Accountability in Early Childhood Education

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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>
</tr>
</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)</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

## Infrastructure
- Early Learning & Program Quality Standards
- Program Rating & Improvement
- Professional Development
- Data Management & Reporting

## Assessment/Program Improvement Options

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OPTION</th>
<th>I CHILD POPULATION</th>
<th>II PROGRAM POPULATION</th>
<th>III STATE PROGRAM EVALUATION</th>
<th>IV LOCAL AGENCY QUALITY</th>
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<tr>
<td>CORE QUESTION</td>
<td>How well are all children progressing in learning and development?</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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<td>HOW DATA IS USED</td>
<td>- Oversight of state investments/initiatives - Planning new investments/initiatives - Baseline information for K-12 education planning</td>
<td>- Oversight of state investments/initiatives</td>
<td>- Program-wide improvement efforts - Refining standards/policies - Appropriations decisions</td>
<td>- Technical assistance to individual agencies. - Awarding incentives and recognition to local agencies for program improvements - 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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<td>Early Learning &amp; Program Rating &amp; Improvement</td>
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<td>Program Quality Standards</td>
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<td>Professional Development</td>
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<td>Data Management &amp; Reporting</td>
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Infrastructure

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

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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