participation and input.**

Gathering information from multiple sources, such as kindergarten teachers, trained assessors, parents, and early care and education (ECE) providers, is recommended for best understanding young children’s skills and competencies.^{10, 11} Young children are variable in their tendencies to be verbal, follow directions, focus their attention and persist on a task, and be sociable with an unfamiliar adult. This variability can influence assessment results, particularly on standardized direct assessments.

There is universal agreement across position statements and the research literature about best assessment practices that parents are essential participants in a valid and useful assessment process, both as informants about their child’s skills and abilities and as recipients of assessment information. Parents have unique information about children from their daily interactions and the many everyday contexts in which they and their children participate.

The best practices position statements and the research literature also recommend collecting information from teachers who worked with children prior to their entry to kindergarten.¹⁷⁻¹⁹ ECE providers have unique perspectives on children’s early development and learning that could help kindergarten teachers to better understand and serve incoming students. Further, many preschool programs have assessment information they have already collected on the children participating in their programs that they can share with elementary schools. Finally, gathering information about children’s pre-kindergarten experiences from ECE providers in the assessment process promotes continuity between preschool and elementary school settings.

Gathering information from multiple sources, such as ECE providers, teachers, parents, and trained assessors, is recommended for best understanding young children’s skills and competencies.

- **Include information collected through naturalistic methods in familiar settings.**

Because many young children often do not perform well for unfamiliar adults or on demand, collecting assessment information by using naturalistic methods in familiar settings, with people familiar to children, and over time is highly recommended.^{11, 20, 21} Naturalistic methods refer to assessment techniques used in the natural setting of children’s classrooms and include gathering examples of children’s work and observing children’s performance and behavior as they go about their daily work.^{22, 23} Work examples and observations are then scored for level of proficiency, using rating scales or rubrics on which the observing adult has been trained. Naturalistic methods may be especially useful approaches for obtaining valid information about children from diverse cultural and language backgrounds and those with disabilities.

- **Be repeated over time.**

Because of the variations in children’s performance from day to day and the fact that developmental growth patterns are typically uneven, relying on a single performance at only one point in time is not an accurate or fair way to draw conclusions about a child’s abilities.^{10, 11, 24, 25} Best practice guidelines uniformly state that assessments are most accurate and useful when done repeatedly over time. Use of repeated assessments emphasizes growth and gains in skills and learning over time; research shows that this approach more accurately indicates children’s competencies. A focus on growth over time also allows teachers and parents to celebrate strengths and achievements of children, while also using assessment information to plan how to support children’s continuing growth and learning.

- **Be supported by professional development.**

The quality of assessment data relies heavily on the accuracy of implementation; thus, training is critically important. If assessments are not done well, the data collected may not provide the information sought and/or may inaccurately represent children’s performance. The individuals collecting the assessment information should be well trained in child development, assessment principles, and the tools being used for conducting assessments. They also should be knowledgeable about the children’s cultures and capable of assessing children in their primary language.

- **Be feasible and realistic, given the implementation context.**

Ultimately, the kindergarten assessment process selected for implementation must be feasible. Issues that influence the feasibility of an assessment process include cost, capacity, and additional burden on districts, schools, teachers, children, and families.

Although designing a statewide kindergarten assessment process that adopts all the best practices outlined in this section may be challenging, it is important to understand and keep best practices in mind in order to make effective and informed decisions. The Washington State Legislature and other stakeholders will need to prioritize a number of competing purposes and constraints during the development and implementation of a statewide kindergarten assessment process, including prioritizing the best practices most important to adopt.

Use of repeated assessments emphasizes growth and gains in skills and learning over time which research shows more accurately indicates children’s competencies.

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EXAMPLES OF STATE AND OTHER LARGE SCALE KINDERGARTEN ASSESSMENT PROCESSES



To learn about and build on the experiences of others with regard to large-scale kindergarten assessment processes, SRI reviewed published literature related to practices used to assess children in kindergarten. Information was gathered from the Web sites of state departments of education and organizations known for their work in early care and education, early childhood assessment, and/or school readiness, and from early childhood experts at SRI, DEL, OSPI, and Thrive.

Our review found that at least 19 states in the nation have implemented some form of kindergarten assessment process since 2006.

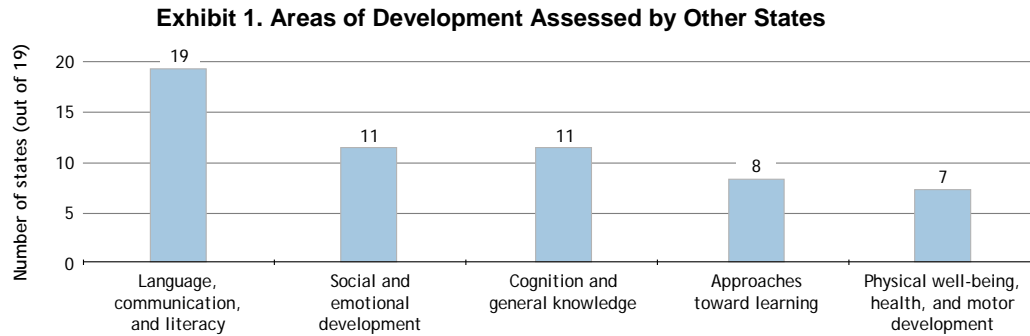
- Alabama
 - Alaska
 - Arkansas
 - Florida
 - Georgia
 - Hawaii
 - Idaho
 - Indiana
 - Iowa
 - Kansas
 - Maryland
 - Minnesota
 - North Dakota
 - Ohio
 - Oregon
 - Rhode Island
 - Texas
 - Vermont
 - Virginia
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Our review found that at least 19 states in the nation have implemented some form of kindergarten assessment process since 2006, and the characteristics of these processes are presented below. In addition, we reviewed assessment processes from two countries outside the United States (Canada and New Zealand). The following sections describe the nature of the assessment processes reviewed, including key purposes, areas of children's skills and development measured, methods used to collect information, and other assessment implementation characteristics. However, the analysis presented here provides a broad perspective of large-scale kindergarten assessment processes rather than a thorough content analysis because of the lack of specificity provided in available reports. For example, information on why particular assessment tools were selected and on the specific procedures being used, including administration, data analysis and reporting, and associated costs, often was incomplete or missing. Below we present the general trends that we identified across the information available. We acknowledge that we may have miscategorized aspects of some states' assessment processes because of the lack of information. Also, it is important to note that many of the large-scale assessment processes reviewed do not adopt all best practices described in the preceding section. Rather, it seems that large-scale assessment processes reflect the best practices most relevant to states' local purposes and circumstances.

Purposes. Most of the states (15 of 19) indicate that improving individual instruction is one of their explicit purposes for implementing their kindergarten assessment process. Another common purpose, identified by 11 of 19 of the states, is to guide planning at the school, district, or state level. More than a fifth of the states (4 of 19) indicate that sharing information with parents about children's strengths and areas of growth is one purpose for their statewide kindergarten assessment process. Very few states (2 of 19) report using statewide kindergarten assessment processes to screen for potential delays or special needs (e.g., Idaho) and only 1 of 19 (Hawaii) reports using them to support improvements in transitions between ECE programs and K-12 schools.

Areas of skills and development measured. All 19 states report including some measure of language and literacy in their kindergarten assessment processes (Exhibit 1). More than half (11 of 19) also include measures of social and emotional development and

cognition and general knowledge. Fewer states include measures of physical well-being, health, and/or motor development (7 of 19) and approaches toward learning (8 of 19).



More than a quarter of states (5 of 19) include measures of all five areas of development (e.g., Oregon, Vermont) and an additional 2 of 19 include measures of four areas (e.g., Maryland); thus, more than a third of the states are conducting very comprehensive kindergarten assessment processes. Our review of international practices also included an innovative holistic approach called “Kei Tua o te Pae” used in New Zealand with Maori children. This approach recognizes that the dimensions of children’s learning and development are interrelated and interconnected and that an assessment must include information about the whole child. Multiple areas of children’s skills and development (e.g., cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual domains), as well as their dispositions for learning (e.g., courage, curiosity, trust, playfulness, perseverance, confidence, responsibility, persistence, interest), are measured. Another international assessment process, developed in Canada, the Early Development Instrument (EDI), is also a comprehensive process that asks teachers to answer questions about how children in their classes are doing in five areas of childhood development.

Most states require districts or schools to use specified assessment tools and processes.

Standardization across districts/schools. Most (15 of 19) states require districts or schools to use specified assessment tools and processes; the other 4 states allow districts and schools to select assessment strategies within given parameters. For example, North Dakota, Iowa, and Texas allow schools to select assessment tools from a specific menu of options.

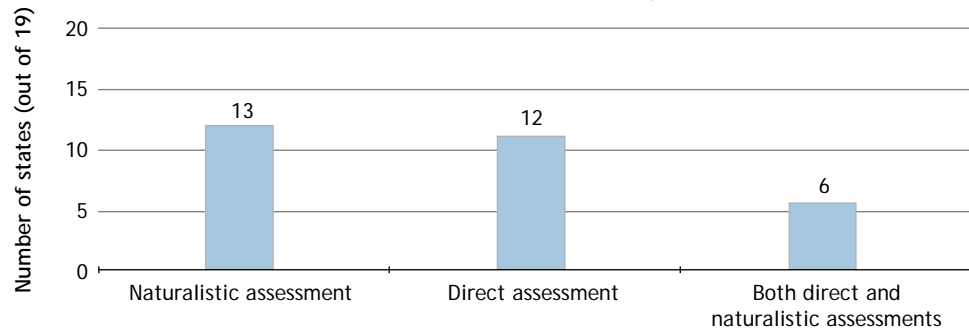
Methods for collecting information on children. Many of the states (13 of 19) use some form of teacher-completed checklists, questionnaires, or rating scales that are based on naturalistic observations and/or portfolios of children’s work and behavior (e.g., Maryland, Indiana) (Exhibit 2). Teacher checklists or rating scales often use 3- to 5-point scales indicating levels of children’s proficiency in a variety of areas. Several of the checklists are based on performance indicators from the Work Sampling System (e.g., Maryland, Minnesota, Vermont); some others are tied to performance indicators based on state learning benchmarks (e.g., Alaska, Georgia). The Early Development Instrument (EDI), used extensively in Canada, includes a comprehensive teacher checklist.

Almost as many states (12 of 19) use at least one direct assessment of children’s development and skills, and these direct assessments are usually published and commercially available (e.g., Idaho, Iowa). Across reviewed states, direct assessments tend to focus on literacy and communication skills, such as the Dynamic Indicators of

Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), Kindergarten Readiness Assessment-Literacy (KRA-L), and Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening-Kindergarten (PALS-K). In fact, some states (8 of 19) use only direct literacy assessments (e.g., Alabama, Indiana, Ohio) and these are used primarily to support early literacy initiatives.

Some states (6 of 19) use a combination of naturalistic and direct assessment approaches. For example, Florida administers DIBELS in combination with a teacher checklist that measures additional aspects of what children know and are able to do.

Exhibit 2. Data Collection Methods Used by Other States



Parents as a source of information. Only a couple of states (Alaska and Rhode Island) specifically mention collecting information from parents as part of their kindergarten assessment process. In these cases, information is collected from the parents by either the kindergarten teacher or other school staff through an interview. New Zealand’s “Kei Tua o te Pae” also involves multiple perspectives in the assessment process, including those of the children themselves, their parents, and their educators. Parents provide information about their children’s interests, strengths, and aspirations, as well as about the family’s cultural background. Parent information is gathered through a variety of methods, including enrollment forms, conversations with teachers, and the sharing of written stories accompanied by photographs.^{26, 27}

The timing of assessments varies widely among states, often based on the primary purpose for conducting the assessment process.

Timing of assessment process. The timing of assessments varies widely among states, often based on the primary purpose for conducting the assessment process. Of the 17 states that specify the timing of the assessment process, 10 collect information on children only at entry, often 4 to 8 weeks after school begins (e.g., Alaska, Florida, Hawaii). Other states (2 of 17) wait until the middle of the school year before assessing children (Oregon, Rhode Island). Still other states (5 of 17) collect information at the beginning of the year and again in the spring (e.g., Arkansas, Virginia) or throughout the year (Georgia), as does New Zealand. The timing and frequency of administering assessments are directly related to the purpose for conducting the assessment process. For example, if states are interested primarily in collecting information to guide early learning investments, assessments are generally conducted at the beginning of the school year. If states are more interested in tailoring instruction for individual students and monitoring their progress throughout the year, assessments may be administered more often.

Sampling. Only 2 of 19 states mention using a sampling approach. For example, Minnesota selects only 10% of its schools each year to participate in its kindergarten assessment process. Most states, however, assess all children in all kindergarten classrooms each year.

Measurement of schools' readiness for children. The review found that only one state (Rhode Island) measures aspects of schools' readiness for children as part of its assessment process. Rhode Island recognizes that schools that are ready to meet the needs of entering kindergarten children have smaller class sizes, kindergarten teachers trained in early childhood education, and a curriculum designed to meet all children's developmental needs.

Most states assess all children in all kindergarten classrooms each year.

“The assessment process should be strengths based so that parents know where children are and so that schools can meet the needs of children, not so children can meet the needs of schools.”

—An ECE provider

“Effective formative assessment practices include meaningful tasks, active involvement by learners, a culture of success, the opportunity for all learners to express their ideas, and elements of self-assessment.”

—An early learning expert

LOCAL KINDERGARTEN ASSESSMENT PROCESSES USED IN WASHINGTON



Most schools with survey data already conduct some form of kindergarten assessment process.

This section provides a brief summary of information collected through an online survey of Washington State districts and schools to learn about kindergarten assessment processes currently in use in the state. An invitation to complete the survey was sent to principals of all elementary schools with kindergarten classrooms in the state ($N = 1,307$) and to all District Assessment Coordinators serving districts including schools with kindergarten classrooms ($N = 301$). The survey was available online to complete between September 25 and October 8, 2008. Surveys completed by representatives from districts ($n = 25$) and schools ($n = 248$) provide information about the assessment practices for 593 schools with kindergarten classrooms in Washington State. This represents roughly half (45%) of the 1,307 schools with kindergarten classrooms in the state. Information provided in this section is based on the 593 schools with complete survey data, as well as on qualitative information about local kindergarten assessment processes gathered through telephone interviews with representatives from six Washington State school districts. A detailed description of the survey methodology and full results can be found in Appendix A, *Washington State Kindergarten Assessment Practices—Online Survey Summary*.

