

APPENDIX B

Proposal for an Assessment and Accountability System For Connecticut's School Readiness Initiative and Kindergarten

School Readiness Initiative

An assessment and accountability system for Connecticut's School Readiness (SR) program would support evidence-based decision-making at every level of the initiative.

- It would allow teachers to make evidence-based decisions which are in the best interest of the children in their classrooms.
- It would allow program administrators and principals to make evidence-based decisions about the best way to enhance the quality of their classrooms and programs.
- It would allow policy- and law-makers to make evidence-based decisions about the best use of state resources to achieve their goals for children.

In order to meet these purposes data must be collected at two levels:

- Child-level
- Classrooms and schools/ECE programs-level

These three purposes and the two levels of data collection are summarized in the charts below with recommendations for how this should be done. Each of these projects is described in the text that follows the charts. The discussion and recommendations for preschool and kindergarten through grade 3 are presented separately. Finally, research on the impact of preschool and school programs is discussed in the section on a proposed longitudinal study.

	Purpose		
	Improving Teaching and Learning	Program Evaluation and Improvement	System Accountability
Child level	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preschool Assessment Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>School or Program determined¹</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SR Accountability Project: Children• Longitudinal study (<i>see kindergarten</i>)
Classroom and school/program level	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SR Program Improvement Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SR Accountability Project: Programs

Preschool Assessment Framework

It is recommended that we continue to require preschool teachers in programs supported by the CT School Readiness initiative to conduct ongoing performance assessments of children in their classrooms for instructional purposes using the CT Preschool Assessment Framework (PAF) or another system

¹ There is not a state requirement to collect child data for program evaluation or improvement. Individual schools/programs may elect to do this on their own.

aligned with the CT Preschool Curriculum Frameworks. Systematic professional development on this assessment model should continue to be made available.

SR Program Improvement Project

A general early care and education and targeted School Readiness Program Improvement Project is needed. Program improvement includes standards, assessment and quality improvement components. Ideally there should be one coherent set of standards and one self-assessment process for programs. Currently NAEYC accreditation or an SDE approval is required for all programs receiving School Readiness and DSS center funds and that accreditation or approval serves as a major way of setting standards and assessing of programs, though not the only way. It is recommended that we maintain this requirement for at least the next year or two while a Quality Rating System (QRS) is developed.

The short term plan for program improvement (next 1 to 2 years) would be to support current and prospective SR programs to meet the new NAEYC accreditation criteria as they undergo re-accreditation. The Accreditation Facilitation Project (AFP) model of providing regional support networks should be maintained to assist programs in conducting the self-assessments and in addressing needs that are revealed in this process.

At the same time a QRS would be developed as a vehicle for both evaluating and enhancing the quality of programs. As the QRS is put in place then the relationship between the accreditation/approval requirement and process and the QRS can be reevaluated. The QRS will take on a greater role for program evaluation and improvement at that time and the role of NAEYC accreditation in quality assessment and improvement for SR programs will be clarified.

As the QRS is developed there should be an effort to integrate the School Readiness self-report and the accreditation self study so that programs are doing one self-assessment. This self assessment should provide the basis for program enhancement plans and support for quality improvements. The Program Improvement Project must have additional resources to help programs improve their staffing and other program components.

The QRS will assign a quality rating to each participating ECE program on the basis of established criteria. These ratings will have some high stakes consequences for programs participating in the School Readiness initiative; there will be a level of quality that has to be met for a program to be eligible for a SR contract or to serve children who have SR scholarships. In addition, there might be a differential rate of reimbursement to programs depending on their rating on the QRS.

SR Accountability Project

Both child and program levels of measurement are needed for accountability purposes. Together they would constitute the School Readiness Accountability Project. Some of these data would be used in the Results-Based Accountability (RBA) system as population indicators and program performance measures.

Children: A sample of children will be assessed by trained assessors using several standardized instruments. These assessments will take place at the beginning and end of each preschool year. Statewide results will be reported each year to track trends and to inform policy decisions (e.g., part-day versus full-day).

