State Pre-K Assessment Policies:

Issues and Status

POLICY INFORMATION REPORT

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Preface

Preschool education is increasingly being recognized as an integral part of efforts to ensure that all children enter school ready to learn and as a way to help close the achievement gaps that exist at the time children enter kindergarten. Such efforts are growing across the country. According to the most recent data, 54 different preschool initiatives in 40 states serve over one million children, almost double the number served eight years earlier. As these programs and efforts to monitor them have grown, a common focus is on documenting children's learning outcomes. Assessing young children, however, presents particular challenges.

In this new Policy Information Report, authors Debra J. Ackerman and Richard J. Coley have put together a useful "primer" on state pre-K assessment policies. They describe the instruments that are used across the states and identify important aspects of their use. Just as important, the authors remind us of the particular challenges that are inherent in assessing young children's learning and report on sound assessment practices that recognize these challenges.

It is our hope that this report will be useful to educational practitioners and policymakers as preschool initiatives expand across the country and the need to document their effectiveness increases. As these efforts to assess preschoolers' learning outcomes also grow, it will be increasingly important to monitor this critical segment of our education pipeline.

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Introduction

Enrollment of 4-year olds in state-funded preschool education, or what is commonly known (and referred to throughout this report) as Pre-K, has grown tremendously over the past decade. As access to Pre-K has expanded, policymakers in almost every state have established policies related to monitoring these programs. Since a major interest of stakeholders is whether Pre-K programs are effective in enhancing young children's development and improving kindergarten-readiness levels, one common focus of these monitoring policies is the documentation of children's learning outcomes.[1] This report provides a status report on Pre-K policies related to assessing preschoolers' learning outcomes for the 2011–2012 school year.

Data on what children are learning in Pre-K can serve as an important component of program accountability and quality improvement efforts.[2] In fact, the recent Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge initiative gave priority to applicants that focused on strengthening the use of assessments and their results to determine individual children's progress and improve the quality of early education programs.[3] At the same time, to obtain useful data on what young children know and can do, Pre-K stakeholders not only need to engage in some type of organized information-gathering process, but also choose from several different approaches, as well as a wide variety of measures of children's knowledge and skills.[4] Yet, policymakers and other Pre-K stakeholders may not be fully "assessment literate" when it comes to these options, and thus unable to contribute effectively to discussions and decisions on this topic.[5,6]

Given that $500 million in federal aid has been slated for distribution to Race to the Top — Early Learning Challenge grantees, current information on Pre-K policies governing the assessment of children's learning could be useful. The purpose of this report is to provide a comprehensive picture of these policies. Of specific interest are:

1. Which learning outcome measures, if any, are specified in Pre-K policies?
2. Do these specified measures fall under the categories of direct assessments, observation checklists or scales, or a combination of both assessment approaches?
3. How much choice do Pre-K providers have in selecting the measures to be used in their classrooms?
4. How frequently are learning outcome measures to be administered and reported?

To set the stage, we provide a brief background on Pre-K programs across the United States and discuss the special issues that should be considered when assessing young children. We then describe three different approaches to documenting preschoolers' learning. After highlighting the methodology for our study, we report the variety of Pre-K child assessment policies in place in 2011–2012. Finally, we offer some overall generalizations and perspectives on the trends reflected in these policies.

[1] W. S. Barnett, D. J. Epstein, M. E. Carolan, J. Fitzgerald, D. J. Ackerman, and A. H. Friedman, *The State of Preschool 2010: State Preschool Yearbook*, New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2010.

[2] E. Frede, W. S. Gilliam, and L. J. Schweinhart, "Assessing Accountability and Ensuring Continuous Program Improvement," in E. Zigler, W. S. Gilliam, and W. S. Barnett (Eds.), *The Pre-k Debates: Current Controversies and Issues,* Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2011.

[3] U.S. Department of Education (DOE) and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), *Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge,* Washington, DC, 2011.

[4] C. E. Snow and S. B. Van Hemel (Eds.), *Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What, and How*, Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2008.

[5] W. J. Popham, "Assessment Literacy for Teachers: Faddish or Fundamental?" in *Theory into Practice, 48*, 2–11, 2009.

[6] R. Stiggins, *Assessment for Learning Defined*, Portland, OR: Assessment Training Institute, 2005.

Over the past 10 years, despite economic challenges and uneven spending on early-education programs, enrollment of 4-year olds in Pre-K programs has increased. During the 2001–2002 school year, 581,705 4-year olds, or 14.8 percent of the entire population in this age group, were enrolled in 45 Pre-K programs in 40 states.[7] Just eight years later, the number jumped to 1,093,005, representing 26 percent of this group of children. The number of programs increased during this period, as well, with 54 different initiatives in 40 states and the District of Columbia in operation during the 2009–2010 school year.[8,9]

This increase in access and enrollment has been fueled by several factors. These include results of research on the effects of high-quality Pre-K in improving academic outcomes,[10, 11] policymakers' interest in reducing the achievement gap, and the efforts of advocates, elected officials, business leaders, and philanthropic foundations to move preschool onto the public policy agenda. Expansion also has been aided by the participation of public schools, private child care centers, and Head Start grantees in state-funded Pre-K programs.[12]

As access and enrollment have expanded, policymakers have established Pre-K-specific programmatic and learning outcomes standards and monitoring policies. Monitoring data can provide Pre-K program administrators with the capacity to engage in a cycle of planning, doing, reviewing, and acting, similar to the management model advocated by W. Edwards Deming.[13] In turn, this continuous review cycle can enable state and local administrators to reflect on what Pre-K program elements or policies need to be revised as a means for meeting an initiative's goals.[14]

The exact purpose of these monitoring efforts varies across Pre-K programs. Monitoring data typically are used to determine the technical assistance needed by Pre-K providers, the focus of professional development training or mentoring provided to teachers, and how the curricula should be adjusted. These data also are used to determine the need for corrective actions or sanctions and/or to identify which providers should receive funding. Some programs also report using monitoring data to implement changes in preschool policies.[15]

As might be expected given these multiple purposes, Pre-K programs report the collection of a variety of data as part of their respective monitoring efforts. Such data include information on classroom quality, teachers' efforts to support children's learning, and the nature of teacher-student interactions. Facility and safety procedure reports and program records also are collected. Because Pre-K stakeholders often are interested to know if such programs are effective at enhancing young children's development and/or improving kindergarten-readiness levels, one common focus of these monitoring initiatives is documentation of

[7] W. S. Barnett, K. B. Robin, J. T. Hustedt, and K. L. Schulman, *The State of Preschool: 2003 State Preschool Yearbook,* New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2003.

[8] According to NIEER's *State Preschool Yearbook*, the 10 states that did not provide Pre-K in 2009–2010 were Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Mississippi, Montana, North Dakota, New Hampshire, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming.

