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Supporting the Implementation of Rhode Island's Kindergarten Entry Profile: Recommendations Based on Implementation Science, Stakeholder Input, and Lessons Learned from Other States

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July 2016

Introduction

Since 2005, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of states implementing assessments that measure children’s learning and development at kindergarten entry. These Kindergarten Entry Assessments (KEAs) have proliferated because of a growing awareness of the dramatic school readiness gaps that exist between low- and higher-income children, and the impact that high-quality early learning programs can have in closing these gaps. States are eager to better understand how children are faring as they enter kindergarten and want to measure the impact that early childhood system enhancements have in improving school readiness. In most states, the findings from KEA assessments represent the first uniform, statewide look at children’s learning and development, and the data gathered by well-implemented state KEA systems is of great value to policymakers, kindergarten teachers, and parents.

The federal Race to the Top–Early Learning Challenge (RTT–ELC) grant program accelerated the implementation of kindergarten entry assessment systems nationally. RTT–ELC provided significant funding to states to design systems that measure “the state of children’s learning and development at kindergarten entry.”¹ Nineteen of the 20 states that received RTT–ELC funding elected to use a portion of the grant funds to create or enhance a KEA system.² Today, 43 states report either using a KEA or have plans to implement one.³

In 2011, Rhode Island was one of the first states in the country to win an RTT–ELC grant. As part of the grant, the state proposed to select, pilot, and implement a Kindergarten Entry Profile (KEP) that would measure the school readiness of children entering kindergarten,

¹ Rhode Island Department of Education. (Oct 2011). Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge: Application for Initial Funding (CFDA Number: 84.412). Washington, DC: US Department of Education.

² U.S. Department of Education. (2015). Race to the top – early learning challenge: At a glance, 2014 progress update. <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/2015apr/aprupdate.pdf>

³ Hanover Research. (Dec 2013). Kindergarten entry assessments: Practices and policies. <http://www.hanoverresearch.com/media/Kindergarten-Entry-Assessments-Practices-and-Policies.pdf>.

and to measure the state's progress in closing school readiness gaps between the state's low- and higher-income children. In 2013, Rhode Island joined a consortium of states lead by North Carolina to submit a successful Enhanced Assessment Grant (EAG) proposal to the U.S. Department of Education to develop and implement a K-3 formative assessment system. This assessment system, which will be used to support individualized instruction for children in K-3 classrooms, will also be used as Rhode Island's KEP. Since 2013, RTT-ELC staff members within the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) have been working towards voluntary implementation of the K-3 assessment system.

Rhode Island's KEP will provide information about children's development and learning as they enter kindergarten. In the aggregate, data collected from the KEP will be used to drive data-driven decision making in support of statewide early childhood system improvements. At the same time, KEP data for an individual child will provide important information for a kindergarten teacher to quickly understand what the child currently knows and is able to do, as well as areas of development and learning that may require more attention. In this way, the KEP can be used as a formative assessment to tailor curriculum to support a child's developmental growth and learning. Teachers will also be able to use KEP data to engage parents and suggest home activities to support a child's development and learning.

Despite the numerous potential benefits, the issue of early childhood assessment is a sensitive topic for practitioners, making the implementation of Rhode Island's KEP more difficult. Whether it is the burden that assessment places on teachers; issues with accurately measuring child development and learning at kindergarten entry; or the ways in which assessments have sometimes been improperly used, there are numerous challenges to successful implementation. One specific challenge derives from the multiple roles that the KEP must play

within a state. As noted in a position paper from the Council of Chief State School Officers, kindergarten entry assessment systems must provide different types of assessment information to different stakeholders:

- Parents and teachers in kindergarten classrooms want to know about the strengths and needs of children in order to provide effective supports and learning opportunities.
- School administrators want to know the status of children’s early learning and development in order to plan program services and determine whether these services are effective.
- State policymakers want to document population trends, track children’s progress over time, and determine if public early childhood expenditures are making a difference.⁴

As noted in the CCSSO paper, these roles make the task of designing and implementing a kindergarten entry assessment that much more difficult.

Implementation Plan

Given the challenges with implementing a kindergarten assessment, it is important that Rhode Island come up with strategies that support the implementation of the new KEP. Accordingly, this paper uses research from implementation science, interviews with state administrators who have implemented a kindergarten entry assessment, and data from focus groups of Rhode Island school administrators and teachers to provide recommendations for the state’s KEP implementation. Specifically, the goals of this document are to:

1. Summarize research from the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) that supports the successful implementation of the KEP

⁴ Howard, E. C. (June 2011). Moving forward with kindergarten readiness assessment efforts: A position paper of the early childhood education state collaborative on assessment and student standards. Council of Chief State School Officers. http://www.buildinitiative.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/CCSSO_K-Assessment_Final_7-12-11.pdf

2. Investigate the implementation of similar kindergarten entry assessment systems in other states and summarize the lessons learned from their experiences
3. Understand the context of kindergarten teachers and school administrators to determine the messaging and resources that will be required to obtain their buy-in for KEP implementation

Methods

The implementation recommendations provided here are derived from information and experiences obtained from multiple sources. The information collected allows for an examination of Rhode Island's KEP from an implementation science perspective, provides for a better understanding of the context in which the KEP is going to be implemented, and gives Rhode Island state administrators insight into what to expect during KEP implementation using the experiences of other states that are farther along in their implementation.

