



Comprehensive Early Childhood Assessment Systems: Looking Back, Looking Around, Looking Ahead

Building State Education Capacity to Implement and Sustain Comprehensive Early Childhood Assessment Systems

Tom Schultz, Council of Chief State School Officers – September 16, 2013

I. Looking Back: Are we: (a) making progress, (b) simply recycling our position statements, or (c) seeing our worst nightmares comes to pass?

Take 1: We Know Much, Much More about Young Children and Early Childhood Programs

- How children are progressing, birth through 3rd grade.
- How early childhood programs generate short-term and long-term outcomes.
- How curricula, workforce characteristics & teaching practices influence child outcomes.

But:

- Should we expect sustained/long-term outcomes from early childhood programs?
- Are we learning enough about what works for whom under what conditions?

Take 2: States Leading the Way

- States have Birth-5 early learning guidelines and are refining them to align with Common Core Standards and new research.
- Expanded efforts to assess and improve program quality via QRIS efforts and use of CLASS assessment in program monitoring.
- Expansion of Kindergarten Entry Assessment efforts to create a baseline picture of all young children.
- Longitudinal data systems, inclusive of early childhood data, allow tracking children from early childhood to school.
- Flagship local programs using data to drive/guide continuous improvement efforts.

But:

- NIEER yearbook showing losing ground on some state PreK quality indicators, including program monitoring efforts.
- QRIS initiatives may not be measuring indicators that enhance children's progress.

Take 3 – Evolution of Federal Policy

- NCLB - Raised awareness of achievement gaps/shortfalls, importance of high expectations for all students and tangible consequences for failing schools.
 - Expanded awareness of technical aspects of reporting assessment data (minimum group size, confidence intervals, year-to-year variability).
 - But problems included Adequate Yearly Progress metric, variability in state standards, lack of success with mandated models for helping failing schools.
 - New accountability strategy includes common standards, improved assessments, progress metrics, and more flexibility in school turnaround strategies.
- Head Start National Reporting System – Lack of clarity on how results will be used; limited focus on assessments; lack of ownership by program leaders led to demise; replaced by local programs defining/assessing progress towards school readiness goals and Designation Renewal System based on CLASS assessments.

- OSEP Child Outcomes/Reporting – Implementation of a large-scale child assessment data system without major backlash.
- Optimistic conclusion is we are learning from experience and improving policy based on evidence/feedback.

But:

- Fast-track mandate to use student assessment data to evaluate teachers & administrators is questionable and problematic.
- Child care, Head Start, PreK, special education & Kg.-3rd still have largely separate standards, assessments, and data & accountability efforts.

II. Looking Around: 3 Big Challenges

Implementation Challenges: Overloading Teachers

- We have more standards than teachers can possibly observe, assess or incorporate into curricula.
- Teachers have too many assessment mandates: KEAs & Grade Level Reading, & RTI & Teacher-Evaluation.
- What guidance can we offer to teachers on what to do when assessment data reveal what we know they will reveal?
 - Huge achievement disparities.
 - Wide variability of knowledge, skills, abilities among children in most classrooms.

Technical Challenges: Assessing Dual Language Learners

- Assessing children in two languages takes twice as long.
- How do we analyze, report, understand and use data on how children are progressing in skills, knowledge and capabilities in two languages?

Policy Challenges: Accountability for Child Outcomes

- We need to create a climate of urgency and collective accountability to move the needle on early achievement gaps and shortfalls.
- But high stakes outcomes-based accountability is very hard to implement in early childhood classrooms/programs.
- In particular, outcomes-based accountability efforts make it hard to build a climate of curiosity, disciplined inquiry, collaboration and innovation among educators in studying and using assessment data.

III. Looking Ahead: 3 Hopes/Challenges - *Outcomes*-based improvement/accountability is an extremely compelling idea. It's almost impossible to imagine anything better than studying data on outcomes and quality measure as a pathway to improvement. And it is unlikely that we will change course in policy. If so, can states:

- **Develop a “less is more” version of standards & assessments?**
- **Focus on building local program/school/teacher capacity for using assessment data for continuous improvement and a culture of “internal accountability”?**
- **Use the Administration’s PreK Initiative to define a next generation state-federal partnership in program evaluation, continuous improvement and accountability?**