[9] Barnett et al., 2010.

[10] E. Frede, K. Jung, W. S. Barnett, and A. Figueras, *The APPLES Blossom: Abbott Preschool Program Longitudinal Effects Study (APPLES) – Preliminary Results through 2nd Grade,* New Brunswick, NJ: NIEER, 2009.

[11] J. T. Hustedt, W. S. Barnett, K. Jung, and A. H. Friedman, *The New Mexico PreK Evaluation: Impacts from the Fourth Year (2008-2009) of New Mexico's State-funded PreK Program*, New Brunswick, NJ: NIEER, 2010.

[12] E. Rose, *The Promise of Preschool: From Head Start to Universal Pre-Kindergarten*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

[13] W. E. Deming, *Out of the Crisis*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000.

[14] National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force, *Taking Stock: Assessing and Improving Early Childhood Learning and Program Quality*, New York: Foundation for Child Development, 2007.

[15] Barnett et al., 2010.

children's learning outcomes.[16] This report focuses on the Pre-K policies governing the assessment of such learning. However, before deciding on their approach to collecting such data, as well as the specific measure(s) to be used, policymakers must pay careful attention to the special challenges involved in assessing young children. These issues are discussed next.

[16] Barnett et al., 2010.

The process of documenting preschoolers' learning can reveal children's strengths, needs, and progress, as well as how effective their Pre-K programs are in enhancing their skills and knowledge. These data can be especially useful if they are collected at more than one point in time and used to inform the planning, reviewing, and doing cycle. In turn, this information can guide decisions about the assistance or training teachers need and/or how individual classroom experiences and program policies might be improved to better serve and educate children.[17, 18]

Yet, the process of assessing what young children know and can do poses particular challenges. These challenges may best be illustrated by first considering the traditional approach used by school districts and states to determine the academic achievement of mid-elementary, middle, and high school students, and, in turn, whether their teachers and/or schools can be considered effective.[19] Older students typically are tested through the use of norm- or criterion-referenced assessments. Students are expected to independently read and respond to assessment items by filling in a bubble or circling or checking an answer (known as a selected response), or writing an essay or performing mathematical calculations (also known as a constructed response).[20]

These traditional approaches are unlikely to produce useful data about what a 4-year-old knows or can do, and, in turn, how effective the Pre-K program is in improving children's development and/or kindergarten readiness. For example, while preschoolers may be able to hold a pencil and/or use computers, it is unrealistic to expect children at this age to read independently and respond to selected- and/or constructed-response items. Even if an adult reads the prompt for a test item, a preschooler may not be able to remember the directions, stay focused on the task at hand, and/or regulate her behavior in terms of sitting for any length of time. This could be particularly problematic if she is placed in an unfamiliar setting, does not know the person conducting the test, or is not accustomed to engaging in question-and-answer-type conversations with adults.[21, 22, 23, 24]

Another challenge relates to fairly pinpointing the level of academic performance that indicates whether a Pre-K program is effective at improving learning. This is because younger children develop at vastly different rates, with the variation in development more evident in the preschool years than at any other time during the school-age period. Such developmental changes may be episodic, erratic, and rapid, even among "typically" developing children. In addition, preschoolers' ability to demonstrate their skills at any particular point in time can vary, rendering the results of any single assessment unreliable. Young children's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development may not necessarily proceed in an equal manner within and across these domains even under the best of circumstances. This especially

[17] National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force, 2007.
[18] S. Riley-Ayers, E. Frede, W. S. Barnett, and K. Brenneman, *Improving Early Education Programs through Data-Based Decision Making*, New Brunswick, NJ: NIEER, 2011.
[19] L. Darling-Hammond, *Standards, Assessments, and Educational Policy: In Pursuit of Genuine Accountability,* William H. Angoff Memorial Lecture, Princeton, NJ: ETS Policy Information Center, 2006.
[20] D. F. Gullo, *Understanding Assessment and Evaluation in Early Childhood Education (Second Ed.)*, New York: Teachers College Press, 2005.
[21] Gullo, 2005.
[22] B. T. Bowman, M. S. Donovan, and M. S. Burns (Eds.), *Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers*, Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2000.
[23] S. J. Meisels, and S. Atkins-Burnett, "The Elements of Early Childhood Assessment," In J. P. Shonkoff and S. J. Meisels (Eds.), *Handbook of Early Childhood Intervention*, *2nd Ed*. (pp. 231–257), New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
[24] Snow and Van Hemel, 2008.

may be the case if a child has any type of physical and/or cognitive disability.[25, 26, 27, 28]

Complicating matters further, the knowledge and skills individual preschoolers bring to their classrooms vary widely. This is due not only to differences in children's individual rates of development, but also because Pre-K programs enroll children who may not have experienced equal opportunities to learn. About 40 percent of the programs require that families meet some type of low-income threshold. Additional eligibility criteria can include a child's disability or developmental delay, low levels of parental education, a family's home language being other than English, or having a parent who is on active duty in the military. On the other hand, some Pre-K programs determine a child's eligibility based solely on meeting an age cutoff and residing in the district or state offering the program.[29] In short, while typical Pre-K enrollees may share a similar chronological age, the children within any Pre-K classroom may reflect many developmental and demographic factors. Such variation also makes it difficult to define exactly what level of achievement outcomes demonstrate that a Pre-K program has been effective at improving children's learning.

Because of the importance, nature, and complexity of these issues, several national organizations have coalesced around the development and dissemination of sound practices in the assessment of young children. For example, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) have issued a joint position statement on the assessment of young children.[30] These organizations urge use of measures that are "developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, [and] tied to children's daily activities." Moreover, they argue for an assessment system that involves evidence of children's learning documented across time at multiple times and reflecting their varied, real-world contexts. In addition, if children are from families whose home language is not English, NAEYC urges caution when using measures that were designed for English-speakers. Instead, any instruments should be aligned with children's culture and language. Further, those administering the measures need to be competent in speaking the child's language.[31]

NAEYC and NAECS/SDE also urge that multiple sources of evidence be considered when assessing young children.[32] This might include not only multiple measure types, but also information gathered from families. In addition, any measures used should reflect the goals, instructional strategies, and curricula being implemented in a Pre-K classroom. The results of such measures therefore also can inform any decisions related to improving the educational experiences offered to Pre-K enrollees.