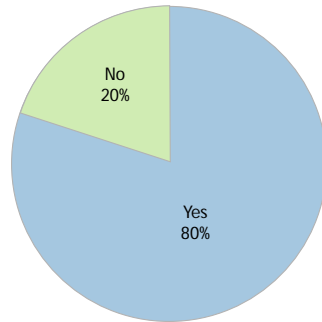
Many schools in Washington State are already gathering information about what children know and are able to do and about their competencies close to kindergarten entry. Some of the processes used by schools described in this section reflect best practices for the assessment of young children (e.g., measuring more than one area of children's skills and development and sharing assessment information with parents), while others do not (e.g., excluding children with disabilities or other special needs from the processes, using tools available only in English, and not collecting assessment information from parents). In the absence of statewide requirements and funding for kindergarten assessment processes, districts and schools appear to be implementing processes that best meet their immediate needs, given their local priorities and resources. Thus, with limited resources and guidance, it is difficult for schools to follow some best practices.

Prevalence of kindergarten assessment processes in the state. Most of the schools (80%) with survey data already conduct some form of kindergarten assessment process (Exhibit 3). All interviewed district representatives report assessing entering kindergarten students. The data presented in the remainder of this section represent the 472 schools that indicate that they administer a kindergarten assessment process.

Purposes for assessing entering kindergarten students. Schools that administer some form of schoolwide assessment of entering kindergarten students report doing so for multiple purposes. The most commonly cited purposes include informing instruction

for individual students (96%), informing instruction at the classroom level (88%), and informing parents of children’s strengths and areas for growth (81%).

Exhibit 3. Elementary Schools in Washington State That Already Implement a Kindergarten Assessment Process (N = 593)

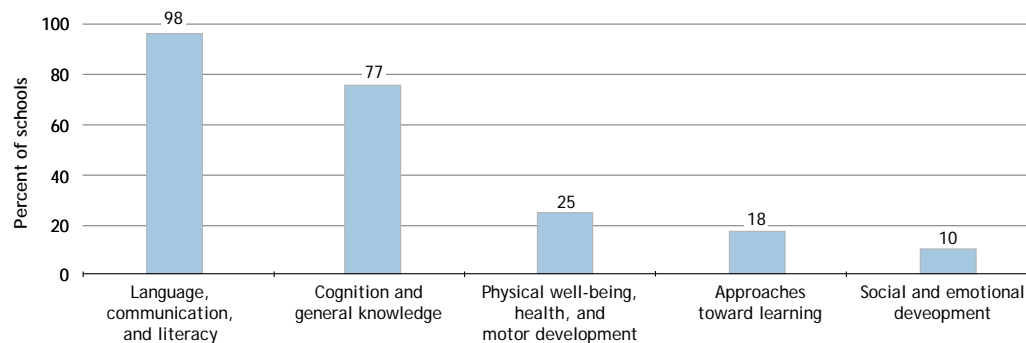


Fewer schools with a kindergarten assessment process cite screening children for potential developmental delays (77%), informing planning for ongoing investment in early learning (60%), and supporting transition and alignment between ECE programs and K-12 schools (22%). Interviewed representatives of six districts report conducting assessments to inform instruction at the student and classroom levels, to inform parents of children’s strengths and areas for growth, and to support transition and alignment between ECE programs and K-12 schools. Most district representatives also report using the assessment process to screen children for potential developmental delays.

Areas of children’s skills and development assessed. Few of the schools with a kindergarten assessment process conduct comprehensive assessment processes that gather information about multiple areas of children’s skills and development. Rather, most of these schools’ assessment processes measure only one (43%) or two (22%) areas of children’s skills and development. Nearly all of the schools (98%) measure children’s language, communication, and literacy skills (Exhibit 4). More than three-fourths (77%) assess children’s cognition and general knowledge. Schools that completed the survey are much less likely to measure approaches toward learning (18%) and social and emotional development (10%). While all the district representatives interviewed report measuring language, communication, and literacy, none report using an assessment process that measures more than two areas of children’s skills and development.

Few schools with a kindergarten assessment process conduct comprehensive assessment processes that gather information about multiple areas of children’s skills and development.

Exhibit 4. Areas of Children’s Skills and Development Assessed by Schools (N = 472)



Assessment tools used. The most commonly cited assessment methods used in the schools with a kindergarten assessment process are developed locally by districts or schools (47%), with the exception of the use of the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) to measure children’s literacy skills (55%). More than half of schools using DIBELS do so in combination with at least one other assessment tool, often developed locally. Most district representatives interviewed also report using DIBELS.

Additional characteristics of schoolwide assessment processes. Schools with a kindergarten assessment process most commonly report beginning their assessment process at entry or within the first month of school (75%). Interviewed district representatives also report assessing students within the first month of school.

Few Washington schools report involving parents in their current assessment processes.

The implementation of most schoolwide assessment processes involves a combination of staff. The majority of schools with a kindergarten assessment process report that kindergarten teachers (85%) and/or other school staff (63%) administer the assessments. Most interviewed district representatives report using a team of trained professionals to conduct the assessments, as do 41% of the schools. Few Washington schools (4%) with a kindergarten assessment process report involving parents in their current assessment processes.

Offering assessments in languages other than English and having them conducted by a person who speaks the child’s primary language appear be challenging for most schools. Nearly 70% of the schools with a kindergarten assessment process report that at least one of the tools used in their assessment process is available only in English. Interviewed representatives in three of six districts, however, report using bilingual staff or translators to administer assessments with children whose primary language is not English. More than half of schools (57%) with a kindergarten assessment process currently make accommodations for children with special needs. However, an additional 13% of schools, and most district representatives interviewed report excluding children with special needs from the assessment process.

Nearly 70% of schools report that at least one of the tools used in their assessment process is unavailable in any language other than English.

Most schools with a kindergarten assessment process report sharing assessment results with teachers and principals (99%), parents (83%), and district staff (64%). All interviewed district representatives report sharing the assessment results with teachers, and most also share the results with district staff and parents.

Finally, 85% of schools with a kindergarten assessment process report that participation in the kindergarten assessment process is required and that families are not given the option not to participate.

STAKEHOLDER PRIORITIES FOR A STATEWIDE KINDERGARTEN ASSESSMENT PROCESS



This section summarizes information gathered from a variety of Washington State stakeholders on their priorities for a statewide kindergarten assessment process in the state. The bulk of the information was collected during the last 2 weeks of October 2008 through an online survey that was posted on the DEL Web site in English and Spanish, along with audiovisual presentations in both languages that introduced key concepts related to conducting a kindergarten assessment process. A total of 1,476 stakeholders, including respondents from all 39 counties and 12 Washington Indian Tribes, completed the survey. Nearly 91% of stakeholders ($n = 1,349$) responded to all survey items, and 9% ($n = 127$) submitted surveys with some incomplete responses (i.e., skipped some survey items). Most percentages provided in this section of the report were calculated excluding missing and “*Not applicable; there should not be a kindergarten assessment process*” responses.²⁸ Survey respondents represented diverse groups including:

- School principals, teachers, and staff ($n = 392$)
- Early care and education (ECE) providers and program directors ($n = 350$)
- Parents and other family caregivers ($n = 327$)
- Early learning and assessment experts, including researchers, policy-makers, and professors ($n = 186$)
- Educational Service District (ESD) and district administrators and staff ($n = 112$)
- Washington Indian Tribe representatives ($n = 30$)
- Others ($n = 79$).

A complete description of the survey methodology and full results are provided in Appendix B, *Stakeholder Priorities for a Statewide Kindergarten Assessment Process: Online Survey Summary*. Survey information is augmented by qualitative information gathered through focus groups with early learning, assessment, and cultural competency experts; a listening session at the Washington State Tribes Tribal Leaders Congress on Education (Tribal Congress); and telephone interviews conducted by DEL staff with 20 stakeholders.

Although information presented in this section was collected from a broad range of stakeholders across the state, the priorities described herein should not be viewed as representative of all constituents in the state because participants were invited to complete the survey or participate in focus groups and interviews through targeted and purposive outreach strategies and were not randomly sampled from the population at large. As will be shown, there is both variation and consensus for various aspects of a

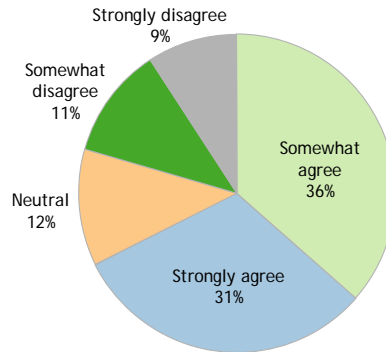
A total of 1,476 stakeholders, including respondents from 39 counties and 12 Washington Indian Tribes, completed the survey.

kindergarten assessment process among Washington State’s stakeholders. Thus, there are areas in which further dialogue and consensus building may be necessary when moving forward in the planning process.

Although the majority of stakeholders strongly or somewhat agree (67%) with the idea of developing a statewide process, 20% strongly or somewhat disagree.

Agreement with the idea of conducting a statewide kindergarten assessment process. Stakeholders in Washington State have diverse opinions with regard to the development of a statewide kindergarten assessment process. Although the majority of stakeholders strongly or somewhat agree (67%) with the idea of developing a statewide process, 20% strongly or somewhat disagree (Exhibit 5). Similarly, most of the individuals who participated in additional qualitative data collection agree with the idea of conducting a statewide assessment process, but some do not. Those who do not agree with the idea express concern about potential misuses of data, the costs of implementing a process statewide, and not being able to appropriately include children from diverse backgrounds in the process.

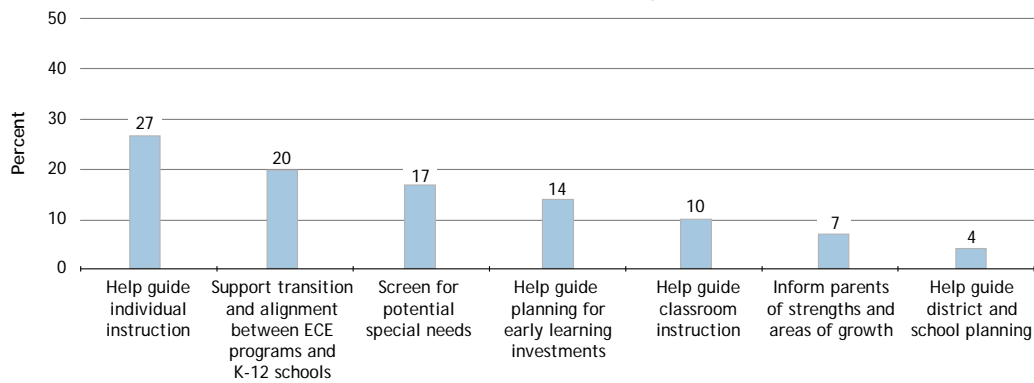
Exhibit 5. Stakeholder Agreement with Idea of Developing a Statewide Kindergarten Assessment Process (N = 1,476)



Purposes for conducting a statewide assessment process. Stakeholders who completed the survey support a variety of purposes for conducting a statewide assessment process. Those who participated in focus groups and members of the Tribal Congress express a desire for the state to explicitly define the purpose of a kindergarten assessment process in Washington State. Focus group participants note that developing a process with too many purposes may be both unrealistic and inappropriate. They also note that determining the purpose of the assessment process will drive all subsequent decisions about areas to be measured, types of assessments to be used, who collects the data, and with whom and how the data are shared.

Guiding instruction for individual students is cited as the most important purpose for conducting a statewide assessment process across stakeholder groups who completed the survey (27%), followed by supporting transition and alignment between ECE programs and K-12 schools (20%) and screening children for potential developmental delays or other special needs (17%) (Exhibit 6).

Exhibit 6. Most Important Purpose Identified by Stakeholders (n = 1,304)



Parents interviewed by DEL staff shared their desire that an assessment process should be used “to better develop the talents that our children already have” and “to help children reach their full potential.” ECE staff who completed the survey identify supporting transition and alignment between ECE programs and K-12 schools as the most important purpose for an assessment process. Representatives from Washington Indian Tribes who completed the survey and members of the Tribal Congress identify screening as the most important purpose for conducting an assessment process. Participants in the focus groups have differing opinions on the appropriateness of screening children for potential developmental delays or other special needs as a primary purpose for conducting a statewide assessment process, with some supporting this purpose and others not.

Another purpose for conducting an assessment process mentioned by early learning and assessment experts is to evaluate early education programs “so that parents know if programs are effective at what they intend to do.” However, other focus group participants warned that conducting an assessment process solely for accountability purposes is “unethical” and that there has to be “some tangible benefit [of the process] for children and teachers.” Others also mentioned that accountability as a primary purpose may encourage ECE providers or teachers to “teach to the test rather than focusing on the individual strengths of each child.”

Areas of children’s skills and development. In general, stakeholders think that measurements of multiple areas of children’s skills, development, and competencies are important to include in a statewide assessment process. Survey respondents indicate that social and emotional development and language, communication, and literacy are of utmost importance to include. The strength of stakeholders’ desire to measure social and emotional development contrasts greatly with the small number of schools in Washington that currently measuring this area of development. Across stakeholder groups, the majority of survey respondents (86%) strongly or somewhat agree that a statewide assessment process should be comprehensive and capture information on all five areas of development (i.e., social and emotional development; language, communication, and literacy; physical well-being, health, and/or motor development; cognition and general knowledge; approaches toward learning). Early learning, assessment, and cultural competency experts and Tribal Congress members agree that an assessment process should be comprehensive and should not “narrowly focus on academic skills.” Tribal

“The proper role for assessment is to help us know where children are developmentally when they enter school as well as how ready the schools are for children when they get there.”