Programs: A sample of programs will be assessed by trained assessors using standardized observational instruments (e.g., ECERS, ELLCO or SELA). The statewide results of these assessments will be reported each year to track trends. These assessments might ultimately become incorporated into a Quality Rating

System (QRS) or replaced by something else when the QRS is instituted. This data can be used at a state level to determine what is needed to enhance the quality of programs in the State.

Kindergarten through Grade 3 Assessment and Accountability

	Purpose		
	Improving Teaching and Learning	Program Evaluation and Improvement	System Accountability
Child level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kindergarten Assessment Framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>School determined</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early Development Instrument 3rd grade Mastery Longitudinal study
Classroom and school level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>School determined</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>School determined</i> 	

Kindergarten Assessment Framework

It is recommended that a performance assessment be developed for kindergarten with the purpose of improving teaching and learning in kindergarten classrooms. This assessment should be aligned with the Preschool Assessment Framework and the state standards. Part of the development of this instrument might involve adjusting the PAF so that they are perfectly aligned. All kindergarten teachers would use the tool to assess their children and use the information to address the learning needs of the classrooms. The observations for the assessments would be made continuously, but teachers would formally record them twice a year in preparation for conferences with parents.

Kindergarten Benchmark for Accountability

State and local policymakers need a kindergarten benchmark to determine whether children are starting school ready to succeed. The Early Development Instrument (EDI) is serving this purpose in Canada, Australia and some US states and communities. The EDI is a population measure of children's development done in the kindergarten year by the kindergarten teacher. It could serve as a baseline assessment for the primary grades that could be compared to the Mastery test results in 3rd grade.

The EDI could also be used as an indicator of children's readiness for school. Annual trends in the EDI could be reported to track changes in readiness for school in the population. The EDI should be coupled with demographic information² on the child such as:

- Gender
- Race/ethnicity
- Prior early care³
- Special education (children who are receiving special education services)
- Limited English proficiency
- Enrollment in free and reduced priced meals program

² These categories are those used in the Maryland School Readiness annual report.

³ Maryland identifies the type of early care and education experienced by the child in the 12 month period prior to starting kindergarten. The prior care types are: Head Start, public school preschool, child care center, family child care, non-public nursery school, home or informal care by parent or relative. Connecticut could add School Readiness as a prior care category.

The EDI information for each of these demographic groups could then be reported at both the state and local level. The State, school districts and local councils could use these results for policy and planning purposes. In addition, the results from Connecticut could be compared with those from other states and countries which are using the same instrument. It should be very clear that the results of the EDI cannot be used for high stakes evaluation of particular preschool programs because there is no comparable baseline indicator of the children when they enter particular programs. Early childhood programs serve children who have varying degrees of risk; if the EDI were used to evaluate particular programs without a baseline it would create a disincentive for programs to serve children at greatest risk.

The EDI could take the place of the kindergarten proxy done by kindergarten teachers in 2006-07. The kindergarten proxy is to be done both in the fall and spring but the EDI would only need to be administered once in the kindergarten year for the purposes proposed here⁴. It will need to be administered after the children have had sufficient time to adjust to the kindergarten experience and the teacher has had sufficient time to get to know the children.

Longitudinal Study

In addition to tracking child and program results from year to year, it will be highly useful to follow the same children overtime. This could be accomplished with a longitudinal research study that would follow a sample of children from preschool through third grade. The children will be assessed each year using a variety of standard instruments done by trained assessors. The EDI in kindergarten and the 3rd grade mastery scores could also be part of this data set. The programs and schools in which the focus children participate will be identified and significant elements described in order correlate the outcomes with these inputs. This will provide a more detailed examination of the annual progress children make from preschool entry through the primary grades and the relationship of participation in School Readiness to school performance for various subsets of children.

⁴ The intent of repeating an assessment at the end of kindergarten would be to assess the progress children make during the kindergarten year. However, the results of a pre and post assessment could also be used as a high stakes evaluation of the kindergarten teacher. This creates a reliability challenge when the instrument (such as the Proxy and the EDI) used to assess the children depends on teachers' observations and impressions.