The methods used to gather information to support the recommendations include:

A scan of National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) literature. A new field of study has emerged that seeks to understand the supporting conditions for the successful implementation of new policies and practices. The implementation of Rhode Island's KEP can benefit greatly from this new field of implementation science. Accordingly, research summarizing the implementation literature was consulted to better understand the key components of a successful implementation process, as well as potential barriers to successful implementation.

Interviews with state administrators. A number of states are far along in the implementation of kindergarten entry assessments, and there is a good deal to learn from these states. Accordingly, interviews were conducted with state administrators from Washington, New Jersey, and Maryland who are in charge of KEA implementation. The interviews were designed to better understand their respective kindergarten entry assessment systems, their processes for

communicating about KEA implementation to stakeholders, and lessons learned from KEA implementation. Administrators from these states were chosen specifically because they are far along in their KEA implementation and share a similar KEA philosophy with Rhode Island. Appendix A provides the protocol used in these interviews.

Focus groups with Rhode Island school-district administrators and kindergarten teachers. Rhode Island's school-district administrators and kindergarten teachers are two of the primary stakeholder groups that will be impacted by the KEP. These two groups will play a key role in implementation, so focus groups were conducted to obtain their input on a range of topics including their current assessment and pedagogical practices, their attitudes toward KEP implementation, and resources needed to successfully implement the KEP. Appendix B provides the focus group protocols used for these focus groups.

Findings

Implementation of Rhode Island's KEP will be voluntary, making it critically important that the state provide the appropriate resources to incentivize implementation and minimize potential barriers. The findings from the implementation literature, state administrator interviews, and focus groups provide important insights into the resources that will be necessary to incentivize implementation; how the KEP should be communicated to stakeholders to obtain buy-in; and barriers to implementation that may be encountered. The findings from the implementation research, administrator interviews, and focus groups are discussed in detail below.

Implementation Literature

The National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) and the State Implementation and Scaling up Evidence-Based Practices (SISEP) Center conducted a comprehensive review of

over 700 publications across a broad range of disciplines. The literature review, entitled *Implementation Research: A Synthesis of the Literature*⁵, has a number of useful lessons for “installing” and scaling a KEP in Rhode Island.

Understanding the stages of implementation. An important initial point for Rhode Island’s KEP implementation is to understand that the successful implementation of new initiatives tends to follow a specific progression that takes place over a number of years. The NIRN synthesis identifies four stages of implementation:

Phase 1 - Exploration and adoption: In this phase, Rhode Island must consider a number of factors including whether the KEP meets the needs of district administrators, kindergarten teachers, and parents; whether the state has sufficient resources for full and effective implementation; and the extent to which there is buy-in from the stakeholders.

Phase 2 - Program Installation: Next, Rhode Island must focus on establishing the appropriate infrastructure necessary to support KEP implementation, including competency development (e.g., ensuring kindergarten teachers are adequately trained to implement the KEP), organizational supports (e.g., ensuring the data system, technology, and other systems are in place to support implementation), and leadership (e.g., school district leaders support and facilitate implementation of the KEP).

Phase 3 - Initial Implementation: After the appropriate infrastructure is in place, Rhode Island will then begin implementation. In this phase, the state will need to focus on change management to work through what the NIRN review calls “the compelling forces of fear of change, inertia, and investment in the status quo.” As such, it is particularly important that Rhode Island

⁵ Fixsen, D. L., Naoom, S. F., Blase, K. A., Friedman, R. M., & Wallace, F. (2005). *Implementation research: a synthesis of the literature*. Tampa, FL: University of South Florida, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute. The National Implementation Research Network (FMHI Publication #231).

anticipates the potential challenges that may arise during this initial period and develop strategies for overcoming them in order to sustain the continued buy-in from the stakeholders.

Phase 4 - Full Operation: In the final phase of implementation, the KEP will become institutionalized through new procedures and processes. State staff, school district administrators, and kindergarten teachers will begin to develop a level of mastery and the assessment data will become increasingly more valid and reliable, making it possible to achieve the full intended effectiveness of the KEP.