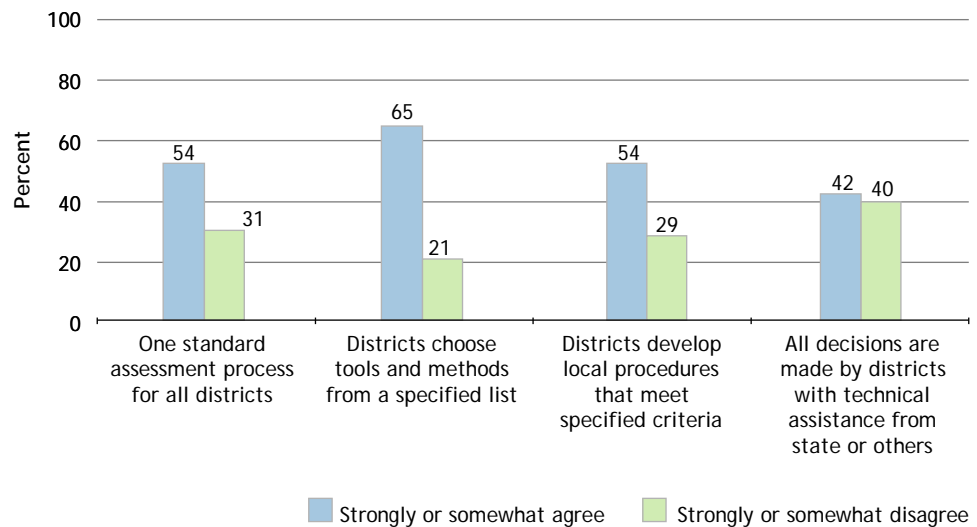
—An early learning expert

Congress members specifically mentioned sense of identity, culture, and respect for elders and children’s disposition for learning (e.g., curiosity, courage, and playfulness) as additional areas of children’s skills and development to be included in a holistic process. Focus groups and Tribal Congress members also feel that an assessment process ideally should include measures of schools’ readiness for children.

Across stakeholder groups, the majority of survey respondents (86%) strongly or somewhat agree that a statewide assessment process should be comprehensive and capture information on all five areas of development.

Approaches to implementation of a kindergarten assessment process. In general, stakeholders agree with some level of standardization in the assessment implementation approach (Exhibit 7). Requiring districts to choose tools and methods from a specific list is the implementation approach with greatest support from all but one of the stakeholder groups. Representatives from Washington Indian Tribes more strongly agree with a process in which districts are able to develop local procedures that meet a specified set of criteria or in which all decisions are made by individual districts with the provision of technical assistance. They also more strongly disagree with the idea of requiring one standard assessment process for all districts.

Exhibit 7. Stakeholder Agreement with Potential Implementation Approaches
(n = 1,254 – 1,262)



Approaches to collecting information on children’s skills and development. Survey respondents hold favorable opinions of various approaches for collecting information on children’s skills and development, including the use of direct assessments (77%); portfolios and work samples (76%); and checklists, questionnaires, and rating scales (74%). School staff most strongly agree with the use of direct assessments, while ECE staff, early learning experts, and representatives from Washington Indian Tribes agree less with their use.

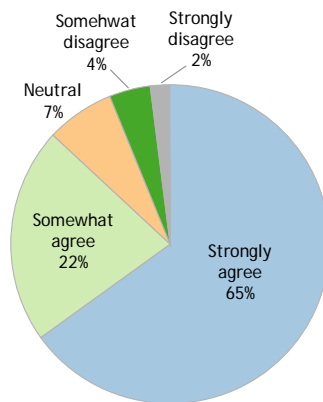
Focus group participants and Tribal Congress members say that an assessment process should involve assessors who speak the child’s primary language and are from or know the child’s culture and community. Focus group participants also say that assessment processes should allow for accommodations for children with special needs, should be implemented in an environment that is familiar to the child, and should include multiple sources of information.

Focus group participants and Tribal Congress members say that an assessment process should involve assessors who speak the child’s primary language and are from or know the child’s culture and community.

The majority of stakeholders (87%) who completed the survey strongly or somewhat agree that a kindergarten assessment process must include information gathered from parents (Exhibit 8). Participants in both focus groups and Tribal Congress members strongly reiterate this point. Cultural competency experts suggested that a benefit of conducting an assessment process is to “bring the family into the conversation with their child’s school and teacher early” and to “validate and empower parents as their child’s first and best teacher.” The strong desire to include information from parents is not reflected in current assessment processes being used by the vast majority of schools.

The majority of stakeholders (87%) who completed the survey strongly or somewhat agree that a kindergarten assessment process must include information gathered from parents.

Exhibit 8. Stakeholder Agreement with Necessity of Including Parent Input (n = 1,275)

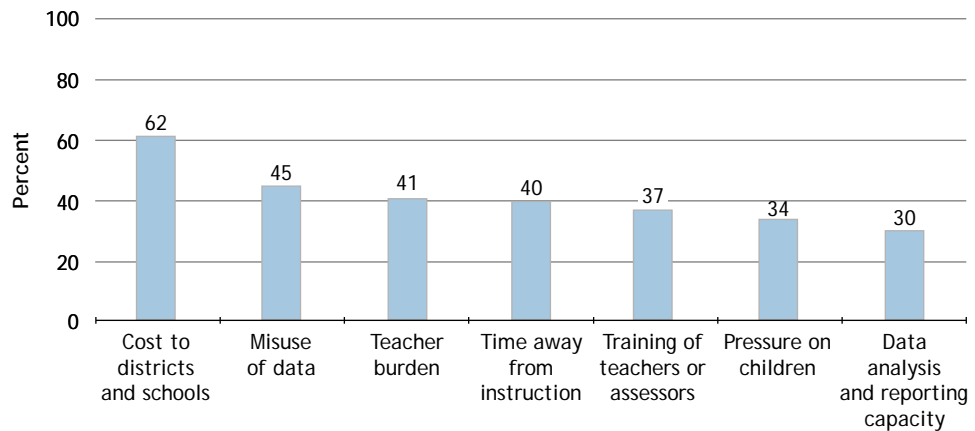


Finally, there is wide variation in the amount of instructional time stakeholders who completed the survey are willing to invest in conducting a statewide kindergarten assessment process. One-quarter (25%) of stakeholders indicate they would invest up to 1 hour of instructional time per child per year for assessment, and 45% indicate a willingness to invest more than 1 hour of time. Some respondents are less willing to spend instructional time on a kindergarten assessment process, with 16% wanting to spend less than 30 minutes per child and 14% not wanting to invest any instructional time in assessment. Many (73%) of those not wanting to invest any time in an assessment process also indicate that they strongly disagree with the idea of a statewide kindergarten assessment process.

Potential implementation challenges. Stakeholders were asked how significant a challenge to implementing a statewide kindergarten assessment process they believed seven issues might be. The majority of survey respondents (62%) and most focus group participants consider cost to be a “very significant” challenge to implementing a statewide kindergarten assessment process (Exhibit 9). Other “very significant” challenges identified by stakeholders who completed the survey are potential misuse of data (45%), teacher burden (41%), time away from instruction (40%), training of teachers or assessors to collect and use assessment data effectively (37%), pressure on children (34%), and capacity to analyze and report data (30%).

Most survey respondents (62%) and focus group participants consider cost to be a very significant challenge to implementing a statewide kindergarten assessment process.

**Exhibit 9. Challenges Anticipated to Be Very Significant by Stakeholders
(n = 1,347 – 1,355)**



“Assessment guidelines and training for data collectors are essential. You can have a really good assessment process but you still need to ensure that data are collected in an appropriate and high-quality way and that data are not misused.”

—A cultural competency expert

Most survey respondents (87%) indicate that more than 6 months or perhaps more than a year of planning time is needed before piloting a statewide kindergarten assessment process.

For early learning experts, ECE staff, and representatives from Washington State Indian Tribes who completed the survey, potential misuse of data is also a significant anticipated challenge. Washington Indian Tribes survey respondents and Tribal Congress members express concerns about pressure on children, commenting that the assessment process might negatively affect native children’s self-esteem and social-emotional development. Tribal Congress members also suggest that Washington Indian Tribes be “given an opportunity to provide their own local interpretations of native children’s assessment data as well as the opportunity to refute any claims made by the state or researchers that might not reflect native cultural identities.”

Additional challenges identified by focus group participants include the difficulty of identifying assessment approaches that are both valid and culturally responsive and of adequately training assessors. It was noted that assessors, be they teachers or outside specialists, need to be trained not only in the administration of the assessment methods, but also in how to interact with children, understand their cultural backgrounds and personal histories, and interpret and share the results. Focus group participants and members of the Tribal Congress also anticipate challenges related to inappropriately labeling children in a negative manner or using assessment data for placement or classification in the school system. Finally, an additional anticipated challenge noted by individuals who reviewed this draft report is building consensus among stakeholders about the various attributes of a statewide kindergarten assessment process, including key purposes, tools to be used, and how to share data.

Suggestions for next steps. Most survey respondents (87%) indicate that more than 6 months or perhaps more than a year of planning time is needed for a dialogue between the state and stakeholder groups before piloting a statewide kindergarten assessment process. Focus group participants and Tribal Congress members also recommend additional planning time and suggest that the planning process “be transparent and include broad and meaningful involvement of diverse stakeholders.”

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS



In this section, we present recommendations and considerations for initial steps toward the development of a statewide kindergarten assessment process for Washington State. Developing such a process will provide Washington State with an opportunity to focus resources to better support families, parents, schools, and communities to help children succeed in kindergarten and beyond. However, as noted earlier, developing a statewide kindergarten assessment process is complex because it involves multiple interrelated decisions and requires setting priorities across a broad range of stakeholders. Thus, it is important to consider the following issues and recommendations as a process is developed.

Consider stakeholder support for a statewide kindergarten assessment process. The initial stakeholder input described in this report shows that although there are diverse opinions about the development of a kindergarten assessment process, the majority of stakeholders who completed the survey strongly or somewhat agree (67%) with the idea of developing a statewide process, while 20% strongly or somewhat disagree. Those who disagree with the idea express concern about the costs of implementing a process statewide, potential misuse of data, and not being able to appropriately include children from diverse backgrounds in the process. Also, until the purpose or purposes are defined, some stakeholders are reluctant to form an opinion about their level of support for a statewide kindergarten assessment process. Thus, it will be important to clarify goals and determine how stakeholder concerns could be addressed during the next planning phase, so that a clear understanding of what a statewide kindergarten assessment process could be and accomplish is established.

Identify the key purpose(s) of a kindergarten assessment process early in the planning phase. Defining the purpose(s) of a kindergarten assessment process up front is important because all other attributes and decisions about the assessment process flow from the purpose(s).^{18, 29} For instance, the types of assessment tools, individuals used to collect assessment data, training needed, and costs of an assessment process all vary according to the purpose(s) of the assessment process.

Washington State stakeholders feel that careful consideration of purposes must be addressed as a first step in an extended planning process leading to a pilot assessment process. Furthermore, the purpose(s) selected must be clearly articulated and broadly communicated to the wide range of stakeholders across the state.

Stakeholders who completed the survey indicate the following as the most desired purposes:

- Guide instruction for individual students (27%).

It will be important to clarify goals and determine how stakeholder concerns could be addressed during the next planning phase, so that a clear understanding of what a statewide kindergarten assessment process could be and accomplish is established.

- Support transition and alignment between ECE programs and K-12 schools (20%).
- Screen children for possible developmental delays or other special needs (17%).

Regardless of the purpose, stakeholders strongly endorsed the view that an assessment process should benefit children, support their learning, help children reach their full potential, and focus on their strengths. However, many of the early learning experts who provided input note that developing a process that meets multiple purposes simultaneously may be both unrealistic and inappropriate.

Choose the characteristics of children’s early learning and development that will be measured in the assessment process, as well as the degree of comprehensiveness. One of the major decisions that must be made about a kindergarten assessment process is the degree to which the process focuses on early learning and children’s skills and abilities comprehensively across multiple areas of development or focuses more narrowly on one or a few areas. All stakeholder groups prefer a comprehensive approach. However, most Washington schools currently use a process that measures only one or two areas of children’s skills and development. Furthermore, although stakeholders identify measures of social and emotional development as of utmost importance to include in a kindergarten assessment process, few Washington schools’ current assessment processes include measures of this area of development.

All stakeholder groups prefer a comprehensive approach. However, most Washington schools currently use a process that measures only one or two areas of children’s skills and development.

If future deliberations lead to the adoption of a more comprehensive kindergarten assessment process, its feasibility in terms of needed time and resources must be weighed carefully. A comprehensive approach including in-depth assessments in multiple areas of children’s development could require significant time and resources. On the other hand, a comprehensive approach that gathers information about a range of areas at a more general level using an observational checklist could require less time and fewer resources.

Determine how the areas of development to be measured in a kindergarten assessment process will be aligned with specific frameworks about children’s early learning and school readiness. Some states have developed kindergarten assessment processes that align or connect with the areas of development and skills outlined in their early learning guidelines, school readiness frameworks, or assessment guidelines. In the case of Washington State, future planning must address whether or not to align kindergarten assessment processes with the *Washington State Early Learning and Development Benchmarks*,³⁰ which set goals about skills and competencies for young children, and/or OSPI’s recently published *A Guide to Assessment in Early Childhood*, which provides background and context, practical guidance, recommendations, and resources for the assessment of young children.²⁵

It is also important to decide whether to expand on the existing frameworks to incorporate additional areas of development valued by diverse populations. For instance, stakeholders from Washington State Indian Tribes identify sense of identity, culture, and respect for elders as important early learning outcomes. Stakeholders recommend that more input be gathered from the many diverse groups in Washington State about the areas of children’s skills and development to be measured during the assessment process, as well as how closely these areas should align with existing work done in the state.

Make decisions about methodology or approaches to be used for conducting a kindergarten assessment process, including those sensitive to cultural and socioeconomic differences influencing the development of young children. Both the literature on assessment of young children and stakeholders recognize the many challenges of identifying assessment approaches that can yield accurate and useful information about what young children know and can do. Further, they recognize that special attention needs to be paid to conducting assessments that are culturally and linguistically responsive. Assessment tools or processes that are linguistically or culturally inappropriate may underestimate children’s true abilities and lead to inaccurate conclusions about children’s competencies.^{4, 11-13, 31}

For children whose primary language is not English, assessments using observational methods and work samples of children’s performance can provide a fuller and potentially more accurate picture of children’s abilities than other methods.^{4, 11-13, 31-34} Other highly recommended strategies for ensuring cultural and linguistic competency include using only assessment tools with norms for the groups being assessed, using culturally and linguistically appropriate assessors, including parent input as part of the assessment information, ensuring culturally relevant content, and training assessors to ensure that they do not misinterpret children’s test-taking styles.