Similarly, the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council of Exceptional Children recommends that children identified as having special needs be assessed with a variety of measures that are reflective of the child's

[25] Snow and Van Hemel, 2008.
[26] Bowman, Donovan, and Burns, 2000.
[27] Gullo, 2005.
[28] Meisels and Atkins-Burnett, 2000.
[29] Barnett et al., 2010.
[30] National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE), *Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation: Building an Effective, Accountable System in Programs for Children Birth through Age 8,* Washington, DC: NAEYC, 2003.
[31] National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), *Where We Stand on Assessing Young English Language Learners*, Washington, DC, 2009.
[32] National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE), 2003.

home and school contexts and can provide a valid picture of his or her needs. In addition, rather than relying solely on measures that "simply enumerate or quantify the presence or absence of isolated skills," the DEC urges use of authentic measures that allow a child to "demonstrate a behavior or skill in multiple settings" and across time.[33]

As will be discussed in more detail below, Pre-K stakeholders can choose from different approaches to determine what children have learned and can do. Each approach offers tradeoffs between the degree to which the results provide information about a child's skill set and the time and personnel costs of administering, scoring, and interpreting the results. No matter what approach is used, policymakers should apply at least four important criteria when selecting the specific learning outcome measure(s) that will be used to assess children's learning.

Some Questions to Consider When Choosing an Early Childhood Assessment

1. Will the measure be used for the purpose for which it was designed?
2. Will the measure provide valid and reliable data on enrollees' learning over time?
3. What kind of training and support might be needed by the individuals who will administer and score the measure, as well as interpret its results?
4. What are the costs and benefits of administering, scoring, reporting, and interpreting the results of a single measure vs. multiple measures on a large-scale basis?

First, and of primary importance, is that the measure chosen be used for the purpose for which it was designed. For example, policymakers who wish to determine whether a child's language and literacy skills have improved while enrolled in Pre-K should not use initial screening tests or more in-depth diagnostic assessments designed to identify children who have a disability or delay in their language, cognitive, social, and/or fine or gross motor development. Instead, they should select an instrument that was designed to measure children's literacy skills.[34, 35]

Second, any learning outcome measure used should provide accurate information about children's abilities, meaning its *validity* and *reliability* have been established. Validity refers to the extent to which the scores on a test are appropriate for a particular purpose, such as documenting that a child has acquired a skill or specific type of knowledge. Reliability is defined as the tendency of such scores to be consistent on two or more occasions of testing, provided there is no real change in the test-takers' knowledge.[36]

Third, those administering the assessment and/or interpreting the results need sufficient training and support to perform these tasks competently and build their own "assessment literacy."[37] Otherwise, a child's abilities may mistakenly be under- or overestimated.[38, 39] This issue may be particularly salient in Pre-K programs that require teachers to document children's learning outcomes, but also have teacher qualification policies that differentiate between those working in public schools vs. private child care and Head Start settings. In these

[33] Division for Early Childhood (DEC). *Promoting Positive Outcomes for Children with Disabilities: Recommendations for Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation,* Missoula, MT, 2007.
[34] M. R. Brassard, and A. E. Boehm, *Preschool Assessment: Principles and Practices*, New York: The Guilford Press, 2007.
[35] Snow and Van Hemel, 2008.
[36] S. Livingston, *Testing and Psychometric Terms Glossary*, Princeton, NJ: ETS Brigham Library, n.d.
[37] National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE), 2003.
[38] Bowman, Donovan, and Burns, 2000.
[39] L. Shepard, S. L. Kagan, and E. Wurtz, *Principles and Recommendations for Early Childhood Assessments,* Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel, 1998.

"two-tier" states, public school teachers typically are required to have a minimum of a B.A. and teacher certification, while those working in private child care and Head Start settings are not required to attain this level of qualifications.[40] Yet, if teachers' levels of knowledge about child development and/or formal education differ, it may be unrealistic to expect them to have consistently similar capacity to administer and/or score different types of measures.[41]

Finally, when instituted on a large-scale basis and/or used to monitor the effects of Pre-K participation, policymakers must consider the time, cost, and personnel resources involved in conducting, scoring, reporting, and interpreting each measure.[42] As is the case with a variety of education-related initiatives, the full implementation of some measures may be more labor- and/or cost-intensive than others.[43] This may be an important issue when documenting children's progress over time, with the initial administration of any measure taking place at enrollment and subsequent administrations occurring mid-year and/or at the end of Pre-K.

On a related note, policymakers should consider the practical costs and benefits of adopting a single, universal measure versus providing programs with the flexibility to choose from a menu of approved instruments or even allowing the choice of measure to be made at the individual provider level. Documenting preschoolers' learning or progress through use of a single measure with high levels of validity and reliability can have several benefits. For example, it can be easier to conduct "apples-to-apples"-type analyses across individual classrooms, providers, and programs. In addition, large-scale data collection can become more streamlined. Providing related teacher professional development and technical assistance also can become more efficient and cost-effective when all Pre-K providers use the same measure for documenting what children have learned.[44, 45]

At the same time — and as noted above — children vary widely in terms of their special needs, home language, culture, and parental level of education. Furthermore, because Pre-K teachers may have varying levels of education and knowledge about child development, they may not have similar capacity to administer every measure. Individual Pre-K providers may use different curriculum models as well, with each model having its own related assessment measure. And last, but certainly not least, any single measure is unlikely to provide sufficient information for making informed programmatic decisions. Thus, it might be preferable to mandate the use of several instruments or provide Pre-K providers with some latitude of choice via a "menu" or locally-determined approach.[46, 47, 48]

In sum, when looking across all four key decision areas, it is not enough to choose a measure based simply on whether it has been packaged as appropriate for preschoolers. Furthermore, the different approaches available for assessing young children's learning each present their own set of tradeoffs. These are discussed next.

[40] Barnett et al., 2010.
[41] Gullo, 2005.
[42] Snow and Van Hemel, 2008.
[43] A. S. Epstein, L. J. Schweinhart, A. DeBruin-Parecki, and K. B. Robin, *Preschool Assessment: A Guide to Developing a Balanced Approach*, New Brunswick, NJ: NIEER, 2004.
[44] Gullo, 2005.
[45] Kyle Snow, *Developing Kindergarten Readiness and Other Large-Scale Assessment Systems*, Washington, DC: NAEYC, 2011.
[46] Gullo, 2005.
[47] Snow and Van Hemel, 2008.
[48] Snow, 2011.

Given the extensive body of research on the special issues related to assessing young children, it is clear that the content and administration of measures aimed at documenting preschoolers' development and learning needs to be different than that used with older students. Recognizing these differences, what options do Pre-K policymakers have to inform their program's monitoring and decision-making process? When looking across the spectrum of measures designed to examine what preschoolers know and/or can do, three broad approaches are represented: direct assessments, observation checklists and scales, and samples of children's work. Each approach presents various tradeoffs that are discussed below.

