Accountability in Early Childhood Education

NCSL 2007 Annual Meeting

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Columbia University & Yale University

Dr. Thomas Schultz
The Pew Charitable Trusts
Overview

- **Part I: Background**
- **Part II: Key Challenges**
- **Part III: Proposed System Design**
- **Part IV: Action Steps**
Part I:

Background
Origins

- Conceived by The Pew Charitable Trusts as part of their Advancing Quality Pre-K For All initiative.

- Additional funding from the Foundation for Child Development and the Joyce Foundation.


- Presentation reflects progress-to-date.
Impetus

• Increased attention to early learning
• New state leadership efforts:
  – Systems of early childhood services
  – Funding specific programs
  – Oversight and improvement of local agencies
  – Building P-21 and PK-3 continuum
• Accountability movement
• New interest in child and program data
Task Force Members

• Dr. Sharon Lynn Kagan, Chair
• Dr. Eugene Garcia, Vice-Chair

– Dr. W. Steven Barnett
– Ms. Barbara Bowman
– Dr. Mary Beth Bruder
– Dr. Lindy Buch
– Dr. Maryann Santos de Barona
– Ms. Harriet Dichter

– Mr. Mark Friedman
– Dr. Jacqueline Jones
– Dr. Joan Lombardi
– Dr. Samuel Meisels
– Ms. Marsha Moore
– Dr. Robert Pianta
– Dr. Donald Rock
Part II:

Key Challenges
Four Challenges

1. Structural Challenges
2. Conceptual Challenges
3. Technical Challenges
4. Resource Challenges
Challenges: Structural

- Fragmented non-system of programs for preschool-aged children
- Disjointed early childhood and public education policies
# Multiple Standards and Assessments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Child Care</th>
<th>Head Start</th>
<th>State PreK</th>
<th>Special Education</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program Quality Standards</strong></td>
<td>State Licensing Standards (50 states)</td>
<td>Program Performance Standards</td>
<td>State Program Standards (39 states)</td>
<td>IDEA regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quality Rating Systems (QRS) (13 states + 29 pilots)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>State program standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessing Program Quality</strong></td>
<td>Licensing Visits QRS Assessments (13 + 29)</td>
<td>PRISM Reviews</td>
<td>Program Monitoring (30 states)</td>
<td>State Program Monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child Assessments</strong></td>
<td>No current requirements</td>
<td>National Reporting System</td>
<td>PreK Assessments (13 states) Kg. Assessments (17 states)</td>
<td>States report % of children in 5 categories on 3 goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research/Evaluations</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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</table>

Kindergarten to Grade 3 Standards, Assessments, Data
Challenges: Structural

• Costs, burdens, confusion of multiple standards, assessments, and reports

• Multiple new initiatives all at once

• Pre-K – K-3 disconnects:
  – Pre-K assessments are not transferred to schools.
  – Standards, assessments, curricula are not aligned.
Challenges: Conceptual

• Reconciling early childhood’s focus on developing curriculum based on the child, not on standards

• Reconciling formal and informal approaches to assessment

• Discerning the wise and appropriate uses of data, so as not to track, label, punish or retain children
Challenges: Technical

• Need appropriate assessment tools and methods to report on:
  – Progress/status of young children in all domains of learning and development
  – Young ELLs and children with disabilities
  – Program quality in diverse local agencies
Challenges: Resources

- Limitations and inequities in funding for:
  - Programs
  - Infrastructure
- Risk that accountability efforts ignore and exacerbate inequities in resources
- Doing accountability and assessment right is costly; doing it wrong is deadly.
Part III:

Proposed System Design
Framing Beliefs

- Accountability is here to stay.
- Programs should be held to performance standards that are documented and verified.
- Assessments should inform policy decisions and be tied to program enhancement efforts.
- Current approaches to accountability and assessment must be reformed.
### State Accountability & Improvement System Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infrastructure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Learning &amp; Program Quality Standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Rating &amp; Improvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data Management &amp; Reporting</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

#### Assessment/Program Improvement Options

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OPTION</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>LOCAL AGENCY QUALITY AND OUTCOMES*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>LOCAL AGENCY QUALITY AND OUTCOMES*</td>
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<tr>
<td>CHILD POPULATION</td>
<td></td>
<td>PROGRAM POPULATION</td>
<td>STATE PROGRAM EVALUATION</td>
<td>LOCAL AGENCY QUALITY</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>How well are all children progressing in learning and development?</td>
<td></td>
<td>What is the quality of all early childhood programs?</td>
<td>What is the quality and how well are children progressing in specific state programs?</td>
<td>What is the quality in local agencies?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oversight of state investments/initiatives</td>
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<td>Program-wide improvement efforts</td>
<td>Technical assistance to individual agencies.</td>
<td>- Technical assistance to individual agencies.</td>
<td>- Technical assistance to individual agencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning new investments/initiatives</td>
<td>Planning new investments/initiatives</td>
<td>Refining standards/policies</td>
<td>Awarding incentives and recognition to local agencies for program improvements</td>
<td>- Awarding incentives and public recognition to local agencies for program improvements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baseline information for K-12 education planning</td>
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<td>Appropriations decisions</td>
<td>Decisions on funding local agencies</td>
<td>- Decisions on funding local agencies</td>
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### Pre-K-Grade 3 Alignment and Linkages