Make decisions about methodology or approaches for inclusion of children with disabilities and other special needs. Very few tools for assessing young children include accommodations for children with disabilities and other special needs. In addition, the normative samples used to develop most assessment tools have included few or no children with disabilities. Even if they are included, the numbers and types of disabilities included in the normative samples are often limited and do not reflect the wide range of possible disabilities (e.g., physical disabilities, deafness, vision impairment, cognitive disability syndromes, behavior disorders).^{11, 35-38} Assessment tools developed specifically for each type of disability simply do not exist.

While more than half (57%) of the schools in Washington State with a kindergarten assessment process report making accommodations for children with special needs during their kindergarten assessment processes, 13% of schools and most district representatives interviewed report excluding children with special needs from the assessment process. Highly recommended strategies for including children with disabilities and other special needs include providing needed supports, allowing for alternative ways to indicate responses, allotting extra time, and including parent input as part of the assessment information.

Make decisions about data collection procedures, including considering different options and alternatives. During the next phase in planning for a kindergarten assessment process, broad stakeholder input needs to be sought about many specific implementation and data collection decisions. This input should include identifying various acceptable options and weighing the tradeoffs for each alternative. As mentioned earlier, some decisions and choices flow from the purpose(s) of the assessment. Other decisions and choices will be dictated by local preferences, best practices, costs, and available resources. The following are some of the decisions that will need to be made:

Special attention needs to be paid to conducting assessments that are culturally and linguistically responsive. Assessment tools or processes that are linguistically or culturally inappropriate may underestimate children’s true abilities and lead to inaccurate conclusions about children’s competencies.

Highly recommended strategies for including children with disabilities and other special needs include providing needed supports, allowing for alternative ways to indicate responses, allotting extra time, and including parent input as part of the assessment information.

Current variation in methods being used across the state makes it difficult to summarize results across schools or districts. On the other hand, local school districts have invested time, training, and other resources in their current assessment processes.

- *When will the assessment process collect information about children?* Assessment information could be collected before children enter kindergarten, at a kindergarten orientation event, early in the kindergarten year, during the middle or end of the kindergarten year, or throughout the kindergarten year.
- *Should the assessment process include gathering information collected by ECE and preschool programs?* Many pre-kindergarten programs collect information on children's skills, development, and competencies. Including information about children collected by ECE and preschool staff in the assessment process can help kindergarten teachers tailor instruction to best meet children's needs and competencies. Additionally, formalizing a process to transfer information about children from their pre-kindergarten to kindergarten classrooms could strengthen communication across early learning systems and ease the transition between ECE programs and K-12 schools for children and families.
- *What level of standardization across schools is needed to meet the identified purposes?* In particular, should the process involve the use of common assessment tools and methods across all schools or should schools make all or some decisions locally? Variation in current methods being used across the state makes it difficult to summarize results across schools or districts. On the other hand, local school districts have invested time, training, and other resources in their current assessment processes.
- *Should the assessment process include all children or a sample of children or schools?* Whether or not sampling can be used depends on the purpose(s). If the purpose is to inform instruction for individual children, then all children need to be assessed. If the only purpose is to understand how cohorts of kindergarten children are doing from year to year or to inform planning about early learning investments, then a sampling approach may be more appropriate. It will also be important to decide whether the process will pertain only to children in public schools or also to those attending private schools.
- *What kinds of assessment tools and approaches should be used to collect data?* There are pros and cons to different types of assessment approaches, such as direct assessments (e.g., standardized reading, vocabulary, and early math assessments) versus naturalistic assessments (e.g., observational tools, portfolio samples of children's work, and parent or teacher checklists). Direct assessments are seen as more objective, valid, and reliable by many early childhood researchers and school personnel, and they have norms for general populations of children.¹¹ On the other hand, they have been criticized as inappropriate for many young children, especially for children with diverse cultural and language backgrounds and those with disabilities.^{11, 39, 40} Because many young children often do not perform well for unfamiliar adults or on demand, collecting assessment information by using naturalistic approaches, such as observation and interview methods, conducted in familiar settings and with people familiar to children is highly recommended. Use of naturalistic methods such as observation, portfolios of student work, and checklist assessments may be

especially useful approaches for obtaining valid information about children from diverse cultural and language backgrounds and those with disabilities.^{11, 35, 41-43}

- *Should the assessment process use existing tools or develop new assessment tools?* This decision will depend on whether existing assessment tools can be found that meet the information needs for the purpose(s) identified and whether the assessment process will need to be closely aligned with the Washington State Early Learning and Development Benchmarks. Additional time and funds may be required to align the assessment process with existing standards.
- *Who should be involved in collecting information about children’s skills and development?* Assessment information can be collected from teachers, trained assessors, parents, ECE providers, and other persons who know the child well (e.g., other relatives, child care providers, specialist school staff). Though not a common practice currently, Washington State stakeholders strongly support collecting information from parents as part of the assessment process. Gathering assessment information from multiple sources is a best practice, but it can increase costs and complicate interpretation and reporting of data.
- *How should the individuals who collect information on children’s skills and development be trained to ensure reliability and proper use of the information?* The type and amount of training required will depend on the purpose(s) of the assessment process identified and complexity of the tools selected. Although more training may be necessary to ensure reliability if using an observational, portfolio, or checklist assessment tool, this training also will build the capacity of teachers and/or parents to support children’s learning and development. Training can be offered in various ways, including training packets reviewed collectively through telephone conference calls, online training modules, or training workshops for all kindergarten teachers or for school lead teachers.

Include explicit features to ensure that a kindergarten assessment process is not used to screen or preclude children from entering kindergarten if they are otherwise age-eligible. Best practices in assessment and stakeholder input strongly endorse having an explicit and consistent policy statement that specifies that the adopted kindergarten assessment process will not, and must not, be used to preclude children from entering kindergarten when they are age-eligible.⁶⁻¹⁰ Such a statement should be contained in all documents about the kindergarten assessment process. Consideration should be given to conducting the assessment process after children enter kindergarten so it cannot be used to preclude children from entering. Training of teachers, administrators, and others on proper use of assessment can also serve to prevent this kind of misuse of an assessment process.

Develop plans for how the information from the kindergarten assessment process will be shared with parents, OSPI, school personnel, DEL, the public, and other stakeholder groups. Data from a kindergarten assessment process will be of great interest to many different groups in Washington State. The planning process must lead to a detailed plan for how the data will be analyzed and reported back to the interested groups (e.g., individual teachers, schools and/or district administrators, parents, and

Though not a common practice currently, Washington State stakeholders strongly support collecting information from parents as part of the assessment process.

Best practices in assessment and stakeholder input strongly endorse having an explicit and consistent policy statement that specifies that the adopted kindergarten assessment process will not, and must not, be used to preclude children from entering kindergarten when they are age-eligible.

taxpayers). Whether and how data are reported to various groups will vary according to the purpose(s) identified and approaches selected for the assessment process.

Consider including measures of schools' readiness for children in the assessment process. Focus group participants and Tribal Congress members suggest that a statewide kindergarten assessment process gather information not only on entering students but on the readiness of schools to serve children as well. Best practices and early learning frameworks also support assessing the readiness of schools and communities. Components of schools' readiness for children include class size, teacher-child ratios, teacher preparation, parent involvement policies, plans for transition between ECE programs and K-12 schools, and instructional practices to support the learning of diverse groups of children. Including measures of schools' readiness for children is also in line with the shared mission of DEL, OSPI, and Thrive to support families, parents, schools, and communities to help children succeed in kindergarten and beyond. Although important, including measures of schools' readiness for children in the assessment process will require additional data collection strategies and may increase total costs and time of the process.^{3, 44, 45}

Focus group participants and Tribal Congress members suggest that a statewide kindergarten assessment process gather information not only on entering students but on the readiness of schools to serve children as well.

Consider the costs and time a kindergarten assessment process could require. As mentioned earlier, many stakeholders who completed the survey (62%) anticipate that cost will be a very significant challenge to implementing a statewide kindergarten assessment and that the process must be a state-funded mandate for it to succeed. Other stakeholders recommend that the state weigh the costs of implementing a kindergarten assessment process against other uses of funds, such as investing more funds in early learning services or elementary schools. The costs and time required to conduct a kindergarten assessment process will depend on the decisions made regarding all of the previous considerations because they affect the selection of materials, training, choice of assessors, and data analysis and sharing components that constitute the process itself. The ranges for cost and time related to each of these kindergarten assessment process components, described below, are based on a review of *Early Childhood Measures Profiles*.⁴⁶

The cost and time required to conduct a kindergarten assessment process will depend on the decisions made regarding all of the previous considerations because they affect the selection of materials, training, choice of assessors, and data analysis and sharing components that constitute the process itself.

- **Materials.** Costs for direct assessment materials vary, with some published and commercially available materials costing as little as \$1 per student and others with more reliability and validity costing \$300 to \$900 per testing kit (a kit can be used repeatedly, but with only one student at a time). Published materials for conducting observational measures can cost from \$90 to \$300 per classroom or teacher. If assessment materials are developed to align with state learning and development benchmarks, additional costs may be incurred. If measuring multiple areas of children's skills and development, there may be a need to use more than one type of assessment materials, with costs increasing for multiple tools. Some assessment tools, however, do provide comprehensive measures, such as the Early Development Instrument (EDI) and other teacher checklists like that included in the Alaska Kindergarten Developmental Profile.
- **Training.** The costs and time involved in training depend on the assessment materials selected and method of training used. At the high-cost end of the spectrum, training could involve one- or multiple-day seminars for all kindergarten teachers or for one lead teacher per school (i.e., train the trainer).

Lower-cost training options include training packets reviewed collectively through telephone conference calls or online training modules.

- *Teacher or assessor time.* The time required by teachers or assessors also varies across assessment methods and assessment tools. Some assessment tools require as little as 10 minutes per student; many require up to 30 minutes; a few take up to 60 minutes per administration. Some states pay teachers for their time assessing children (e.g., \$100 per class) or employ substitute teachers to free up teachers' time to complete assessment protocols. Costs for external assessors vary and can be up to \$200 per student for a comprehensive assessment.
- *Data analysis and sharing.* The purpose(s) of the assessment process will determine whether and how the information gathered on individual students is most appropriately aggregated, analyzed, and reported. For example, if the sole purpose is to help guide instruction for individual students, teachers may be able to use individual results effectively without any higher-level analysis or without sharing beyond their classroom. However, if the purpose is to guide broader planning at the school, district, or state level, then costs for data collection, processing, and analysis increase dramatically. Costs could include those related to entering and analyzing data, preparing statewide, district-level, and/or school-level reports (and possibly individual student reports for parents), and training for teachers on how to use assessment data effectively. Total long-term costs related to data analysis and sharing could be reduced by investing in a state-level Web-based data system and staff. Providing analysis support at the state level also could reduce overall costs and the comparability of data across districts compared with each district conducting its own analysis. To support use of data, the state also could provide technical assistance to schools and districts. Finally, costs of data analysis and reporting also will depend on the number of times per year that information is collected on kindergarten students.
- *Pilot phase.* Given that several key decisions have not yet been made that will affect the final cost of a pilot assessment process, we can provide only a rough estimate of \$1,500,000 for the pilot phase. This estimate is based on an estimate for a similar statewide project prepared by OSPI in 2007. Activities and costs included in the OSPI budget were broken down over two years. In year one, the budget for planning and preparation for the pilot was \$759,500. In year two, the budget to initiate the pilot phase and prepare for statewide implementation was \$938,700.

The budget included in the OSPI estimate included some activities that have been completed under the current planning contract (e.g., inventorying existing practices in Washington and other states). However, much of the planning and implementation work included in the OSPI budget estimate remains to be done. These tasks include researching and identifying the most appropriate early assessment tool(s) and processes; selecting assessment tool(s) and processes to be piloted; piloting the use of the kindergarten assessment process; evaluating the results of the pilot for statewide implementation; and preparing for statewide implementation. These tasks align with the activities in the recommendations and considerations presented in this section of the report.

SUGGESTED IMPLEMENTATION PLAN



In this section, we present a possible implementation plan for developing and conducting a pilot of the kindergarten assessment process and supporting the use of the process in a voluntary use phase. The implementation plan and timeline will depend on a variety of factors, including the success of gathering sufficient input from representatives across the state, the selected assessment purpose(s), and available funding. The recommended implementation plan includes two phases that align with two biennial legislative sessions. The first phase, *Planning and Pilot Phase (2009 – 2011 Biennial Legislative Session)*, will be used for additional planning and stakeholder decision-making and for conducting a pilot. The second phase, *Voluntary Use Phase (July 2011 – June 2013 Biennial Legislative Session)*, will be used to provide support to districts that choose to implement the kindergarten assessment process.

- *Planning (2009 – 2010)*. More planning and gathering of input from Washington stakeholders is needed to ensure broader representation of stakeholder groups that reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of Washington State. This planning process also should gather additional input from ECE programs and providers and from school districts about how a statewide process could complement their local assessment processes and not duplicate them.

More planning and gathering of input from Washington stakeholders is needed to ensure broader representation of stakeholder groups that reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of Washington State.

During this 12-month planning period, a task force/council should oversee the development of a comprehensive plan for a statewide kindergarten assessment process. The Early Learning Advisory Council or another existing council, which includes and/or works with a wide array of stakeholders (including psychometric, cultural competency, and early learning experts; constituent groups such as parents, ECE providers, and teachers; representatives from diverse cultural and linguistic groups; and representatives from DEL, OSPI, and Thrive), could serve as an oversight body to a key group of stakeholders who are focused specifically on this planning effort. The task force/council could work with stakeholders from throughout the state to oversee the collection of input and decision-making regarding the following elements:

1. Deciding the purpose(s) and scope of the kindergarten assessment process
2. Selecting data collection tools and methods and data sources (e.g., children, parents, ECE providers)
3. Identifying funding sources and calculating projected implementation costs
4. Identifying a training plan and methods of implementation
5. Identifying data storage, analysis, and reporting methods
6. Developing a plan for how schools and/or districts will be selected to pilot the project.

OSPI, in collaboration with DEL and Thrive, could coordinate the recruitment of schools, distribution of materials, training of teachers and assessors, and collection and analysis of data from schools for the pilot.