Direct Assessments

The first type of approach to measuring young children's learning involves the use of traditional direct assessments. These measures typically are norm-referenced and thus are designed to provide both individual scores and aggregated data for large groups of children, with an individual's or group's scores compared to the larger sample of children of the same chronological age. The data from this type of assessment are useful for monitoring trends within classrooms, schools, or districts over time. This type of measure also can be used to screen children for learning disabilities, determine their eligibility for special services, and/or diagnose the extent to which children are in need of specialized interventions. [49, 50, 51]

Norm-referenced tests are standardized as well. This means that during their administration, all children — except for those with disabilities and requiring special accommodations — are presented with the same or parallel questions (e.g., "What letter is this?") or task directions ("Point to the letter B"). The administration — including timing, if applicable, and use of sample items and/or prompts — scoring, and score interpretation of these measures also occurs in the same or parallel fashion.[52]

Standardized, norm-referenced measures that have appropriate levels of validity and reliability have the potential to provide evidence about whether children enrolled in a particular program meet a specific skill or knowledge benchmark at a particular point in time. To revisit the letter-recognition item example described above, a child will either name or point to the letter B, or she will not. In addition, in contrast with the other approaches described below, the assessment administrators do not need to be in the classroom on a daily basis, which means that external assessors can be used. As a result, while pre-administration training certainly is needed, the administration and scoring of these measures can be less burdensome on teachers.

Yet, determining whether or not a preschooler can name or point to a specific letter at a particular moment may not provide a full understanding of a child's skill set, much less enough information about the quality of a program and/or the amount and type of professional development or technical assistance a teacher may need.[53, 54, 55, 56] Finally, norm-referenced assessments are sometimes referred to as "artificial," since they assess children's knowledge out of context, rather than as part of whatever activity a child happens to be engaged in at a particular time.[57]

Observation Checklists and Scales

The second type of approach to determining what preschoolers know and can do involves teachers'

[49] Epstein et al., 2004.
[50] Division for Early Childhood (DEC), 2007.
[51] Gullo, 2005.
[52] Gullo, 2005.
[53] J. Jones, *Early Literacy Assessment Systems: Essential Elements*, Princeton, NJ: ETS Policy Information Center, 2003.
[54] J. Jones, "Framing the Assessment Discussion," *Young Children, 59*(1), 14–18, 2004.
[55] National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force, 2007.
[56] Snow and Van Hemel, 2008.
[57] High/Scope Educational Research Foundation. *Child Observation Record: Information for Decision Makers*, Ypsilanti, MI, 2005.

observations of children's classroom performance. Sometimes referred to as an "informal," yet "authentic," assessment method, observing children on a day-to-day basis while engaged in everyday program activities and within naturalistic settings has a long tradition in the early childhood education field. For this type of assessment, teachers usually record what they observe through the use of what are known as anecdotal or running records.[58]

By also providing contextual information, observations may provide stakeholders with a more complete sense of what is — or is not — happening in a classroom, and thus also inform the support that teachers or Pre-K providers may need.[59] Yet, when conducted in a high-quality manner, observations can be more labor-intensive than norm-referenced measures. This difference is mainly due to the need for observations to be completed by the teacher or other regular classroom staff member, as the goal here is to generate informed and insightful details about the skills a child is displaying over time. Such information also must be classified in such a way as to provide information on individual children and/or within specific domain areas, such as language, literacy, or math.[60, 61, 62]

Pre-K staff and/or policymakers also may elect to guide observations through the use of pre-set content checklists or scales. Such measures typically contain indicators that demonstrate a predetermined standard of mastery for a discrete skill, with the items within each indicator incrementally arranged on a continuum to represent the beginning stages of skill acquisition up to full mastery. In turn, the indicators are grouped under larger domains. The criteria in these observation measures may be aligned with the objectives for the preschool curriculum or a program's early learning guidelines, as well.[63, 64] The information gathered through this process then can inform any adjustments that need to be made to the curriculum.[65] The use of this type of measure also can improve instruction and understanding of how young children learn.[66]

As an example, an objective in *The Creative Curriculum for Preschool* is for a child to "Demonstrate knowledge of the alphabet."[67] For the related Language Development/Reading and Writing Domain indicator in the *Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum* observational assessment, in contrast to being asked to name or point to a specific letter, children can be rated as being in one of four developmental stages.[68] The first stage is classified as "Forerunners," with the example provided being that the child "Points out print in environment." A child would be rated as being in Level I if he or she "Recognizes and identifies a few letters by name." Level II indicates that the student "Recognizes and names many letters," whereas Level III infers that he or she is "Beginning to make letter-sound connections." By gathering information over time, teachers and policymakers might better determine how effective the curriculum is in moving preschoolers from the Forerunner stage to Level III.

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[58] J. R. Jablon, A. L. Dombro, and M. L. Dichtelmiller, *The Power of Observation*, Washington, DC: Teaching Strategies, Inc., 1999.
[59] Gullo, 2005.
[60] Brassard and Boehm, 2007.
[61] A. Losardo, and A. Notari-Syverson, *Alternative Approaches to Assessing Young Children*, Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2001.
[62] Snow and Van Hemel, 2008.
[63] Brassard and Boehm, 2007.
[64] Losardo and Notari-Syverson, 2001.
[65] Gullo, 2005.
[66] R. B. Whelan, *Understanding Children's Mathematical Learning: The Relationship to Instruction in Preschool Classrooms*, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Seton Hall University, 2008.
[67] D. T. Dodge, L. J. Colker, and C. Heroman, *The Creative Curriculum for Preschool, Fourth Edition*, Washington, DC: Teaching Strategies, 2002.
[68] D. T. Dodge, L. J. Colker, and C. Heroman, *A Teacher's Guide to Using The Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum Assessment System*, Washington, DC: Teaching Strategies, 2001.

While observation measures can help teachers and other classroom staff classify children's progress across one or more domains, it also should be noted that all staff administering such measures should be trained on their implementation. Furthermore, to ensure consistency within and across classrooms — and thus the ability to compare any results — teachers need to be able to demonstrate adequate levels of reliability prior to administering such measures. Such reliability should be checked over time, as well.[69]

Samples of Children's Work

The third type of approach used to document what preschoolers have learned relies on the collection of purposeful samples of children's work, and thus also is considered by many early childhood stakeholders to be an "authentic" assessment.[70, 71] To return to our example of documenting a child's progress in letter recognition, work samples might include original documents showcasing the student's ability to copy letters, or teacher-produced photographs of signs or labels the student has made. The teacher also might consider using audio or video recordings of the preschooler talking about letters while participating in circle time or engaged in other pre-reading or reading activities.[72]

When done well, student work samples can complement teachers' observations in documenting children's learning performance and progress over time. Such samples also might identify domain areas that need further support, and in turn, inform teachers' instructional strategies for individual children.[73] Furthermore, when combined with teacher-produced photos, notes, records, audio and/or video recordings, etc., as well as formal assessment results, the resulting "portfolio" can provide a more complete picture of a child's skill set.[74, 75]

Yet, organizing work samples or more inclusive portfolios can be labor intensive for teachers, since choosing the artifacts that best demonstrate children's progress is dependent on systematically collecting and sorting through the various items that might be included. Decisions also need to be made about defining the criteria for the samples, making sure the judgment of items is consistent within and across classrooms to enable comparison, as well as how such items will be analyzed to inform the planning and decision-making process. And, if teachers are to adequately demonstrate children's learning progress, they also must be dedicated to continually updating and reviewing children's work samples. Attention also must be paid to how and where each portfolio will be stored.[76, 77]

In summary, there are at least three main approaches from which Pre-K policymakers may choose when attempting to assess enrollee's learning outcomes, and, in turn, inform program monitoring decisions. However, each approach offers distinct tradeoffs, particularly when implemented on a large-scale basis. The next section of the report describes the child assessment policies across all state-funded Pre-K programs for the 2011–2012 school year.