Rhode Island is currently in the exploration and adoption phase of implementation and is moving toward program installation. As such, the recommendations related to successful implementation must focus on securing resources for full and effective implementation and achieving the buy-in of district administrators, kindergarten teachers, and parents. In addition, the state must be focused on establishing the appropriate infrastructure for KEA implementation, which will require statewide training, a data platform to house the KEA data, and Rhode Island Department of Education staff to work with the data to generate state, district, classroom, and child reports.

Implementation Drivers. In addition to the phases of implementation, the NIRN framework also outlines the main elements that help to facilitate change during implementation. These interlocking processes, called “Implementation Drivers” are organized into the areas of *staff competency, organizational supports, and leadership*. While some of these drivers are difficult for those administering Rhode Island’s KEP to influence, it is important to note the role of each driver and its potential to impact the implementation of a KEP.

Competency Drivers: There are three different types of competency drivers. The first is called “staff selection,” which focuses on the characteristics of practitioners who will be directly

implementing the KEP. Staff selection focuses on issues like whether implementation of the initiative is the practitioners' primary responsibility and whether they are hired specifically to implement the new initiative. In the case of KEP in Rhode Island, administering a formative assessment is only one of many jobs of a kindergarten teacher and district administrator.

The second competency driver is the quality, intensity, and mode of the training that is received on the new initiative. Rhode Island will have to decide how much of their training component will be introduced through pre-service trainings and how much will be delivered through continued on-the-job professional development experiences, such as consulting or coaching.

The final competency driver involves how performance is assessed. Assessment helps ensure fidelity to the model and can also assist in targeting areas of need at the individual and program level, providing useful feedback for continued improvement.

Organization Drivers: The second set of drivers focuses on the characteristics of the administration of the initiative. For example, is there a system for implementing the KEP and how does the system track implementation? The system would provide data for improvement and connect with other performance monitoring systems in the state.

Leadership Drivers: The final set of drivers involves leadership. To successfully implement change, leadership must be *adaptive*. Rhode Island leaders implementing the KEA (at the state and district level) must be committed to the implementation of the KEA, have the ability to manage change, and make the case that the KEP is better than current practice. There is also a *technical* aspect to leadership where leaders must be skilled in the technical aspects of the change and have the ability to manage change from a technical perspective.

Interviews with state administrators

To obtain a real-world perspective on the roll-out of a kindergarten entry assessment, early administrators in charge of KEA implementation from the New Jersey, Maryland, and Washington State Departments of Education were interviewed. The interviewers focused on the state's motivation behind the KEA, how it was being implemented, barriers, and lessons learned. A number of important points emerged from these interviews that inform Rhode Island KEP implementation:

Embed communication about the KEP in a larger context with a focus on the transition to school, connecting families to school, and promoting collaboration among learning professionals: To support successful implementation, Rhode Island's KEP implementation should not be talked about in isolation or as an end in itself. There is a general perception among practitioners and parents that children are over-assessed, and accordingly, it is important that the communication about the KEP should be contextualized to better support buy-in. For example, the Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKids) embeds assessment within the broader context of family connections to school and early learning collaboration and alignment among the parents, teachers, and community.

Expect and manage pushback from various stakeholder groups: All three state respondents indicated that they received pushback on the implementation of their state's KEA from numerous stakeholder groups, including unions, teachers, and parents. Effective communication and a willingness to change KEA procedures based on stakeholder feedback were two of most effective methods of overcoming pushback from the community. Parents were a particularly important constituency in the overall success of the KEA, as the acceptance of the KEA by parents (the ultimate stakeholder) worked to bring other constituencies along. A key to winning

the buy-in of parents involved a clear explanation of the ways in which the KEA could support their child's learning in the classroom. The respondents also noted the numerous concerns of teachers. As the stakeholder group in charge of administering the assessment, the pushback of teachers was multi-faceted, questioning the need to replace previously existing assessments, the inclusion of previously untested developmental areas (such as the social-emotional domain), and the time that would be required not only to learn the new assessment, but to administer it according to the state's timeline.

Use the process of piloting the KEP to manage the pushback and to gain stakeholder support: Respondents noted that the piloting of the KEA was an excellent opportunity to educate teachers and parents on the assessment instrument, respond to feedback, and gain stakeholder buy-in. A point made by the New Jersey administrator was that the choice of sites was important to the success of the pilot, as was the flexibility to gradually phase in the assessment. The state gave some schools the choice to opt out of using the assessment if they felt they were not ready, and for those schools that engaged in the pilot, only certain domains of development were assessed in the first year to reduce the burden on teachers. Respondents noted that the pilot was so important because there are no better advocates to promote the benefits of a KEA than the teachers who have used it. As such, it is critical that Rhode Island be responsive to feedback obtained during the pilot, communicate what was heard from stakeholders during the process, and document how the state responded to feedback. The respondents emphasized that teachers have to be heard and their concerns properly addressed if KEP implementation has any chance of success. Finally, respondents noted that the pilot was an excellent opportunity for district administrators to realize that assessment and teaching should be integrated in the classroom, and that teachers require supports to do both well.