- *Pilot (7/2010 – 6/2011)*. OSPI, in collaboration with DEL and Thrive, could hire a consultant or dedicate staff to oversee the kindergarten assessment pilot. The pilot should include large enough samples of districts (e.g., 20) and kindergarten children (e.g., 2,000) to be able to make reliable statements about the effectiveness of the assessment process for diverse student and school populations across the state. The pilot also should gather feedback from teachers, parents, and other key stakeholders about the implementation process and conduct a more detailed analysis of costs. A report that summarizes the results of the pilot phase should be shared with stakeholders and include recommendations for refining the kindergarten assessment process for the voluntary use phase.
- *Voluntary Use (7/2011 – 6/2013)*. During the two years of the voluntary use phase, OSPI, in collaboration with DEL and Thrive, could oversee the provision of technical support to districts that choose to implement the kindergarten assessment process. Information and results from the voluntary use phase will be used to guide decision-making for a time certain when schools districts must offer the assessment statewide.

The pilot should include a large enough sample of districts and kindergarten children to be able to make reliable statements about the effectiveness of the assessment process for diverse student and school populations across the state.

“There needs to be a lot more time for discussion and planning [in regard to a kindergarten assessment process]. You should not rush such an important process...It could take a year just to decide what is appropriate to measure in one domain.”

—A cultural competency expert

Information and results from the voluntary use phase will be used to guide decision-making for a time certain when schools districts must offer the assessment statewide.

“We need to have consensus and buy-in across the state on what we want children to know when they enter school so we can all work toward a shared goal, and so that funding can be focused on strategies focused on these outcomes.”

—A cultural competency expert

CONCLUSION



During future planning, it will be important to clarify goals and determine how stakeholder concerns could be addressed, so that a shared understanding of a statewide kindergarten assessment process can be established.

The Washington State Legislature’s request that DEL, OSPI, and Thrive work together to research and make recommendations to the Legislature about developing a kindergarten assessment process presents both challenges and opportunities. Designing a kindergarten assessment process is complex because there are many interrelated decisions to be made about its purpose(s), focus, methods, and implementation. However, with thoughtful consideration and planning, a kindergarten assessment process could provide reliable information about the skills, development, and competencies of the nearly 72,000 children entering kindergarten in Washington State each year. This information could be used in a variety of ways to support families, parents, schools, and communities in helping children succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

This report establishes a foundation for further planning for a statewide kindergarten assessment process in Washington State. It provides a summary of the literature on best practices in kindergarten assessment, a snapshot of current kindergarten assessment practices in schools across Washington, examples of kindergarten assessment processes in other states and countries, and priorities from a variety of stakeholders in Washington for a statewide kindergarten assessment process.

Additional planning and decision-making still need to be done. This planning needs to involve the many stakeholders who will be affected by a kindergarten assessment process as well as the information on best and current practices presented in this report. During this planning, it will be important to clarify goals and determine how stakeholder concerns could be addressed, so that a shared understanding of a statewide kindergarten assessment process can be established.

A statewide kindergarten assessment process could complement and strengthen what local schools are already doing.

Planning for a kindergarten assessment process also needs to take into account that the vast majority of schools in Washington State already have some type of kindergarten assessment process. However, because these processes tend to be narrow in scope and rely heavily on locally developed tools, they do not lend themselves to use for statewide summaries about what children know and are able to do when they enter kindergarten. A statewide kindergarten assessment process could complement and strengthen what local schools are already doing. For example, a statewide process could support the use of local kindergarten assessment processes that are more comprehensive, developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, inclusive of children with special needs, tied to children’s daily activities, supported by professional development, inclusive of families, and connected to specific, beneficial purposes.

Designing a statewide kindergarten assessment process that adheres to the best practices for assessment of young children and aligns with the priorities of Washington stakeholders is complex and difficult, but such a process could have far-reaching benefits for children in the state.

END NOTES



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APPENDIX A. WASHINGTON STATE KINDERGARTEN ASSESSMENT PROCESSES—ONLINE SURVEY SUMMARY



To inform the development of recommendations for a statewide kindergarten assessment process in Washington State, SRI International surveyed districts and schools about current kindergarten assessment processes in Washington. This document summarizes data from the online survey of districts and schools.

Data Collection

SRI International worked collaboratively with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to design and implement an online survey to gather information from districts and schools with kindergarten classrooms in Washington State. An invitation to complete the online survey was sent to principals of all elementary schools with kindergarten classrooms in the state ($N = 1,307$) and to all District Assessment Coordinators serving districts including schools with kindergarten classrooms ($N = 301$). The invitation was sent on September 25, 2008, and respondents were asked to complete the survey by October 8, 2008.

Survey Respondents

A total of 273 online surveys were completed by representatives from districts ($n = 25$) and schools ($n = 248$) in Washington State. In an effort to understand school-level kindergarten assessment processes currently in use, each district-level survey submitted was weighted to be representative of the number of schools with kindergarten classrooms in the district. If a school in that district also submitted a survey, that school was not included in the district weighting. Thus, the data obtained from the 273 completed online surveys provide information about assessment practices for 593 schools with kindergarten classrooms in Washington State. This represents roughly half (45%) of the total population of 1,307 schools with kindergarten classrooms in the state.

Four-fifths (80%) of schools represented in the sample reported conducting some form of schoolwide assessment process for children entering kindergarten. An additional 1% reported that although they do not currently conduct a schoolwide assessment of kindergarteners, they plan to do so in the near future. Nearly one-fifth (19%) of schools in the sample do not engage in a schoolwide assessment of entering kindergarten students.

Exhibit A1 presents the total number of respondents to the online survey and the number of respondents to the online survey who indicated that their district or school conducted a schoolwide assessment of entering kindergarten students, as well as their weighted sample sizes.

Exhibit A1. Survey Response Rates

	Respondents	Schools Represented	Percent of Schools Represented
Completed online survey	273	593	45
Conduct schoolwide assessment of entering kindergarten students	189	472	36

Kindergarten Assessment Practices

The data presented in the remainder of this appendix represent the 472 schools in the weighted sample that indicated that they administer a schoolwide kindergarten assessment.

Assessment tools used. Of the schools that perform a schoolwide assessment of children entering kindergarten, more than half (60%) reported using only one assessment tool, 29% reported using two assessment tools, and 10% used three assessment tools. The remaining 1% reported using more than three tools.

The most commonly used assessment tool was the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), used by more than half of the reporting schools (55%). Of those schools that reported using DIBELS, 39% use only that tool; the remaining 61% use DIBELS in combination with at least one other assessment tool. Nearly half of schools (47%) reported using at least one locally developed assessment tool. Of these locally developed assessment tools, 27% were developed by schools and their teachers; the remaining 20% were developed by a school district. Of those schools that use locally developed district tools, 59% use only that tool; the remaining 41% use at least one additional assessment tool as well. Of those schools that reported using tools locally developed by the school or teachers, 38% use only those tools; the remaining 62% use school- or teacher-developed tools in combination with other assessments.

Many fewer schools use a variety of additional standardized assessment tools, which include Read Well (5%), Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) (4%), and Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning (DIAL) (4%). All other assessment tools named were used by fewer than 3% of schools.

Purposes for assessing entering kindergarten students. Survey respondents were asked to identify the key purpose(s) of each assessment tool used as part of their schoolwide assessment processes from a list of options. Although some schools used multiple assessment tools with unique purposes, the information presented here is aggregated across assessment tools used for each school. This approach provides a picture of the key purposes for assessing kindergarten students at the school level.

In general, schools identified multiple purposes for conducting assessments of entering kindergarten students. Across schools, the average number of purposes identified for conducting a schoolwide assessment process was 4.5. As shown in Exhibit A2, nearly all schools cited conducting a kindergarten assessment to inform classroom instruction for individual students (96%). Other commonly cited purposes for assessment included to inform instruction at the classroom level (88%) and to inform parents of children's strengths and areas for growth (81%). Schools also use assessment information to screen for potential developmental delays (77%) and to inform planning for ongoing investment in early learning (60%). Additionally, 16% of schools wrote in an "other" purpose for conducting a schoolwide assessment that was not listed on the prepopulated list of options—to "balance classes" or to inform the placement of students in specific classrooms or instructional grouping. The remaining 8% of schools reported conducting kindergarten assessments for a variety of other nonspecified purposes.

Exhibit A2. Purposes of Assessment Tools

Purpose of Assessment*	Percent
Inform instruction for individual students	96
Inform instruction on classroom level	88
Inform parents of children's strengths and areas for growth	81
Identify potential developmental delays	77
Inform planning for ongoing investment in early learning	60
Support transition and alignment between ECE programs and K-12 schools	22
Other – Inform instructional grouping/placement	16
Other – Not specified by respondent	8

* More than one response option could be selected.

Areas of children's skills and development assessed. Respondents were asked to identify domains of children's development and skills that were assessed through their kindergarten entry assessment process from a list of options. Although some schools used multiple assessment tools, each potentially measuring different domains, the information presented here is aggregated across assessment tools used for each school. This approach provides a comprehensive picture of the domains measured during each school's assessment process.

As shown in Exhibit A3, nearly all (98%) of reporting schools measure some aspect(s) of children's language, communication, and literacy skills (e.g., children's use of language, reading, and writing skills, and ability to communicate). A bit more than three-fourths of schools (77%) currently assess entering kindergarteners' cognition and general knowledge (e.g., children's ability to think about and understand the world around them, including knowledge about people, place, and things, math concepts, and ways to solve problems using logic and what they already know). Only one-quarter of schools (25%) assessed children's physical health, well-being, and motor development (e.g., children's physical health and ability to participate in daily activities). Across schools, the least commonly assessed domains were approaches toward learning (18%) (e.g., children's approaches toward learning new skills, including being curious, persisting at tasks, being creative, paying attention, and thinking about what they have just learned) or social and emotional development (10%) (e.g., children's ability to handle their own emotions and have positive relationship at home, at school, and in the community).

Only 5% of schools with a kindergarten entry assessment process reported using a process that measured all five domains of children's development and skills. An additional 7% reported assessing four domains, while 24% assessed three, 43% assessed two, and 22% assessed one domain. The average number of domains measured by schools during a schoolwide assessment process was 2.3.

Exhibit A3. Domains Assessed by Schools

Domain*	Percent
Language, communication, and literacy	98
Cognition and general knowledge	77
Physical well-being, health, and/or motor development	25
Approaches toward learning	18
Social and emotional development	10

* More than one response option could be selected.

Characteristics of schoolwide assessment processes. Most (87%) of schools conducting a schoolwide kindergarten assessment process assessed more than 90% of the incoming kindergarten class. The remaining 13% of schools assessed at least half of the incoming kindergarten class.

For the majority of schools responding to the survey (85%), participation in the assessment process was not voluntary for families.

The majority of schools (82%) with a kindergarten entry assessment process indicated that they had not gathered parent or family input when selecting or designing the assessment process they currently use. Nearly one-fifth of schools (18%) reported that parent input was gathered during the assessment selection process.

Three-fourths of schools (75%) responding to the survey administered at least one assessment tool within the first month of school. A third of schools (33%) reported administering at least one assessment tool during kindergarten enrollment, before children begin school; 16% of schools reported administering at least one assessment tool later in the school year.

Eighty-five percent of schools indicated that kindergarten teachers conducted at least one of their schoolwide assessments of children. Sixty-three percent of schools indicated that at least one of their assessments was administered by another school staff person, and 41% reported that assessments were conducted by assessment specialists. Only 4% of schools reported that at least one of their assessments was completed by the child's parent. Nearly one-fifth of schools (17%) reported only teachers as participating in the assessment process, while nearly three-quarters (70%) reported using a combination of teachers, specialists, other school staff, and parents to administer the assessment process.

Nearly 70% of schools reported that at least one of the assessment tools currently in use was available only in English. Of the 33% of schools reporting using at least one assessment tool that was available in a language other than English, Spanish was by far the most commonly cited other language available (80%). Four percent of schools reported having assessment tools available in additional languages (e.g., French, Russian, Ukrainian).

More than half of the reporting schools (57%) indicated that they made accommodations for children with special needs during their schoolwide assessment process. Twenty-eight percent of schools made no special accommodations for children with special needs; an additional 13% of schools excluded children with special needs from the assessment process.

Nearly all schools (94%) reported that kindergarten assessment data were available at the individual student level. A bit more than three-quarters (77%) reported that data were available at the classroom level, and 71%

indicated that data were available for the school overall. Across schools, assessment results were shared with school teachers and principals (99%), parents (83%), and district staff (64%).

Summary and Conclusion

Representatives from nearly half of all schools with kindergarten classrooms in Washington State responded to an online survey requesting information on schoolwide kindergarten assessment processes currently in use. Eighty percent of represented schools currently conduct some form of assessment with entering kindergarten students.

Schools reported conducting a schoolwide assessment of kindergarteners for multiple purposes, the most commonly cited purposes including informing instruction (for individual students and at the classroom level) and informing parents of their children's strengths and areas for growth. Assessment processes currently used by Washington State schools responding to the online survey mostly measured only two areas of children's development and skills (e.g., language and cognition) and thus were not comprehensive in nature. Schools were least likely to measure children's social and emotional development with current assessment processes.

More than half of schools currently use only one assessment tool. More than half of reporting schools reported using DIBELS, either alone or as part of a multitool assessment process. Almost half of schools reported using unstandardized tools developed locally by districts, schools, and teachers to assess children. The vast majority of schools assessed all incoming kindergarten students at entry or within the first month of school. Most schoolwide assessment processes involved a combination of teachers and other people, including specialists and other school staff, in the assessment of children. Most schools reported that at least one assessment was available only in English, and a bit more than half of schools reported making accommodations for children with special needs during the assessment process. Participation in the assessment process is rarely voluntary.

This summary of kindergarten assessment practices currently under way in Washington State provides a context for thinking about how a statewide kindergarten assessment process could duplicate or augment common local practices.

APPENDIX B. STAKEHOLDER PRIORITIES FOR A STATEWIDE KINDERGARTEN ASSESSMENT PROCESS—ONLINE SURVEY SUMMARY



To inform the development of recommendations about a statewide kindergarten assessment process, SRI International surveyed a variety of stakeholders about their priorities for such a process in Washington State. This document summarizes data from the survey.