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[69] Frede, Gilliam, and Schweinhart, 2011.

[70] S. C. Wortham, "Assessing and Reporting Young Children's Progress: A Review of the Issues," In J. P. Isenberg, and M. R. Jalongo (Eds.), *Major Trends and Issues in Early Childhood Education (Second Ed.)* (pp. 97–113), New York: Teachers College Press, 2003.

[71] S. C. Wortham, A. Barbour, and B. Desjean-Perrotta, *Portfolio Assessment: A Handbook for Preschool and Elementary Educators*, Olney, MD: Association for Childhood Education International, 1998.

[72] P. Apple, S. Enders, and S. Wortham, "Portfolio Assessment for Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers: Bridging the Gap between Data Collection and Individualized Planning," In S. C. Wortham, A. Barbour, and B. Desjean-Perrotta (Eds.), *Portfolio Assessment: A Handbook for Preschool and Elementary Educators* (pp. 31–44), Olney, MD: Association for Childhood Education International, 1998.

[73] S. J. Meisels, *Using Observational Assessment to Evaluate Young Children's Learning: The Technical Quality of the Work Sampling System*, Chicago: Erikson Institute, 2010.

[74] Wortham, 2003.

[75] Wortham, Barbour, and Desjean-Perrotta, 1998.

[76] Losardo and Notari-Syverson, 2001.

[77] Wortham, Barbour, and Desjean-Perrotta, 1998.

This section of the report identifies and describes specific state Pre-K child assessment policies in effect for the 2011–2012 school year. Of particular interest are the specific measures cited in these policies and the assessment approaches under which these measures can be categorized. Also highlighted are the policies on the degree of choice Pre-K providers have in selecting which specific measure(s) to use in their respective settings, as well as how often Pre-K assessments are to be administered and reported.

To provide this information, we relied on two sources of data. The first source was the information reported in NIEER's 2009–2010 *State Preschool Yearbook* [78] about each of the 54 state-funded Pre-K initiatives. These data were useful in highlighting the purpose of the monitoring policies within these initiatives, as well as the various types of data collected to inform monitoring decisions.

While the *Yearbook* reports some data on Pre-K child assessment policies, this information was from the 2009–2010 school year. To identify and describe each program's current policies, we conducted a survey of state personnel involved in each of the 54 Pre-K initiatives identified in the *Yearbook*. The survey was conducted during the summer of 2011 and focused on three topics:

- The child outcome measure(s) that must or are allowed to be used;
- The degree of choice Pre-K providers have in selecting measures; and
- When learning outcome data are to be collected and reported.

Staff representing 53 of the 54 state-funded Pre-K programs highlighted in the *Yearbook* participated in our survey, which represents a 98 percent response rate. Although one program did not respond, we were able to gather the desired information independently. Our results are presented below.

Measures to Be Used and Types of Approaches Represented

The first survey question asked staff to report on their policies regarding any measures that individual program providers must or are allowed to use to collect child learning outcome data. If specific instruments were reported, we then categorized each program's respective policy based on whether it represented exclusive use of direct assessments or observation checklists/scales, or a combination of these approaches. The specific measures reported as required to be used or approved for use are displayed in the Appendix; however, we discuss here and summarize in Table 1 the data on the different approaches these measures represent.[79]

Direct Assessments. As can be seen in Table 1, four programs report policies that require the use of measures that can be exclusively categorized as direct assessments. And, while not the case with every assessment, as is evident from the titles of these instruments that can be found in the Appendix Table, they mainly focus on children's ability to recognize and/or name objects, as well as their familiarity with letters and letter sounds.

- Alabama Pre-K policy requires its providers to use the *Language and Emerging Literacy Assessment* (LELA), which was developed by a Head Start grantee in Alabama.[80] In addition, these providers are randomly assigned to administer the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test* (PPVT).[81]

[78] Barnett et al., 2010.

[79] While the use of work samples/portfolios is one approach to assessing children's learning, because no Pre-K program reports sole reliance on this approach, it is not included as a stand-alone column in Table 1.

[80] G. Cunningham, D. Hicks, and G. Williams, *Language and Emerging Literacy Assessment*, Birmingham, AL: Jefferson County Committee for Economic Opportunity Head Start, 2002.

[81] L. Dunn and L. Dunn, *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Third Edition,* Circle Pines, MN: American Guidance Service, 1997.

Table 1. *Assessment Approaches Represented by State Pre-K Policies*

Pre-K Program (n=54)	Direct Assessment Only	Observation Checklist/ Scale Only	Combination of Approaches	One or All Assessments Not Specified	Child Outcome Data Not Required
Alabama First Class Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Program	X				
Alaska Pilot Prekindergarten Program	X				
Arizona Early Childhood Block Grant – Prekindergarten Component		X			
Arkansas Better Chance/Arkansas Better Chance for School Success		X			
California State Preschool Program		X			
Colorado Preschool Program		X			
Connecticut School Readiness				X	
Delaware Early Childhood Assistance Program (ECAP)		X			
District of Columbia Charter School Pre-K (DC Charter)				X	
District of Columbia Pre-kindergarten Expansion and Enhancement Program (DC PEEP)				X	
Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Program			X		
Georgia Pre-K Program		X			
Illinois Preschool for All			X		
Iowa Shared Visions		X			
Iowa Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SVPP)		X			
Kansas At-Risk Four-Year-Old Children Preschool Program				X	
Kansas Pre-K Pilot Program				X	
Kentucky Preschool Program			X		
Louisiana Cecil J. Picard LA4 Early Childhood Program			X		
Louisiana 8(g) Student Enhancement Block Grant Program			X		
Louisiana Non-Public Schools Early Childhood Development Program (NSECD)			X		
Maine Public Preschool Program				X	
Maryland Prekindergarten Program					X
Massachusetts Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) and Grant 391 Program		X			
Michigan Great Start Readiness Program				X	
Minnesota Head Start				X	
Missouri Preschool Project		X			
Nebraska Early Childhood Education Program – Ages 3 to 5		X			
Nevada State Prekindergarten Education Program	X				
New Jersey Former Abbott & Expansion Districts (Abbott)				X	
New Jersey Former Early Childhood Program Aid Districts (ECPA)				X	
New Jersey Former Early Launch to Learning Initiative Districts (ELLI)				X	
New Mexico PreK		X			
New York Universal Prekindergarten				X	
North Carolina More at Four Pre-Kindergarten Program		X			
Ohio Early Childhood Education				X	
Oklahoma Early Childhood Four-Year-Old Program				X	
Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten				X	
Pennsylvania Education Accountability Block Grant (EABG)		X			
Pennsylvania Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program (HSSAP)		X			
Pennsylvania Kindergarten for Four-Year-Olds & School-Based Pre-K (K4)				X	
Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts		X			
Rhode Island Prekindergarten Demonstration Project			X		
South Carolina Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP)			X		
South Carolina Half-Day Child Development Program (4K)				X	
Tennessee Voluntary Pre-K					X
Texas Public School Prekindergarten					X
Vermont Early Education Initiative		X			
Vermont Prekindergarten Education – Act 62		X			
Virginia Preschool Initiative	X				
Washington Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)				X	
West Virginia Universal Pre-K		X			
Wisconsin Four-Year-Old Kindergarten Program (4K)					X
Wisconsin Head Start State Supplement				X	
TOTAL # PROGRAMS	**4**	**19**	**8**	**19**	**4**