Provide multi-modal forms of professional development as well as technical assistance: As discussed in the implementation literature, training is a key competency driver of successful implementation. Respondents noted significant effort was made in each state to provide adequate training. Maryland had particularly intensive and flexible training, which included a reliability assessment. Teachers received 2.5 days of training that was delivered either in person, on-line, or using a hybrid model depending on teacher preference. To assess reliability, on the last half-day of the training, teachers watched video vignettes of children and were asked to assess the child based on the interactions observed in the video. Maryland also formed an electronic learning community where training content is available on-line for teachers who wish to revisit the content and where teachers could be in contact with trainers should they have specific questions. The on-line learning community was organized into groups of 20 teachers per trainer to ensure that the trainer could be adequately responsive to teacher questions. A key lesson learned from Washington state's training was that training must continue into September as kindergarten teachers may be assigned in September and will require training.

Focus group findings

To better understand the perspective of those stakeholders that would be primarily responsible for implementing the KEA, focus groups of district administrators and kindergarten teachers were conducted. In early December of 2015, 41 teachers from at least 14 different Rhode Island school districts and one charter school participated in at least one of three focus groups (See Appendix C). The key findings from the teacher focus groups included⁶:

⁶ Focus groups of district administrators were also conducted but participation was too low to be able to generalize the results. The school district administrator perspective is reflected throughout the document but the findings are not presented separately.

Kindergarten teachers will require additional resources to effectively implement the KEP

Kindergarten teachers expressed concern over the additional burden of implementing the KEP given their current workload. Two issues are specifically important. First, Rhode Island only recently mandated full-day kindergarten across the state, so many of the teachers were in the first year of implementing full-day kindergarten and were adjusting to the longer days. The addition of the KEP was perceived as “too much change.”

Second, and even more importantly, kindergarten teachers in Rhode Island are already under-resourced with very few teachers having full-time teaching assistants. With a class size of 18 students and teachers either sharing a teaching assistant (sometimes among 3 teachers) or having no assistant at all, the thought of implementing an additional assessment was overwhelming. In the absence of a teaching assistant, teachers discussed how one disruptive student could derail the implementation of the curriculum: “Curriculum and assessment are put on a back burner when you have children who are so disruptive. It is the biggest thing and there is not anything we can do.”

There is significant variation in the assessment practices, pedagogical approaches, and transition practices of Rhode Island’s school districts

In Rhode Island, policies related to assessment, curriculum, and the transition into the K-12 system are set at the district level. This fact results in significant variation in the assessment, pedagogical, and transition practices across the state. In addition, the amount of discretion and flexibility that teachers have to set their own pace with curriculum or modify curriculum and assessment approaches also varies. There is a good deal of assessment that takes place in the first 6 weeks of school and assessment practices vary widely. Teachers noted that they administered such assessment instruments as the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS), the

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), as well as a number of literacy and math curriculum-based assessments. In addition, the teachers noted that contact with the children before entering school varied from little or no contact to meeting parents and children at a school sponsored event (“ice cream social”) to doing formal assessments of children after they register for school.

This variation has important implications for KEP implementation. If part of successful implementation of the KEP is dependent upon convincing stakeholders that it is significantly better than the status quo, this task is made more difficult by the significant variation across Rhode Island school districts.

Kindergarten teachers do not have enough information on the KEP to support its implementation

A key purpose of the focus groups was to attempt to assess the willingness of kindergarten teachers to implement the KEP. In response to questions on this topic, teachers noted that they needed a good deal more information before hypothetically supporting its implementation. In order to make a decision, they required information about:

- The constructs that would be measured
- How long it would take to implement and other indicators of burden on the teacher (paperwork, reporting, etc.)
- The likelihood that the KEP could supplant current assessment items

It was clear that the majority of teachers were most concerned with being able to meet the demands of current practice within their districts. As such, any information related to the importance of the KEP in state-level work and how KEP data could be used to advocate for more district-level resources was not compelling to teachers overall. Only those teachers that had a

broader vision of the education system in the state were moved by these arguments, but these teachers represented a small minority of those who attended the focus groups.

KEA implementation has to be a part of a broader district-level strategy where the decisions are made, with more input from teachers.