Data Collection

SRI International collaborated with the Department of Early Learning (DEL), the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), and Thrive by Five Washington to design and implement an online survey to gather information from a variety of Washington State stakeholders about their priorities for a statewide kindergarten assessment process. The online survey and an introductory presentation were posted in English and Spanish on the DEL website for anyone wishing to give input. Both were available during the last 2 weeks of October 2008.

The opportunity to participate in the survey was advertised through flyers posted at and distributed by schools, libraries, and other community-based organizations; announcements made at statewide conferences of early care and education (ECE) providers and a Tribal Congress meeting; letters to each of the federally recognized Washington Indian Tribes; e-mails to all schools, districts, and Educational Service Districts (ESDs); e-mails to Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) agencies, Head Start programs, and licensed home child care providers, Infant and Toddler Early Intervention Program (ITEIP) contractors, and participants in electronic mailing lists; and e-mails to staff and members of organizations concerned with early childhood and school readiness issues. All announcements encouraged people to forward information about the presentation and online survey to others they thought might be interested in participating in the process. In addition, all the e-mails sent to schools and other agency staff encouraged them to forward the survey announcements and flyers to parents.

In addition to the survey, SRI gathered input through in-person and phone conversations. These included a conference call with early learning and assessment experts, a conference call with cultural competency experts, a discussion with ECE providers at the statewide Washington Association for the Education of Young Children (WAEYC) meeting, and a number for people to call to provide feedback to DEL interviewers. Only data collected through the online survey are reported here.

Survey Respondents

A total of 1,476 Washington State stakeholders completed the online survey, 7 of whom completed the Spanish version. An impressive 90% of stakeholders ($n = 1,349$) provided complete answers to all survey items; 9% ($n = 127$) submitted incomplete surveys (i.e., skipped some survey items). Exhibit B20 at the end of this report provides for each survey item the number of respondents who answered the item, selected *Not applicable; there should not be a statewide kindergarten assessment process*, and left the item blank (i.e., *Missing*). Most of the

percentages provided in this appendix were calculated excluding *Not applicable; there should not be a statewide kindergarten assessment process* and missing responses.¹

Surveys were completed by at least one stakeholder in each of Washington State’s 39 counties. In addition, surveys were completed by at least one representative of 12 of the state’s 29 federally recognized tribes. Even though each county and some of the Washington Indian Tribes are represented in the data, the priorities of survey respondents described here should not be viewed as representative of all constituents in the state or of members of Washington Indian Tribes because participants were invited to complete the survey through targeted and purposive outreach strategies and were not randomly sampled from the population at large. Additionally, the percentages presented for Washington Indian Tribe representatives reflect a smaller number of individuals compared with other stakeholder groups.

Exhibit B1 presents the percentages and numbers of respondents to the online survey, by stakeholder group. The most respondents were in the groups of school principals, teachers, and staff; ECE providers and program directors; and parents and other caregivers. Common stakeholders in the *Other* category were health professionals, family educators and service providers, nonprofit agency staff, and social workers.

Exhibit B1. Survey Respondents, by Stakeholder Group

Stakeholder Group	Percent	Number
School principals, teachers, and staff	27	392
ECE providers and program directors	24	350
Parents and other relative caregivers	22	327
Early learning and assessment experts, including researchers, policy-makers, and professors	13	186
ESD and school district administrators and staff	8	112
Washington Indian Tribe representatives	2	30
Other	5	79
Total	100	1,476

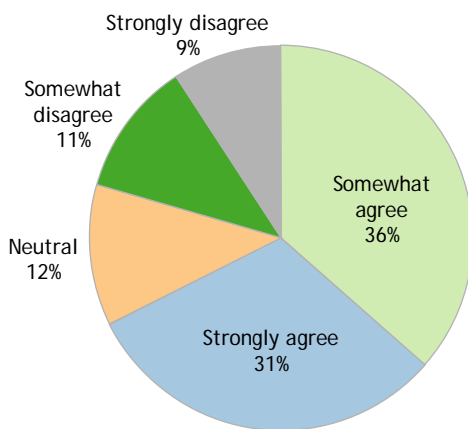
Forty-four percent of survey respondents reported that they either currently work with or provide care for at least one child who speaks a language other than English as his or her primary language. Of these, most were school or ECE staff. Fifty-five percent of respondents reported that they either currently work with or provide care for at least one child with a disability or other special need. Most of them were school or ECE staff or representatives from Washington Indian Tribes.

¹ Individuals who indicated that they strongly or somewhat disagree with the idea of developing a kindergarten assessment process were given the option to answer subsequent survey questions substantively or to indicate *Not applicable; there should not be a statewide kindergarten assessment process*. These respondents were likely to indicate *Not applicable; there should not be a statewide kindergarten assessment process* on the majority, but not all, of subsequent survey items. Additionally, individuals who indicated that they strongly or somewhat agree with the idea of developing a statewide kindergarten assessment process sometimes selected *Not applicable; there should not be a statewide kindergarten assessment process* on subsequent questions. For these reasons, percentages provided in this report were calculated excluding “not applicable” and missing responses.

Priorities for a Kindergarten Assessment Process

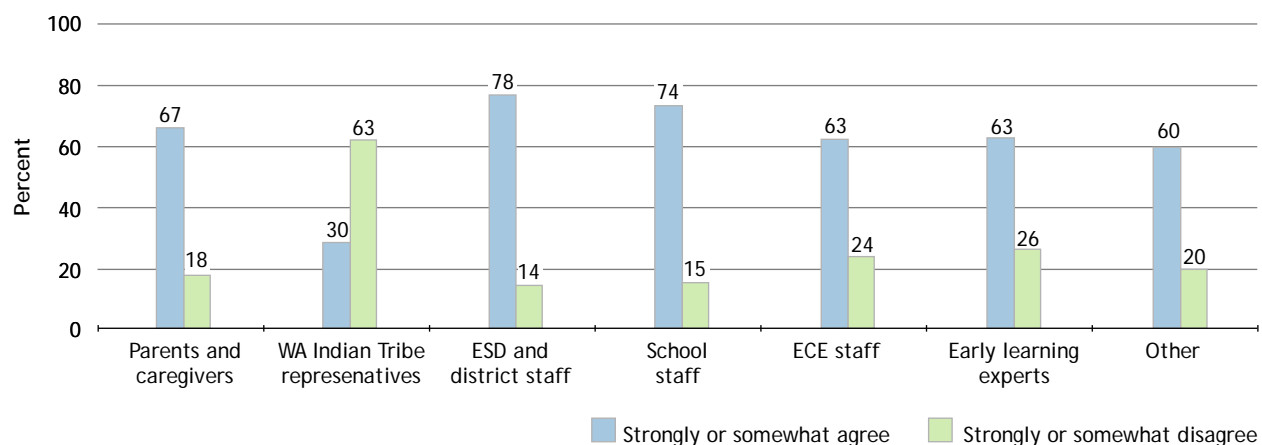
Agreement with the idea of a statewide kindergarten assessment process. Stakeholders in Washington State had diverse opinions about the idea of developing a statewide kindergarten assessment process. The majority, however, favored the idea. Two-thirds (67%) of respondents reported that they strongly or moderately agree with the idea (Exhibit B2). In contrast, a large minority (20%) of respondents indicated that they strongly or moderately disagree with the idea.

Exhibit B2. Stakeholder Agreement with the Idea of Developing a Statewide Kindergarten Assessment Process, Overall



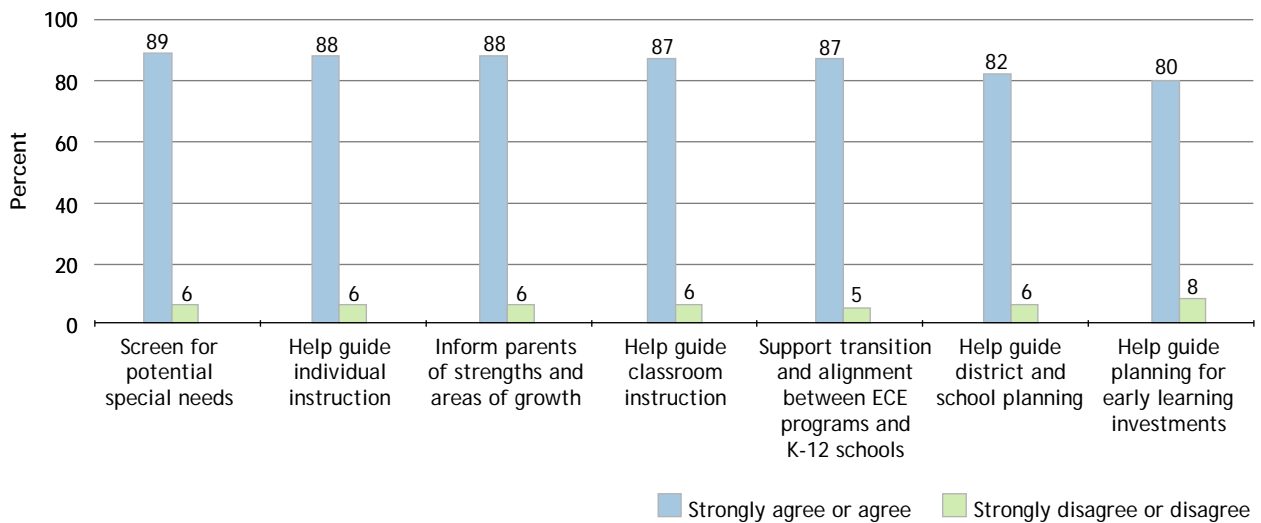
Support for developing a statewide kindergarten assessment process varies by stakeholder group. Somewhat higher percentages of ESD and district staff (78%) and school personnel (74%) agree with the idea of developing a statewide kindergarten assessment process, compared with other stakeholder groups (Exhibit B3). In contrast, less than one-third (30%) of Washington Indian Tribe respondents indicated that they strongly or moderately agree with the idea.

Exhibit B3. Agreement and Disagreement with the Idea of Developing a Statewide Kindergarten Assessment Process, by Stakeholder Group



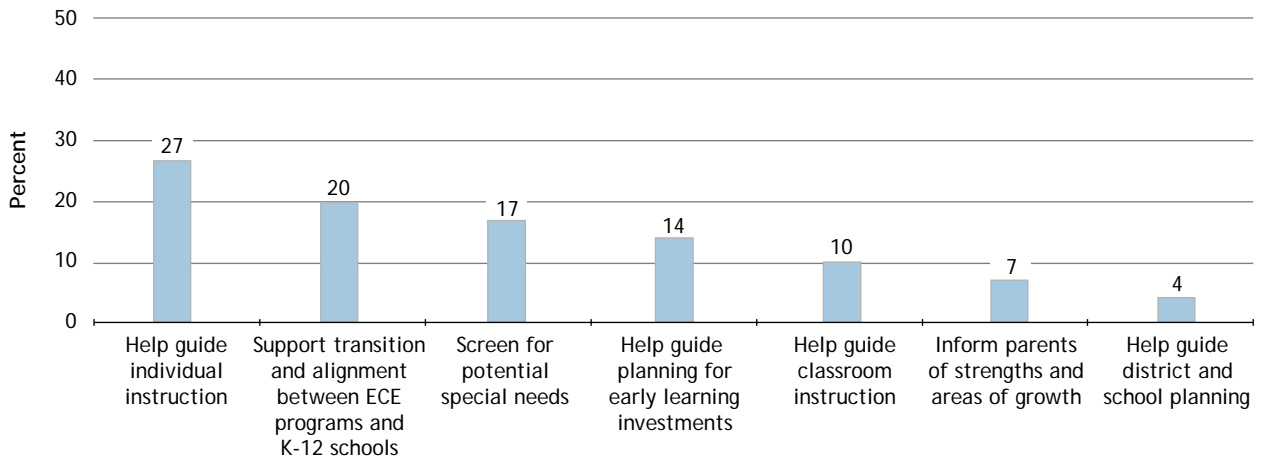
Purposes of assessment. Information gathered through a kindergarten assessment process can be used for a number of purposes. Survey respondents were asked how strongly they agree with the appropriateness of seven possible purposes for a statewide process in Washington. Exhibit B4 shows the percentage of respondents who reported they strongly agree or agree with the percentage who strongly disagree or disagree with each purpose listed in the survey. In general, respondents strongly agree or agree with most of the seven purposes. Support was slightly lower for using a statewide kindergarten assessment to help guide district and school planning and planning for statewide investments in early learning.

Exhibit B4. Stakeholder Agreement and Disagreement with Purposes of Assessment, Overall



Respondents were then asked to identify which of the seven purposes they considered the most important for a statewide kindergarten assessment process. The purpose identified as most important was to help guide instruction for individual students, with 27% of all respondents choosing this option (Exhibit B5). The purposes least commonly identified as most important were to inform parents of children’s strengths and areas for growth (7%) and to help guide district and school planning (4%).

Exhibit B5. Most Important Purpose of Assessment Identified by Stakeholders, Overall



For most stakeholder groups (Exhibit B6), the most important purpose for a statewide kindergarten assessment process was to guide instruction for individual students. However, ECE staff identified supporting the transition and alignment between ECE programs and K-12 schools as the most important purpose, and representatives from Washington Indian Tribes identified screening as the most important purpose for conducting an assessment process. For the most part, helping to guide planning at the district or school level was least often identified as the most important purpose across all stakeholder groups.

Exhibit B6. Most Important Purpose of Assessment, by Stakeholder Group

Purpose	Percent Who Rated Purpose as Most Important						
	Parents/ Caregivers	WA Indian Tribe Representatives	ESD/ District Staff	School Staff	ECE Staff	Experts	Other
Help guide individual instruction	36	26	32	23	21	30	26
Help guide classroom instruction	12	15	10	15	7	6	6
Screen for potential special needs	16	32	12	20	22	10	13
Inform parents of strengths and areas of growth	10	0	5	6	4	10	15
Support transition and alignment between ECE programs and K-12 schools	15	26	19	17	30	20	24
Help guide district and school planning	2	0	7	3	4	6	7
Help guide planning for early learning investments statewide	9	11	16	16	13	19	9

Areas of children’s skills and development to be assessed. Respondents were asked to indicate the importance of including measures of five areas of children’s skills and development in a statewide kindergarten assessment process (Exhibit B7). Generally, respondents thought that all five areas are very or somewhat important to include in a statewide kindergarten assessment process. However, respondents believed it was particularly (i.e., very) important to include social and emotional development (71%) and language, communication, and literacy (68%) in a statewide kindergarten assessment process.