- Alaska also mandates use of the PPVT, as well as the *Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning-Third Edition* (DIAL-3).[82] The purpose of this latter measure is to identify children who may have developmental issues.
- Nevada providers also are required to use the PPVT, as well as the *Expressive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test* (EOWPVT).[83] In addition, if providers enroll children whose home language is not English, they also must use the *Pre-Language Assessment Scales* (pre-LAS).[84]
- Providers participating in the Virginia Preschool Initiative must use the *Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening* (*PALS-PreK*), which was developed at the University of Virginia. [85]

Observation Checklists and Scales. Table 1 also shows that 19 programs report policies that require the use of measures that can be categorized as exclusively multi-domain, observational checklists or scales. Across these 19 programs, there are 10 observation protocols that potentially are in use. However, the two most frequently cited measures in these programs' policies are *Teaching Strategies GOLD*[86] and *Work Sampling System*.[87] These measures are similar in that each is set up with distinct domain areas and indicators within each domain. In addition, both include domains focusing on social/emotional and physical development, language, literacy, math, science, and social studies, as well as the arts. These two measures also have some differences. For example, *Teaching Strategies Gold* has 38 indicators, while the *Work Sampling System* uses a total of 55 items. In addition, the number of progress levels for each indicator varies. In the *Work Sampling System*, a child's performance is rated as Not Yet, In Process, or Proficient, whereas the GOLD system relies on nine progress levels.

The observational measures that are required to be used in the programs in California, Missouri and New Mexico were developed by their respective Departments of Education.

- California uses the *Desired Results Developmental Profile-Preschool,* which maps onto the state's preschool learning standards.[88] This measure has seven domains and 43 indicators, with a child's mastery of any indicator scored as Not Yet, Exploring, Developing, Building, or Integrating.
- Pre-K providers in Missouri rely on a measure called the *Preschool Exit Observational Instrument*. This measure has 65 indicators and focuses on seven different domains, including conventional knowledge, communication, and mathematical/physical knowledge. Six of the seven domains are scored as Not Yet/Almost Never, Occasionally/Sometimes, or Almost Always.[89]

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[82] C. Mardell-Czudnowski, and D. S. Goldenberg, *Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning – Third Edition (DIAL-3)*, Bloomington, MN: Pearson Assessments, 1998.
[83] R. Brownell, *Expressive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test (EOPVT; 3rd Edition)*, Novato, CA: Academic Therapy Publications, 2001.
[84] S. E. Duncan, and E. A. DeAvila, *Pre-LAS 2000*, Monterey, CA: CTB/McGraw-Hill, 1998.
[85] M. Ivernizzi, A. Sullivan, J. Meier, and L. Swank, *Pre-K Teachers Manual: PALS Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia, 2004.
[86] Teaching Strategies, Inc., *Research Foundation: Teaching Strategies GOLD Assessment System,* Washington, DC, 2010.
[87] S. J. Meisels, J. R. Jablon, D. B. Marsden, M. L. Dichtelmiller, and A. B. Dorfman, *The Work Sampling System* (4th Ed.), New York: Pearson Early Learning, 2001.
[88] California Department of Education Child Development Division, *Desired Results Development Profile – Preschool*, Sacramento, CA, 2010.
[89] Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, *School Entry Profile Preschool Assessment Project Edition: Administrative Manual,* Jefferson City, MO, 2008.

- New Mexico's *Early Learning Outcomes Observational Assessment* has 25 indicators. Children are rated on a 1–5 scale, with the individual numbers representing "Not yet demonstrating for PreK" (1) to "Making progress for PreK" (3) and "Exceeds expectations for PreK" (5).[90]

Combination of Measures Approaches. Table 1 shows that eight programs report policies in which the measures cited represent a combination of direct assessments, observation protocols, and/or portfolios. For example:

- Voluntary Preschool Initiative providers in Florida must use the Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener (FLKRS), which couples a subset of an observation system with a norm-referenced measure that focuses on letter naming and phonemic awareness.[91]
- Providers in Illinois' Preschool for All program may choose from among five observation protocols and two developmental screening instruments.
- In the Kentucky Preschool Program, Pre-K providers have a choice of 10 observational protocols and two developmental screening instruments.
- All three Pre-K programs in Louisiana require providers to document what preschoolers have learned through the use of both a specific observational measure and portfolios of student work.
- Rhode Island requires its Pre-K providers to use both a single observation protocol and three norm-referenced assessments.

Non-specified Assessments. Finally, 19 programs allow individual providers to choose one or all of the measures used to determine enrollees' learning outcomes. For example:

- New Jersey requires providers in its three Pre-K programs to choose from a menu of observation measures to gather data on children's ongoing learning, but also to use a locally determined, norm-referenced screening measure.
- Ohio Pre-K providers must use the age-appropriate version of the *Ages and Stages Questionnaires: Social-Emotional* (ASQ)[92], which can serve as a screener for developmental delays, as well as the *Individual Growth and Development Indicators for Preschool-Aged Children* (also known as *Get it, Got it, Go*)[93], which was developed at the University of Minnesota and focuses on preschoolers' expressive language and early literacy skills. In addition, providers need to choose a curriculum-embedded assessment, with the curriculum chosen aligned with the state's Pre-Kindergarten Content Standards.
- Ohio and Washington providers must use specific measures, but the required additional measures may be locally determined. Thirteen additional program policies allow various degrees of choice, as well. These choice models are discussed next.

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[90] New Mexico Public Education Department, *New Mexico 3- and 4-year-old Early Learning Outcomes 2010: Essential Indicators with Rubrics*, Albuquerque: NM, 2010.