It was clear from the focus groups of teachers that implementation of the KEP would be a district-level decision. While teachers noted that they had varying degrees of input into district decisions related to assessment, most felt that they had no say in the decision to implement the KEP. At the same time, the teachers urged that the implementation of the KEP not be a “one-off” conversation and decision between the state and district, but that both state and district administrators discuss the KEP within the broader context of district resources, professional development supports, curriculum, and what is best for the children attending the schools and their families. Without a broader discussion of the KEP within the context of district practices and resources, KEP implementation would be perceived as yet another initiative imposed on teachers without adequate resources to do it well.

Recommendations: Applying Implementation Science, Stakeholder Perspectives, and Lessons Learned from Other States to Rhode Island’s KEP implementation

The implementation of the KEP represents an important, yet significant change from current practice in Rhode Island. The state is attempting to move from a highly decentralized district-controlled assessment system to a voluntary, uniform state-level kindergarten entry assessment. As the implementation research indicates, the resources and implementation planning for any new initiative has to be in line with the extent to which it is a diversion from current practice. As such, the successful state-wide implementation of the KEP in Rhode Island will require intense communication and professional development, and a strong leadership and organizational infrastructure to increase the probability of success.

Recommendations for communicating the KEP to stakeholders

Stakeholder buy-in is critical to the successful implementation of the KEP. The research conducted here leads to the following recommendations related to a communication strategy:

Make the case that the KEP is better than the status quo

In general, initiatives can succeed when stakeholders are convinced that change is better than the status quo. Given the results from the stakeholder focus groups, many of the broader positive outcomes of the KEP often discussed by the state (data-driven decision making; use as an advocacy tool) are not compelling to key stakeholders (teachers). The messaging to kindergarten teachers must specifically focus on the impact of the KEP on improved teaching practices and communication with families, while allaying fears of increased burden. One effective communication approach would be to create sample reports clearly displaying the information that would be made available to teachers at the classroom and child level, and how the information would be presented to parents to facilitate family engagement.

Make School District Administrators a Key Audience for the State's Communication Strategy

It became clear in the focus groups that decisions made about KEP implementation will happen at the school district level. As such, in addition to engaging in outreach to kindergarten teachers, the state must make an intentional and sustained effort to engage school district administrators. The state must also convince this constituency that change is better than the status quo. With this audience, key considerations in answering this “change” question include information on the costs of the assessment to the district, the psychometric properties of the instrument, appropriateness for the district's child population, alignment to district's curriculum approaches, and types of support. It is important to acknowledge that even if the KEP is free, there are costs of the transition for the district and these should be noted. Some administrators

expressed a hypothetical willingness to consider replacing some of their current instruments with the KEP, but noted that it was too difficult to answer without a better understanding of the instrument.

Recommendations related to professional development and other resources

The implementation research stresses the importance of competency drivers. Both the notion of formative assessment and the KEP specifically will be new to kindergarten teachers in the state. Formative assessment involves a number of specific skills including conducting objective observations of children, using a portfolio of observations and other information to generate assessment scores, and then using those scores to inform instruction. This new approach will require a good deal of professional development. Rhode Island should consider the strategy taken by Maryland, which features a multi-modal approach to professional development. In-person, on-line, and hybrid approaches should be offered, as well as a facilitated learning community and “help line.”

Leadership and Organization

Finally, state and district leadership will also be important for successful implementation. The state should look to identify champions and use leadership bodies like the Rhode Island Early Council to support implementation. The state should provide information and promise to support district administrators to ensure that district leadership is committed to and has the ability to manage district-level changes necessary for KEP implementation.

The state should also work to create the appropriate infrastructure, which includes the technological infrastructure that makes it easy for teachers to input assessment results, as well as data and reporting systems.

Conclusion

Rhode Island has made significant progress in reforming its early childhood system through the RTT–ELC grant funding. The state has created birth-to-five early learning standards, a continuum of revised program standards, and workforce knowledge and competency frameworks. The state has also developed professional development modules and training and technical assistance to support implementation of the early learning standards and program standards, and has worked with institutions of higher education on pre-service early childhood courses. The key question for the state is: What impact do these reforms have on the school readiness of the children served by the system? Data from a well-implemented KEP would help assess the progress that has been made, inform decision making, and support teachers in their work with children.

Appendix A: Kindergarten Entry Assessment/Profile Implementation State Administrator Interview Protocol

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. As I mentioned in my introductory email, the Rhode Island Department of Education is in the early stages of implementing a kindergarten entry profile (KEP). The state is conducting a small pilot of the KEP this September, with a larger field test scheduled for next fall. As part of the state's preparation for full implementation, Rhode Island is developing an implementation plan that will guide the roll-out of the KEP, as well as support stakeholder involvement and communication. In developing the implementation plan, we are conducting interviews with states that are farther along in the implementation of their kindergarten entry assessment (KEA) to better understand what has been most successful and challenging about KEA implementation. So we thank you for talking with us today.