*Task Force members have differing views on the desirability and feasibility of this option.*
## System Design: Infrastructure

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Infrastructure

• Early Learning & Program Quality Standards
  – Alignment between:
    ▪ Standards, assessment systems, and curricula
    ▪ Standards between ages and grades
    ▪ State and federal program structures and funding streams
    ▪ Child and program standards
Infrastructure

• Program Rating & Improvement
  – Assesses and reports on the quality of all forms of early education programs
  – Provides technical assistance and professional development to improve quality
  – May provide public recognition/incentives to reward higher levels of quality
Infrastructure

• Professional Development System
  – Links informal training with formal education, provides career pathways, links education and compensation.
  – Supports training on assessment administration, analysis and use.
**Infrastructure**

- **Data Management & Reporting**
  - All-in-one place data on:
    - Children
    - Programs
    - Workforce
  - Unified system of child identification numbers
  - Provides for quality assurance of data and assessments
Assessment Options

• States vary in:
  – What they want to know
  – How they plan to use data
  – Available resources

• States may implement one or any combination of options

• Report includes cautions/safeguards for each option
# System Design: Assessment/Program Improvement Options

<table>
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<th>CORE QUESTION</th>
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<td>Task Force members have differing views on the desirability and feasibility of this option.</td>
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Options I and II: Statewide Data on All Children & Programs

• How data is used:
  – Planning interagency investments/initiatives
  – Legislative oversight
  – Baseline information for public education
Option I

• How well are all young children progressing in learning and development?
  – Data on learning status/progress for representative sample of all young children in a state
  – Demographic data
MD Kindergarten Readiness Assessment

• Kindergarten teachers administer modified Work Sampling System assessment to all kindergarten children in November.

• Report statewide and school district trends in overall “readiness” in specific domains for subgroups of children.

• Data used to target new state investments and in school district planning.
Option II

- What is the quality of services in all early childhood programs?
  - Quality in all forms of early education services
  - Early childhood workforce
  - Levels of investment/program resources
PA Quality Rating System

- PA Keystone STARS documents and improves program quality through standards, professional development, incentives, and public recognition.
- 4,300 local agencies serving 153,000 children participate.
- ECERS-R assessment tool administered in 1/3 sample of classrooms as part of 4-tiered system of quality recognition.
- State invests $46 million to support STARS including $22 million in incentives to providers.
Option III: Data on Specific State Programs

- What is the quality and how well are children progressing in specific programs?

  How data is used:
  - Program-wide improvement efforts
  - Refining standards/policies
  - Appropriations decisions
Michigan School Readiness Program

- Longitudinal evaluation of program quality and children’s learning through grade 4 using comparison group of similar children.
- 5-state program evaluation using a regression discontinuity design and different child assessment tools.
- Positive results helped sustain program funding in era of budget reductions statewide.
Options IV and V: Data From Local Agency Assessments

- How data is used:
  - Technical assistance to individual providers
  - Awarding incentives and public recognition
  - Funding decisions by state agencies
Options IV and V

- **Option IV**: What is the quality of services in local provider agencies?

- **Option V**: How is the quality and how well are children progressing in local provider agencies?
  
  - Task Force members had varied views on merits and feasibility Option V.
Option IV: NJ Quality Assessments

- NJ administers ECERS-R and 2 state-developed tools assessing quality of teaching in literacy and mathematics in samples of 300 classrooms/year.
- Local agencies conduct self-assessments of tools based on state program quality standards. State validates self-assessments in 1/3 of agencies each year.
- Results are used for provider-specific program improvement and evaluating contracts with Head Start and child care providers.
Option V: NM Pre-K Program

- NM visits all local agencies twice per year to monitor and offer assistance on program quality standards.
- Teachers use state-developed observational assessment tool for instructional purposes; agencies report data to state 3 times per year.
- State aggregates results to report to legislature.
- Local agency results are used for program improvement but are not reported to the public.
System Design: Pre-K – Grade 3
Alignment and Linkages

Pre-K-Grade 3 Alignment and Linkages
Pre-K – Grade 3 Integration

• Align standards, assessments, and reporting on:
  – Children’s progress
  – Quality of teaching/learning opportunities
• “Vertical” teams of teachers/managers to:
  – Review assessment information
  – Enrich learning experiences and teaching strategies
• Joint professional development
Part IV:

Action Steps
Action Steps: Legislatures

- Provide adequate funding for programs and infrastructure to support ongoing assessments and program improvements
Action Steps: State Agencies

• Develop a strategic plan for early childhood accountability and program improvement system

• Create a robust, positive, and rigorous culture for early childhood accountability efforts

• Enable local Pre-K – 3 partnerships
Action Steps: Federal Government

- “Harmonize” information systems
- Fund research and development for better assessment tools
- Conduct ongoing longitudinal research on children and programs
Action Steps: Local Agencies

- Create opportunities for teachers and managers to review assessments and enhance children’s learning opportunities
- Initiate dialogue with local school districts
The Benefits

- **For Children**: Enhanced learning opportunities and improved outcomes

- **For Legislators**: Better data to guide state policies and investments

- **For Teachers/Directors**: Targeted and well-resourced professional development and program improvement efforts

- **For the Early Childhood Profession**: Enhanced public awareness and credibility