[91] Florida Institute of Education at the University of North Florida, *Florida's Early Learning Standards and the Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener: Briefing Paper, Strategy 1: Objective 1, Virtual School Readiness Incubator Project*, Jacksonville, FL, 2007.

[92] D. Bricker, and J. Squires (with L. Mounts, L. Potter, R. Nickel, E. Twombly, and J. Farrell), *Ages & Stages Questionnaires® (ASQ): A Parent-Completed, Child-Monitoring* System (2nd ed.), Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 1999.

[93] S. R. McConnell, M. A. McEvoy, J. S. Priest, and K. M. Missal, *Individual Growth and Development Indicators for Preschool-Aged Children* (*Get it, Got it, Go*), Minneapolis, MN: Center for Early Education and Development, University of Minnesota, 2001.

Pre-K Provider Degree of Choice in Selecting Measures to Be Used

A second purpose of our survey was to determine whether individual Pre-K providers must use a universal measure, choose from a menu of approved instruments, and/or determine at the local level which assessment(s) to use. Table 2 displays the results of our analysis for this research question.

Of the 50 Pre-K programs that have policies on the collection of child outcome data:

- 21 report a policy mandating the use of a required measure or measures. Included in these "no-choice" programs are the same four programs with policies requiring use of specific direct assessments, as well as 11 programs with policies mandating exclusive use of a specific observation protocol. In addition, the programs in Florida, Louisiana, and Rhode Island, as well as the South Carolina CDEPP program, mandate use of measures that represent more than one type of approach to assessing children's learning.
- 10 programs have policies that allow Pre-K providers to select from a menu of approved child outcome measures. Within this group, eight programs rely exclusively on measures that can be categorized as observation protocols. The remaining two programs allow providers to choose from a menu containing both observation instruments and direct assessments. No matter what the type contained in these menus, the range of choices is between two and 11. Among these "menu" Pre-K programs, providers have an average of four child outcome measure options from which to choose.
- 19 programs allow individual providers to go beyond the menu approach by providing them with varying degrees of latitude to select which outcome measure(s) should be used.
  - ➢ As mentioned above, the programs in Washington and Ohio have policies mandating the use of specific measures, but also allow providers at the local level to determine which additional assessment(s) are appropriate for the program based on the population they serve and/or the curriculum used.
  - ➢ New Jersey's program providers must select from a menu of three observation checklists to document children's learning, but also must determine at the local level which norm-referenced screening measure will be used at the beginning of the school year to determine if children are in need of special services.
  - ➢ Providers in Minnesota and Wisconsin must choose measures that are aligned with federal Head Start regulations.
  - ➢ The remaining programs also allow child outcome measures to be locally determined, but under the restriction that the measures are aligned with state Pre-K standards for curriculum, children's early learning, or assessments.

In summary, just as state-funded Pre-K policies differ in terms of the types of child outcome learning assessments represented, they also vary in the extent to which providers at the local level may choose which assessments to administer. Perhaps not surprisingly, there also is variation in the policies on how often assessments are to be administered and the results reported.

Table 2. *Degree of Choice Available for Selecting the Measure(s) to Be Used*

Degree of Choice	Direct Assessments (n=4)	Observation Checklist/Scale (n=19)	Combination of Approaches (n=8)	One or All Assessments Not Specified (n=19)
No choice/Universal measure(s) (n=21)	Alabama Alaska* Nevada Virginia	Arizona Arkansas California Delaware Georgia Iowa Shared Visions* Iowa SVPP* Missouri Nebraska New Mexico West Virginia	Florida Louisiana LA4 Louisiana 8(g) Louisiana NSECD Rhode Island South Carolina CDEPP	
Select from approved menu of measure choices (n=10)		Colorado Massachusetts North Carolina Pennsylvania EABG Pennsylvania HSSAP PA PreK Counts Vermont Act 62 Vermont Early Education	Illinois Kentucky	
Universal measure plus locally determined measure aligned with Pre-K learning, curriculum, and/or assessment standards (n=2)				Ohio Washington
Observation menu plus locally determined norm-referenced developmental screener (n=3)				New Jersey Abbott New Jersey ECPA New Jersey ELLI
All measures locally determined, but aligned with federal Head Start regulations (n=2)				Minnesota Wisconsin Head Start
All measures locally determined, but aligned with Pre-K learning, curriculum, and/or assessment standards (n=12)				Connecticut DC Charter DC PEEP Kansas At-Risk Kansas PreK Pilot Maine Michigan New York Oklahoma Oregon Pennsylvania K4 South Carolina 4K

*Pre-K providers in these programs also may use an additional, locally determined instrument, but are not required to do so.

Frequency of Assessment Administration and Reporting

Our third survey question focused on the frequency with which child outcome data are collected and reported. As might be expected given the results of our first two survey questions, Pre-K policies differed in this area, as well (see Table 3).

The following examples represent the range of frequency:

- Three programs report that the administration of child outcome measures takes place once per year. In Missouri, this data collection occurs at the end of the year. Florida's policy is unique in that assessment of what children have learned must take place within 30 days of kindergarten entry, rather than while children are enrolled in the state's VPK program.
- 14 programs report that documentation of children's learning must occur at least twice each school year, typically in the fall and the spring. Measuring children's learning outcomes at these two points in time can provide programs with the opportunity to track changes over the course of the school year.
- 14 programs report that such data must be gathered a minimum of three or four times per year.
- Providers in Georgia's Bright from the Start program must collect child outcome data every five weeks, which means that in their 160-day school year, assessments might take place at least five times.
- 10 programs have measure-dependent policies. In Ohio, for example, providers must use the observation measure in the fall, but the norm-referenced measure is required in the fall and the spring. Rhode Island Pre-K providers also must use direct assessments in the fall and spring, but collect observation checklist-based data three times per year.
- Eight programs do not report policies regarding how many times children's learning outcome assessments must be administered and reported. Six of these programs allow providers to locally determine all child outcome measures to be used as well. And, while the programs in Illinois and North Carolina do not provide this degree of choice, they do provide a menu of approved measures. Therefore, the lack of policies on administration and reporting frequency within all eight of these programs may reflect the difficulty in determining a "one size fits all" frequency. This would seem to be the case especially given that some direct assessments are better used as an initial developmental screen, while the observation protocols ideally should be used at least in the beginning and end of the school year to track children's learning over the course of their enrollment in Pre-K.