Informed Consent

This interview should last 45 minutes to an hour. The information we gather from you today will be combined with information from other states and published in a KEP implementation plan. We will not quote you, unless we get your permission, but we may call out in the report some specific examples of successes or barriers from your state. We wanted to make sure that was okay before we began.

Overview

1. What are the goals of your state's kindergarten entry assessment?
 - i. Probes: Is it primarily used as a formative assessment? How did you determine the goals?

2. Describe your kindergarten entry assessment.
 - i. Probe: What instrument or instruments are you using? When is it administered? How are the data analyzed and reported?

3. How much does the implementation of the kindergarten entry assessment cost?
 - i. Probes: How many children does that cost cover? Where does the money for the KEA come from (Legislature? RTT-ELC? Department of Education line item?)

Organizational and Professional Capacity

1. What tools or supports did you put in place to support implementation at the **state level**?
 - i. Probes: Did you hire additional staff? Did you create or make modifications to your data system? Did you develop a policies and procedures manual for KEA? Anything else?
2. What tools or supports did you put in place to support implementation at the **district level**?
 - i. Probes: Did you provide districts with the software and training on the instrument? Did you conduct a survey or study of capacity to implement the KEA?
3. What other organizational supports did you provide?
 - i. Probes: Did the principals participate in any training? Did you offer any incentives for school districts to participate in the KEA?
4. How did you measure and support the professional/human resource capacity in your state to implement the KEA?
 - i. Probes: How did you measure the capacity of kindergarten teachers to implement the KEA? How did you support the kindergarten teachers? (i.e. to help them be successful in implementing the KEA and to help them feel less burdened?)

Stakeholder Support and Buy-in

1. Did you have a communication strategy to talk about the KEA to the stakeholders and parents?
 - i. Probes: What were successes and/or challenges of this approach?
2. Who were the major supporters of KEA implementation? Who were the biggest skeptics?
 - i. Probes: How did you gather stakeholder input? How did you address the skeptics? How did you increase buy-in?

Other

1. What was most unexpected aspect of KEA implementation?
 - i. Probes: Were there any unanticipated benefits or consequences of implementation?
2. Are there other things the state should know that we did not ask you about?

Appendix B:
Rhode Island KEA Implementation Study
Administrator Focus Group Protocol

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. My name is Jeff Capizzano and I am a consultant working with the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE). As part of the state's Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge grant, RIDE is planning to implement several initiatives that support Kindergarten instruction and assessment, and facilitate the transition that children make between early childhood programs and kindergarten. A major component of the work is the development of a voluntary comprehensive Kindergarten Entry Profile, intended to support teachers and districts in better understanding children's development and learning upon entering kindergarten.

In order to make sure that these initiatives are useful and support district leaders and kindergarten teachers, it is important that RIDE understand your perspective on the Kindergarten Entry Profile, including what supports you think your teachers would need implement it, and what supports or incentives may be required at the district level as district leaders consider using a kindergarten entry profile. The information you provide during this conversation will help to make sure that the RIDE initiatives are “district-informed” and reflect the current realities of the policies and practices of your district.

Informed consent

This conversation should last about an hour. The information I gather from you today will be combined with information from other groups of district leaders and will be provided to RIDE. The summary may use quotes but we will not use your name. We are also planning on recording the session. The recording will only be used by me to make sure I have my notes correct and it will not be shared with RIDE or anyone else. Your participation in this focus group is voluntary, so, even though we are not talking about anything controversial, if you don't want to answer a question you don't have to. Thank you again for agreeing to participate.

Are there any questions before I begin?

Introductions

Let's start by going around the room and introducing yourself. If you could tell us your name, title, school district, and how long you have been in your current job.

Priming questions

- 1) Can you tell me a bit about your district from an early childhood perspective?
 - a) School structure—How many elementary schools with prekindergarten programs; how many preschool children? Full-day/Half-day kindergarten? Are you transitioning to full day? Rough demographic breakdown of students (Specifically preschool if possible). DLL/IEP Percentage free and reduced lunch? How many Kindergarten teachers? What percentage of Kindergarten teachers have a teaching aide?
- 2) What are the hardest challenges for your district in teaching very young (preschool) children, and what is going particularly well?
 - a) Should we start with what is going well?
 - b) What are some of the big challenges?