Exhibit B7. Stakeholder Perceptions of Importance of Measuring Specific Areas of Development, Overall

Area	Percent				
	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Neutral	Not Very Important	Not at All Important
Social and emotional development	71	21	5	1	1
Language, communication, and literacy	68	24	5	1	1
Physical well-being, health, and/or motor development	56	33	8	2	1
Cognition and general knowledge	56	32	8	2	1
Approaches toward learning	55	33	8	3	1

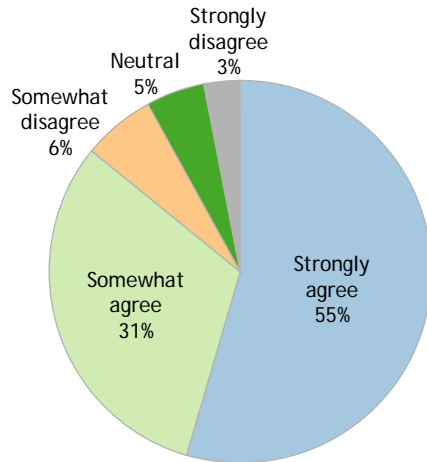
Views on the importance of measuring various areas of children’s development varied by stakeholder group (Exhibit B8). Higher percentages of stakeholders in all groups except ESD and district staff rated aspects of children’s social and emotional development as very important to measure, compared with other areas of development. Higher percentages of ESD and district staff (66%) rated language, communication, and literacy skills and cognition and general knowledge as very important to measure as part of a statewide kindergarten assessment process, compared with other areas of children’s skills and development.

Exhibit B8. Perceptions of Importance of Measuring Specific Areas of Development, Perceptions of Stakeholder Group

Area	Percent of Respondents Who Rated Area as Very Important						
	Parents/ Caregivers	WA Indian Tribe Representatives	ESD/ District Staff	School Staff	ECE Staff	Experts	Other
Social and emotional development	58	58	64	68	83	83	83
Language, communication, and literacy	55	30	66	62	52	51	69
Physical well-being, health, and/or motor development	47	50	58	54	63	63	64
Cognition and general knowledge	55	30	66	62	52	51	50
Approaches toward learning	55	37	50	49	60	61	63

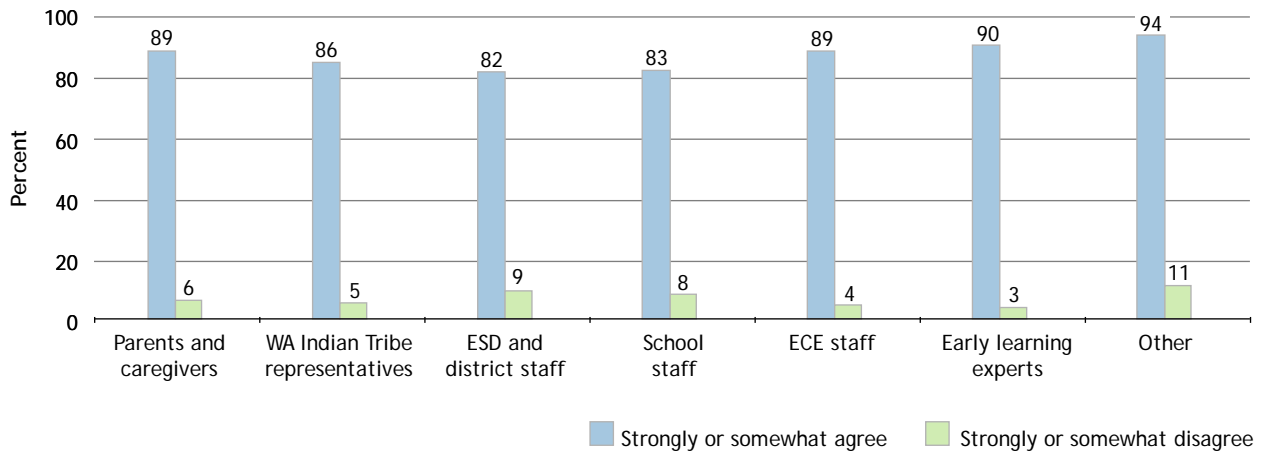
As shown in Exhibit B9, the vast majority of respondents (86%) strongly or moderately agree that a statewide kindergarten assessment process should be comprehensive—that it should gather information on all five areas of children’s skills and development listed in Exhibits B7 and B8. Only 9% of respondents reported that they strongly or somewhat disagree with the idea of a comprehensive assessment process.

Exhibit B9. Stakeholder Agreement with a Comprehensive Kindergarten Assessment Process, Overall



Consensus existed among most stakeholder groups with the idea that a statewide kindergarten assessment process should be comprehensive (Exhibit B10).

Exhibit B10. Agreement with a Comprehensive Kindergarten Assessment Process, by Stakeholder Group



Approaches to implementation of a kindergarten assessment process statewide. Survey respondents were asked how strongly they agree with statements describing four potential approaches to implementing a statewide kindergarten assessment process that varied in degree of choice and standardization across schools. Exhibit B11 compares the percentage of respondents who reported that they strongly or moderately agree with the percentage who strongly or moderately disagree with the implementation approaches listed in the survey. In general, there was an overall desire for some standardization of approach, such as using an assessment process that provides options from a specified list (65%), requiring schools to use processes that meet specified criteria (54%), or stipulating using

the same tools and methods for all districts (54%). Fewer respondents indicated that they strongly or moderately agree (42%) that all decisions about a kindergarten assessment process should be made by individual districts with technical assistance from the state or others.

Exhibit B11. Stakeholder Agreement with Potential Implementation Approaches, Overall

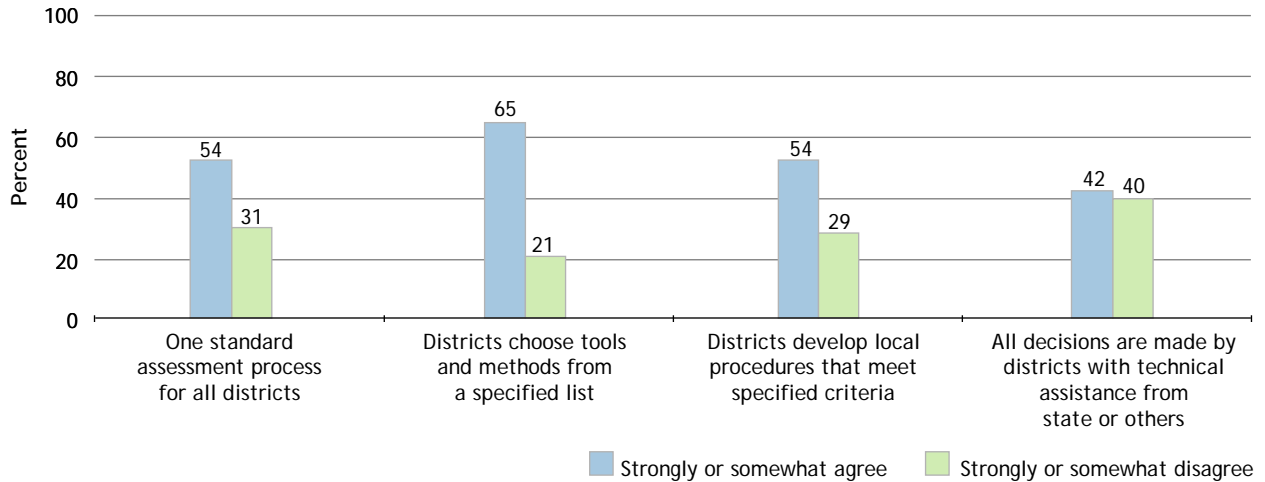


Exhibit B12 shows the percentage of respondents in each stakeholder group who reported that they strongly or moderately agree with each of the four potential approaches to implementing a statewide process. All but one of the stakeholder groups thought districts should be allowed to choose tools and methods from a specified list. Representatives from Washington Indian Tribes indicated that they strongly or moderately agree with a process in which districts are able to develop local procedures that meet a specified set of criteria or in which all decisions are made by individual districts with technical assistance. Washington Indian Tribe representatives also were the least supportive of the implementation approach of all districts using one standard assessment process. Other stakeholder groups were least supportive of a process that allowed all decisions to be made by districts or schools with technical assistance from the state or others.

Exhibit B12. Agreement with Potential Implementation Approaches, by Stakeholder Group

Approach	Percent of Respondents Who Strongly or Moderately Agree						
	Parents/ Caregivers	WA Indian Tribe Representatives	ESD/ District Staff	School Staff	ECE Staff	Experts	Other
One standard assessment process for all districts	58	29	58	58	51	46	51
Districts choose tools and methods from a specified list	65	38	68	68	62	66	62
Districts develop local procedures that meet specified criteria	54	57	51	53	57	50	62
All decisions are made by districts with technical assistance from state or others	41	50	37	43	44	36	39

Inclusion of parent input. Respondents were asked whether they agree that parent input must be included as an information source in a kindergarten assessment process. The majority of respondents (87%) strongly or moderately agree with the assertion that a statewide kindergarten assessment process in Washington State must include information gathered from parents (Exhibit B13). Only 6% of respondents reported that they strongly or moderately disagree that information must be gathered from parents. Furthermore, the majority of respondents in all stakeholder groups were in favor of gathering information from parents and other caregivers as part of an assessment process (Exhibit B14).

Exhibit B13. Agreement with Necessity of Including Parent Input, Overall

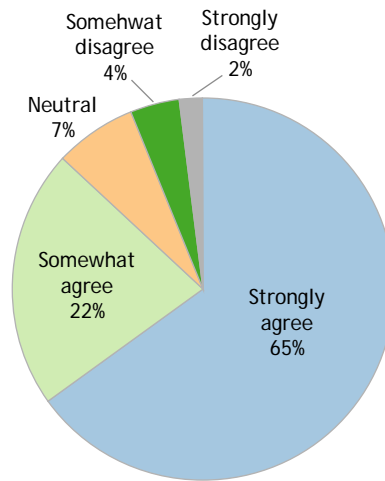
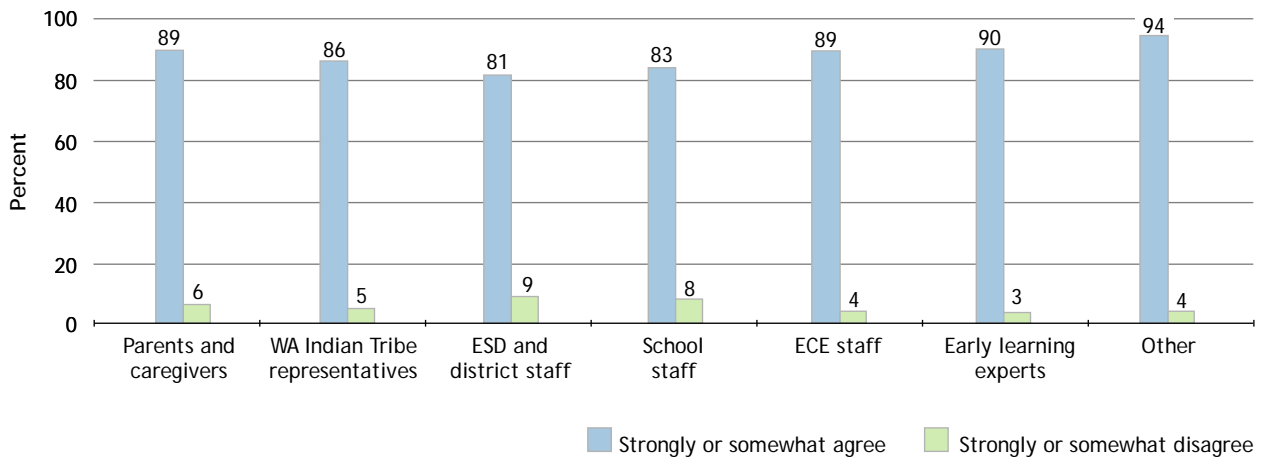


Exhibit B14. Agreement with Necessity of Including Parent Input, by Stakeholder Group



Approaches to collecting information on children’s skills and development. Information on children’s skills and development can be collected by using a variety of approaches. Some of these approaches are direct assessments, with teachers or trained assessors asking children to perform standardized tasks and then recording the results. Other approaches involve having teachers or others who know the children well gather information on their skills and development by observing them perform tasks in their natural settings and recording the results by using checklists, questionnaires, and rating scales and, in some cases, rating samples of children’s work. Respondents were asked how strongly they agree with three possible approaches for collecting information on what children know and are able to do. Exhibit B15 compares the percentage of respondents who indicated they strongly or moderately agree with the percentage who strongly or moderately disagree with the information collection approaches listed in the survey. Generally, respondents held favorable opinions of all three approaches.