Understanding what happens in the first few weeks of kindergarten

- 3) I want to talk about your district-wide policies and procedures in the first few weeks of school. I want to focus specifically on those children who are entering kindergarten.
 - a) Does your district collect information about the children prior to them walking through the kindergarten door? If so, could you talk about the types of information that are collected?
 - i) Is there a district-wide practice or policy to help kindergarten teachers meet students and/or their families before their first day of school?
 - b) What assessments do you administer to kindergarten students district wide (if any) in the first weeks of school?
 - i) If your teachers assess kindergarten children, what assessments are used?
 - (1) How much time do teachers have to assess all of your children—three weeks? Six weeks?
 - (2) What are teachers required to do with the assessment data?
 - (3) Do you know how much time the process of assessment takes (how many hours over how many days)?
 - c) What are the benefits of conducting these assessments?
 - d) Is the expectation that kindergarten teachers use curriculum-based assessments to individualize instruction for kindergarten children?
- 4) Do kindergarten teachers receive information about children's previous school or special education information? If so, when and how do teachers receive that information (e.g., registration)? Is it for all children?

District-wide pedagogical approaches

- 5) I'd like to talk for a few minutes about your district policies related to curriculum, again with a focus on what happens in the kindergarten year.
 - a) Do you have a curriculum or curricula that are required district-wide? If so, how would you describe the curriculum/curricula?
 - b) Does your district require a formal science/social studies curriculum?
 - c) Does your district require a social-emotional curriculum?
 - d) Does your district require a formative assessment?

- 6) How does the district address the common core standards in kindergarten? What are the benefits and drawbacks of having to address these standards from your perspective?

- 7) How much does the district weigh in on teachers' daily schedule, time spent on subjects, curriculum, assessments, etc.?

- 8) Is there a process within your district for decision making that teachers participate in?

Resources and supports

- 9) Does the district sponsor any events or meetings that allow teachers to meet children and their families prior to the beginning of school?

- 10) Tell me about the district's professional development policies and practices.
 - a) Does the district, school, or teacher choose the professional development topic?
 - b) What is the format? Workshops, peer learning community, in-class TA
 - c) How much of the professional development is directly related to Kindergarten or ECE?

- 11) How many professional development days/hours do teachers have?

Family engagement

12) Are there any district policies that encourage family engagement? For example, policies related to parent-teacher conferences, home-school communication, or other policies and procedures?

13) Are there technology applications used in your District to support communication between parents and teachers—emails, webgroups, etc.

Perceptions, questions, and concerns regarding KEP implementation at the district level

14) Many states have developed kindergarten entry assessments. RIDE is working with other states to implement a voluntary kindergarten assessment profile.

- a) If the state offered a tool to create a developmental profile for each child in your district, would your district be interested in using it? What would be some potential challenges/barriers? Potential benefits? What information would the KEP have to collect and what reports would have to be generated in order for the district to be interested?
- b) If your district was considering implementing the KEP, how would the decision making process work? How could RIDE be helpful in this process?
- c) If the KEP assessed domains the district is currently assessing in some way, how likely would it be that the district would be willing to replace one or more of those assessments with the KEP?
- d) How would you describe how well schools in your district use technology? What is the current level of access to technology and what technology is most used? E.g., computer, tablet, smart board, etc.
- e) Are there supports or other incentives that the state could offer to increase the likelihood that your district would use the KEP? For example, training, individual child reports, or other supports?

Closing questions

15) What advice would you give RIDE as they make plans to support kindergarten teachers in their instruction, assessment, and transition practices, and specifically for KEP implementation?

16) Are there other things the state should know about the district perspective that I did not ask you about?

Rhode Island KEA Implementation Study Kindergarten Teacher Focus Group Protocol

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. My name is Jeff Capizzano and I am a consultant working with the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE). As part of the state's Race to the Top--Early Learning Challenge grant, RIDE is planning to implement several initiatives that support Kindergarten instruction and assessment and facilitate the transition that children make between early childhood programs and kindergarten. A major component of the work is the development of a voluntary comprehensive Kindergarten Entry Profile, intended to support teachers and districts in better understanding children's development and learning upon entering kindergarten.

In order to make sure that the initiatives are useful and support kindergarten teachers, it is important that RIDE better understands the work you do every day, how you are supported, and what other supports you may need to consider using a kindergarten entry profile. The information you provide during this conversation will help to make sure that the RIDE initiatives are “practitioner-informed” and reflect the current realities of kindergarten teachers.

Informed Consent

This conversation should last a little over an hour. The information we gather from you today will be combined with information from other groups of teachers and will be provided to RIDE. The summary may use quotes but we will not use your name. We are also planning on recording the session. The recording will only be used by me to make sure I have my notes correct and it will not be shared with RIDE or anyone else. Your participation in this focus group is voluntary, so if you don't want to answer a question you don't have to. Thank you again for agreeing to participate.

Are there any questions before I begin?

Overview/Priming questions

- 17) Can you tell me a bit about the school where you work?
 - a) School structure—K-6? How many children? Demographic breakdown? DLL/IEP Percentage free and reduced lunch? Teaching aides? Full/part time?

- 18) What is hard and what is easy about being a kindergarten teacher?
 - a) Should we start with what is easy?
 - b) What are the hardest parts of your job?

Understanding What Happens at the Start of the School year

- 19) I want to talk about the first six weeks of school and all that you have to do.
- a) Did you have any information about the children in your class prior to them walking through your door?
 - i) Did you get to meet your students and/or their families before the first day of school?
 - ii) If so, what kind of information did you have? What did you know about them?
 - b) Are you required to assess your children in the first weeks of school?
 - i) If so, what assessments are used?
 - (1) How much time do you have to assess all of your children—three weeks? Six weeks?
 - (2) How much time does the process of assessment take (how many hours over how many days?)
 - (3) Do you feel like there are benefits to conducting these assessments? Is it worth the time? What else could you be doing?
 - c) Do you use any assessments, like curriculum-based assessments or ones that you have created, that aren't required?
 - d) Do you use information from these assessments to adapt what you do in the classroom?
 - e) Did you find that any of your children required referral right away? Within the first 3-6 weeks of school? If so, for what? Soc/Emot? Lang/Literacy? Other?
- 20) Do you receive information about children's previous school or special education information? If so, when and how do you receive that information (e.g., registration)? Is it for all children?
- 21) What are the differences between children who attended early childhood programs and those who did not?
- a) Do you receive any information from preschool programs about children's knowledge or skills?

Pedagogical Approaches

- 22) How do you address the common core standards in your classroom? What are the benefits and drawbacks of having to address these standards?
- 23) I'd like to talk for a few minutes about your teaching practices.
- a) What curriculum or curricula do you use? How would you describe the curriculum/curricula?

- b) Do you use formal science/social studies curriculum?
- c) Do you use a social-emotional curriculum?
- d) Do you use a formative assessment?

24) Could you take me through a typical day in your classroom? What does it look like (circle time, small group, centers, specials, etc.) How much time is spent on LAL, Math, outdoor time, specials. [And then how many of them have circle time, small group time, centers, free play, etc. And what kinds of centers are available. Learning centers, blocks, drama, art, fine motor, science, etc.]

25) What level of control do you have over your daily schedule, time spent on subjects, curriculum, assessments, etc.?

26) Is there a process within your district for decision making that you get to participate in?

Resources and Supports

27) Does your school or district sponsor any events or meetings that allow you to meet your children and their families prior to the beginning of school?

28) Tell me about the professional development you receive each year?

- a) Do you get to choose the topic?
- b) What is the format? One-stop workshop, peer learning community, in-class TA,
- c) How much of it is directly related to Kindergarten or ECE?

29) How many professional development days/hours have you had so far this year and how have they been used?

30) What supports does the school provide to enhance your teaching?

- a) If you are seeking advice about a student or lesson, or have a question about an assessment, is there a specific person you can go to for help?
 - i) If so, who is that person?

KEA Perceptions/Questions and Concerns Regarding Implementation

- 31) Many states have developed kindergarten entry assessments, and RIDE is working with other states to implement a voluntary kindergarten assessment profile.
- a) If the state offered a tool to create a developmental profile for each child in your classroom, would you be interested in using it? What would be some potential challenges/barriers? Potential benefits?
 - b) If your district was considering implementing the KEP, would they include K teachers in the decision-making/planning process?
 - c) If the KEP assessed domains you currently already assess in some way, how likely do you feel your district would be to replace one or more of those assessments with the KEP?
 - d) What is your current level of access to technology? E.g., computer, tablet, smart board, etc.
 - e) Are there supports or other incentives that the state could offer to increase the likelihood that your district would use the tool? For example, training, individual child reports, or other supports?

Family Engagement

- 32) How often do you talk with families and what methods of communication do you use most?
- 33) Thinking about your parent-teacher conferences this fall, take me through a typical conversation with parents.
- a) How long are the conversations?
 - b) What are the topics that are covered?
 - c) What data, if any, do you use to describe each child's development and learning to their parents?
 - d) What are the most common questions that parents ask?
- 34) Are there ways to have ongoing conversations with families other than notes going home in a child's folder? For example, do you use technology--emails, webgroups, etc.

Closing Questions

- 35) What advice would you give RIDE as they make plans to support kindergarten teachers in their instruction, assessment, and transition practices?
- 36) Are there other things the state should know that I did not ask you about?

Appendix C
School Districts Represented in Teacher Focus Groups

Providence
Central Falls
Smithfield
Pawtucket
Woonsocket
East Providence
West Warwick
Warwick
Coventry
Lincoln
Cranston
Exeter-West Greenwich
Foster
Chariho
Portsmouth

Unknown: 1