Exhibit B15. Agreement with Approaches to Collection of Information, Overall

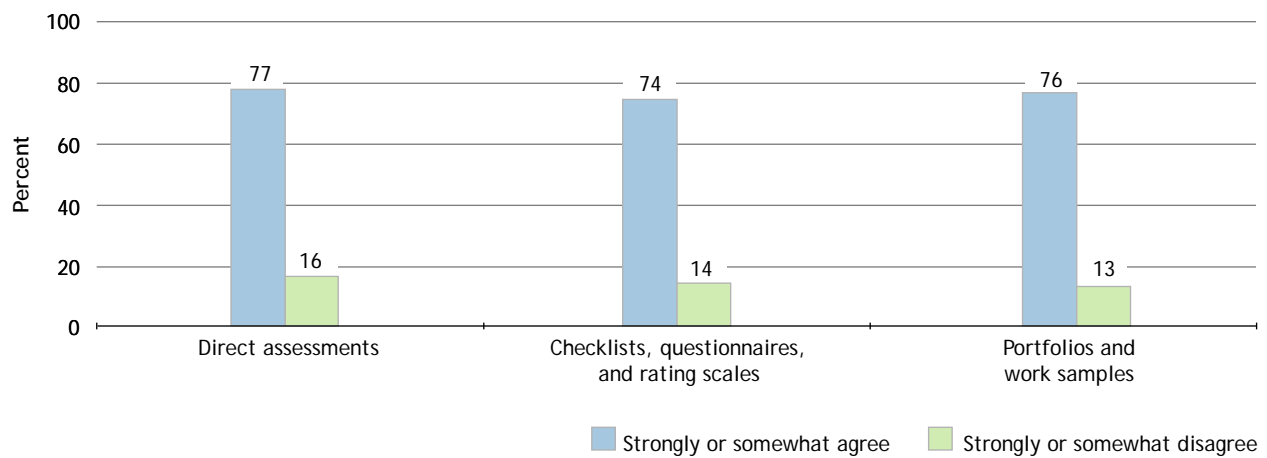


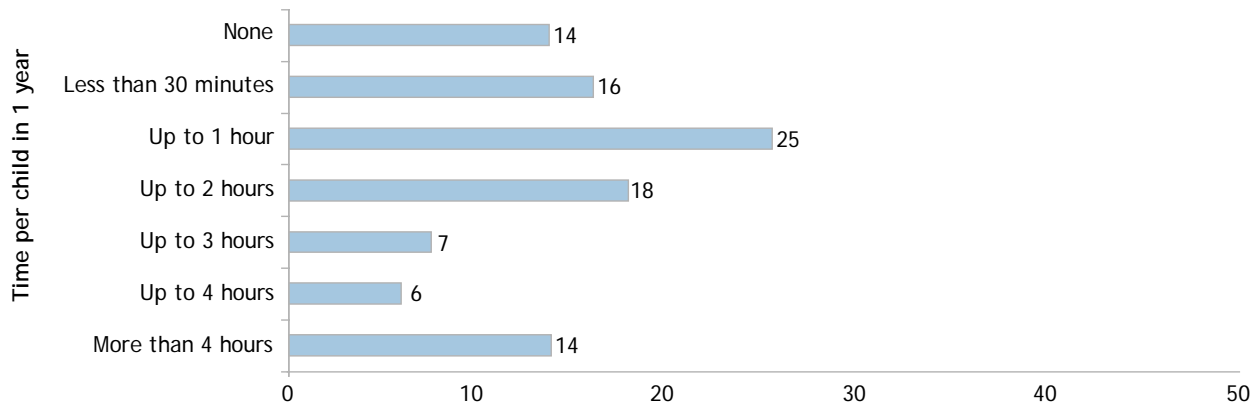
Exhibit B16 shows the percentage of respondents from different stakeholder groups who indicated that they strongly or moderately agree with each of three potential approaches to collecting assessment information. Differences were evident among stakeholder groups; for example, parents (80%), ESD and district staff (82%), and school staff (91%) favored using direct assessments, compared with other approaches for collecting information on children. This differed from the priorities of Washington Indian Tribe representatives (68%), ECE staff (82%), and early learning experts (82%), who favored collecting information on children’s skills and development by using portfolios and work samples.

Exhibit B16. Agreement with Data Collection Approaches, by Stakeholder Group

Approach	Percent of Respondents Who Strongly or Moderately Agree						
	Parents/ Caregivers	WA Indian Tribe Representatives	ESD/ District Staff	School Staff	ECE Staff	Experts	Other
Direct assessments	80	62	82	91	63	63	73
Checklists, questionnaires, and rating scales	76	62	72	73	75	78	65
Portfolios and work samples	75	68	73	69	82	82	74

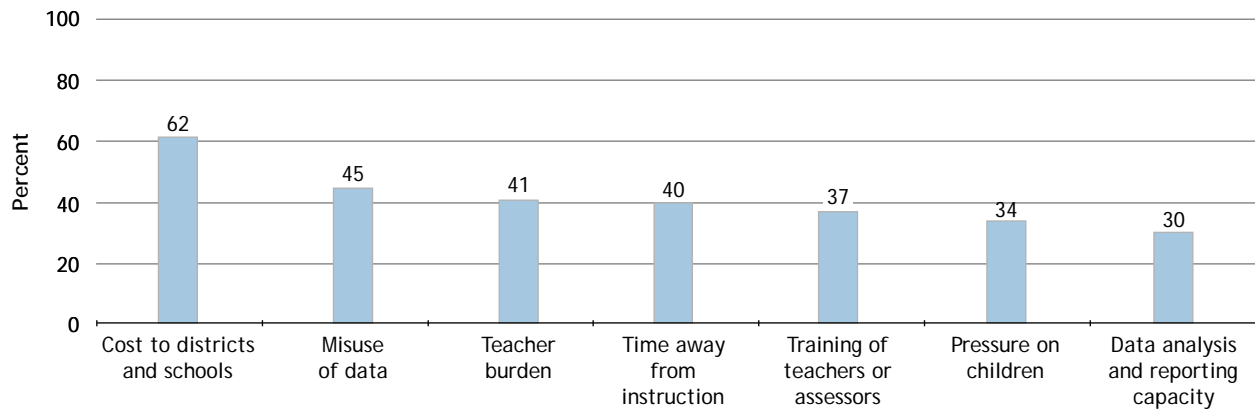
Instructional time willing to invest in the assessment process. Respondents varied widely in the amount of instructional time they are willing to invest in a kindergarten assessment process. As shown in Exhibit B17, 25% of respondents indicated they would invest up to 1 hour of instructional time per child each year for assessment, and 45% indicated a willingness to invest more than 1 hour of time. Some respondents were less willing to spend instructional time on a kindergarten assessment, with 16% wanting to spend less than 30 minutes per child and 14% not wanting to invest any instructional time on the assessment. Seventy-three percent of those not wanting to invest any time in a process also indicated that they strongly disagree with the idea of a statewide kindergarten assessment process.

Exhibit B17. Instructional Time Stakeholders Are Willing to Invest, Overall



Potential challenges. Respondents also were asked how significant a challenge to implementing a statewide kindergarten assessment process they believed seven issues might be (Exhibit B18). The majority of respondents (62%) indicated that cost to schools and districts is a very significant implementation challenge. More than two-fifths of respondents indicated that potential misuse of data (45%), teacher burden (41%), and time away from classroom instruction (40%) might be very significant implementation challenges.

Exhibit B18. Challenges Anticipated by Stakeholders to Be Very Significant, Overall



Respondents in all stakeholder groups identified cost to schools and districts as a very significant challenge (Exhibit B19). For early learning experts, ECE staff, and representatives from Washington Indian Tribes, potential misuse of data is also a significant anticipated challenge. Representatives from Washington Indian Tribes also rated pressure on children as a very significant anticipated challenge.

Exhibit B19. Potential Implementation Challenges, by Stakeholder Group

Challenge	Percent of Respondents Who Rated Challenge as Very Significant						
	Parents/ Caregivers	WA Indian Tribe Representatives	ESD/ District Staff	School Staff	ECE Staff	Experts	Other
Cost to districts and schools	58	71	71	70	59	53	60
Training of teachers or assessors	33	46	37	35	39	43	37
Misuse of data	39	71	45	35	53	52	50
Data analysis and reporting capacity	27	64	29	26	35	35	25
Time away from instruction	27	37	39	56	39	31	32
Teacher burden	33	46	37	54	40	35	38
Pressure on children	30	68	22	27	41	39	36

Additional planning needed. Respondents were asked how much time they think is needed for dialogue between the state and stakeholder groups about a statewide kindergarten assessment before piloting one. A little more than half (52%) reported that at least 6 to 12 months of planning time is needed, and an additional 35% reported that more than a year of planning and dialogue is necessary. Seventeen percent of respondents believed less than 6 months is needed to plan and dialogue.

Respondents also were asked whether they would like to be personally involved in the next steps of dialogue about a statewide kindergarten assessment process. Forty-four percent indicated that they would like to be personally involved and submitted their contact information; this included representation from all stakeholder groups. Early learning experts, ESD or district staff, and representatives from Washington Indian Tribes were more likely to indicate a desire for further involvement than other stakeholder groups.

Finally, respondents were asked whether they were interested in having their school or district participate in a pilot of a statewide kindergarten assessment process. Thirty-seven percent of survey respondents indicated that they would be interested and submitted their school's or district's name.

Summary and Conclusion

Stakeholders from each of Washington State's 39 counties and 12 of the 29 federally recognized Washington Indian Tribes completed an online survey asking about their priorities for developing a statewide kindergarten assessment process.

Stakeholders in Washington have diverse opinions about the development of a statewide kindergarten assessment process. Whereas the majority of respondents supported the idea, 21% did not. Respondents regarded most of the purposes listed in the survey as appropriate for an assessment process. As a whole, the respondents most commonly cited guiding instruction for individual students as the most important purpose, followed by supporting transition and alignment between ECE programs and K-12 schools and screening children for potential developmental delays and other special needs. ECE staff, however identified supporting the transition between ECE programs and K-12 schools as the most important purpose, and representatives from Washington Indian Tribes indicated that screening children for potential delays and other special needs was the most important purpose for conducting a statewide assessment process.

The majority of respondents in all stakeholder groups believed the process should be comprehensive and capture information on all five areas of children's skills and development, but that social and emotional development and language, communication, and literacy are of utmost importance. Stakeholders except ESD and district staff rated aspects of children's social and emotional development as more important to measure, compared with other areas of development. ESD and district staff more often rated language, communication, and literacy skills and cognition and general knowledge as very important to measure.

In general, stakeholders agree with having some level of standardization in the assessment implementation approach. Most respondents support the idea of using an assessment implementation process that requires districts to choose tools and methods from a specified list of options and disagree with a process that requires all decisions to be made by individual districts. Representatives from Washington Indian Tribes disfavored using one standard assessment implementation process more than other stakeholder groups.

The majority of stakeholders believed that a kindergarten assessment process must include information gathered from parents and caregivers. Similarly, respondents held favorable opinions of multiple approaches to collecting information on children's skills and development, including the use of direct assessments; checklists, questionnaires, and rating scales; and portfolios and work samples. School staff most strongly agree with the use of direct assessments, whereas ECE staff, early learning experts, and representatives from Washington Indian Tribes agree less with their use. Opinions varied widely on the amount of instructional time stakeholders are willing to invest in conducting a statewide kindergarten assessment process: two-fifths were willing to invest up to 1 hour per child per year; slightly more were willing to invest more than 1 hour.

Respondents also identified multiple challenges they believe might be very significant to implementing a statewide kindergarten assessment process, including cost to schools and districts, potential misuse of data, teacher burden, time away from instruction, and training of teachers or assessors. Stakeholders from all groups indicated cost to schools and districts as a very significant challenge. For early learning experts, ECE staff, and representatives from Washington Indian Tribes, potential misuse of data also was anticipated to be a very significant challenge. Representatives from Washington Indian Tribes also anticipated pressure on children as a very significant challenge.

Regarding further planning, the vast majority of respondents indicated that more than 6 months and perhaps more than a year of planning time is needed for dialogue between the state and stakeholder groups before an assessment process is piloted. Also, almost half of respondents were interested in personally participating in this planning process, and more than a third were interested in having their schools or districts participate in a pilot kindergarten assessment process.

In conclusion, both variation and consensus exist for various aspects of a kindergarten assessment process among Washington State’s stakeholders. The results of this survey provide a context for making decisions about next steps in developing a process. They suggest areas in which support for certain decisions may already be sufficient (e.g., including parents in the process, conducting a comprehensive assessment process), as well as areas where further dialogue and consensus building may be necessary (such as, purpose(s), time to invest in the process).

Exhibit B20. Stakeholder Survey Response Rates, by Item (N = 1,476)

Survey Item	Number of Responses		
	Answered	Not Applicable	Missing
Respondent characteristics			
County of residence	1,476	-	-
Respondent type (i.e., stakeholder group)	1,476	-	-
Work with or care for children who speak a language other than English as primary language	1,476	-	-
Work with or care for children with disabilities or other special needs	1,476	-	-
Idea of developing a statewide kindergarten assessment process			
Agree with idea of developing a statewide process	1,476	-	-
Purposes for a statewide kindergarten assessment process			
Help guide instruction for individual students	1,357	77	42
Help guide instruction at classroom level	1,357	77	42
Screen children for potential developmental delays or other special needs	1,360	74	42
Inform parents of children’s strengths and areas for growth	1,359	75	42
Help guide planning for ongoing investment in early learning at the state level	1,357	77	42
Help guide planning at the district or school level	1,356	78	42
Support transition and alignment between ECE programs and K-12 schools	1,354	80	42
Most important purpose for a statewide kindergarten assessment process			
Most important purpose	1,304	121	51
Domains to be measured in a kindergarten assessment process			
Physical well-being, health, and/or motor development	1,274	134	68
Social and emotional development	1,275	133	68
Approaches toward learning	1,282	126	68
Cognition and general knowledge	1,282	126	68
Language, communication, and literacy	1,285	123	68

Exhibit B20. Response Rates, by Item (Concluded)

Survey Item	Number of Responses		
	Answered	Not Applicable	Missing
Comprehensiveness of assessment process			
Assessment process MUST be comprehensive	1,269	139	68
Parent input			
Assessment process MUST include information gathered from parents	1,275	115	86
Approaches to implementing a statewide kindergarten assessment process			
One standard assessment process for all districts (i.e., the same process and set of tools and methods)	1,254	136	86
Districts choose tools and methods from a specified list (i.e., choose options from approved menus)	1,261	129	86
Districts develop local procedures that meet a specified set of criteria	1,262	128	86
All decisions for kindergarten assessment processes are made by individual districts with technical assistance provided by the state or others	1,261	129	86
Approaches to collecting assessment information			
Direct assessments in which teachers or trained assessors ask children to perform standardized tasks and then record the results	1,243	132	101
Checklists, questionnaires, and rating scales	1,248	127	101
Portfolios and work samples	1,251	124	101
Time willing to invest in statewide kindergarten assessment process			
Time willing to invest	1,170	185	121
Challenges to implementing a statewide kindergarten assessment process			
Cost to schools and districts	1,355	-	121
Training of teachers or assessors	1,351	-	125
How data may be misused	1,352	-	124
Ability to analyze and report the data	1,347	-	129
Time away from classroom instruction	1,351	-	125
Teacher burden	1,353	-	123
Pressure on children	1,355	-	121
Other	306	-	1,170
Planning and piloting			
Time for dialogue between state and stakeholders	1,190	164	122
Interested in being personally involved in planning	1,354	-	122
Interested in having school/district participate in pilot	1,349	-	127