Table 3. *Policies on Frequency of Child Assessment Administration and Reporting*

Pre-K Program	Number of Times Per Year							Notes
	1	2	3	4	≥5	Measure Dependent	Not Specified	
Alabama First Class Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Program		X						
Alaska Pilot Prekindergarten Program		X						
Arizona Early Childhood Block Grant – Prekindergarten Component			X					
Arkansas Better Chance/Arkansas Better Chance for School Success			X					
California State Preschool Program		X						
Colorado Preschool Program			X					
Connecticut School Readiness			X					
Delaware Early Childhood Assistance Program (ECAP)			X					
District of Columbia Charter School Pre-K (DC Charter)		X						
District of Columbia Pre-kindergarten Expansion and Enhancement Program (DC PEEP)		X						
Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Program	X							At K entry
Georgia Pre-K Program					X			Every 5 weeks
Illinois Preschool for All							X	Menu with two types
Iowa Shared Visions			X					
Iowa Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SVPP)			X					
Kansas At-Risk Four-Year-Old Children Preschool Program		X						
Kansas Pre-K Pilot Program		X						
Kentucky Preschool Program	X							Ongoing assessment, but reported at least annually
Louisiana Cecil J. Picard LA4 Early Childhood Program						X		Observation: 2 times per year Portfolio: ongoing
Louisiana 8(g) Student Enhancement Block Grant Program						X		Observation: 2 times per year Portfolio: ongoing
Louisiana Non-Public Schools Early Childhood Development Program (NSECD)						X		Observation: 3 times per year Portfolio: ongoing
Maine Public Preschool Program							X	Measure determined locally
Massachusetts Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) and Grant 391 Program		X						
Michigan Great Start Readiness Program						X		Developmental screen: 1 time per year Ongoing administration of child measure
Minnesota Head Start							X	Measure determined locally
Missouri Preschool Project	X							At PreK Exit
Nebraska Early Childhood Education Program – Ages 3 to 5			X					In 12-month programs, 4 times per year
Nevada State Prekindergarten Education Program		X						

(continued on next page)

Table 3 (continued). *Policies on Frequency of Child Assessment Administration and Reporting*

Pre-K Program	Number of Times Per Year							Notes
	1	2	3	4	≥5	Measure Dependent	Not Specified	
New Jersey Former Abbott & Expansion Districts (Abbott)						X		Locally determined developmental screen: 1 time per year Observation menu: not specified
New Jersey Former Early Childhood Program Aid Districts (ECPA)						X		Locally determined developmental screen: 1 time per year Observation menu: not specified
New Jersey Former Early Launch to Learning Initiative Districts (ELLI)						X		Locally determined developmental screen: 1 time per year Observation menu: not specified
New Mexico PreK		X						Ongoing administration of observation, submitted 2 times per year
New York Universal Prekindergarten						X		Locally determined developmental screen: 1 time per year Administration of child measure: 2 times per year
North Carolina More at Four Pre-Kindergarten Program							X	Observation menu
Ohio Early Childhood Education						X		
Oklahoma Early Childhood Four-Year-Old Program							X	Measure determined locally
Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten			X					Ongoing administration of measure, submitted 3 times per year
Pennsylvania Education Accountability Block Grant (EABG)			X					
Pennsylvania Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program (HSSAP)			X					
Pennsylvania Kindergarten for Four-Year-Olds & School-Based Pre-K (K4)							X	Measure determined locally
Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts			X					
Rhode Island Prekindergarten Demonstration Project						X		Direct assessment: 2 times per year Observation: 3 times per year
South Carolina Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP)				X				
South Carolina Half-Day Child Development Program (4K)							X	Measure determined locally
Vermont Early Education Initiative		X						
Vermont Prekindergarten Education – Act 62		X						
Virginia Preschool Initiative		X						
Washington Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)		X						
West Virginia Universal Pre-K			X					
Wisconsin Head Start State Supplement							X	Measure determined locally
TOTAL	**3**	**14**	**13**	**1**	**1**	**10**	**8**	

The purpose of this report was to provide a comprehensive picture of state-funded Pre-K policies on assessing children's learning, as well as highlight the particular challenges inherent in determining what young children know and can do. Such a "primer" hopefully will be useful to education policymakers and practitioners as early education initiatives expand and the need to document their effectiveness increases, particularly in challenging economic times. In addition, since an important selection criterion for Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge proposals was how applying states planned to use assessments and assessment results to improve the quality of early childhood programs that serve high-needs children,[94] this report also was designed to provide relevant information for state policymakers and practitioners who wish to improve their assessment literacy.

States are active in the Pre-K policy arena. Of the 54 state Pre-K programs in operation in 40 states and the District of Columbia, 50 have established policies concerning the collection of child outcome data to inform their monitoring process. While such data can contribute to policymakers' efforts to plan, implement, and review their respective Pre-K programs, those who make decisions about which measures will be used to generate learning outcome data also must be mindful of the special issues that are related to the assessment of young children. This is a particularly salient issue given the variety of decisions that are made as part of the larger monitoring process.

Pre-K assessment policies differ in a number of important areas. Analysis of the results of our survey shows variation in the actual measures that must or may be used, the type of assessment approaches that these instruments represent, the degree of choice that individual providers are afforded regarding which measures will be used in their classrooms, and how frequently child outcome data are to be collected and reported. We did not investigate whether these variations among programs are reflective of the extent to which Pre-K programs rely on public schools, child care settings, and Head Start grantees; a state's history of allowing decisions to be made at the district level; and/or just the sheer number of measures available. No matter what the source, while this variation across policies demonstrates that the Pre-K field has not yet established a standard child assessment policy model, we do note several trends.

Preference for an Observation Protocol Approach

First, in looking across all 50 programs that are required by policy to collect learning outcome data and specify which measures must or may be used, we see a preference for comprehensive observation-based protocols over direct assessments. As noted above, administration of observation protocols may offer a greater opportunity to document children's development in a wide array of domains over the school year. This type of measure also allows children to be assessed while engaged in everyday program activities within their classrooms, as opposed to being asked to perform discrete tasks that may not be connected to what they are learning or doing at a particular time.

At the same time, direct assessments appear to have their place in state Pre-K policies. Such measures not only can document discrete skills (e.g., children's vocabulary and emerging literacy skills), but are especially useful for screening children for potential learning disabilities and/or diagnosing their need for specialized interventions. For example, in New Jersey's three Pre-K programs, providers choose from a menu of observation protocols, but then may locally determine which norm-referenced, developmental screen to use.

[94] U.S. Department of Education (DOE) and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), 2011.

Preference for a Universal Measure or Limited Menu

Secondly, Pre-K policies also are not uniform in terms of requiring use of one or more universal measures vs. allowing some degree of choice at the local provider level. Twenty-one policies mandate use of one or more universal measures. Practical costs and benefits accrue to adopting this approach. For example, when a measure has high levels of validity and reliability, analyses across individual classrooms and providers can be conducted. In addition, training and technical assistance to teachers or other staff who will administer the measures can be streamlined and provided more efficiently.

The remaining 29 programs that collect child learning outcomes data offer some degree of choice to individual Pre-K providers. This ranges from offering a menu of approved measures from which to choose to allowing measures to be chosen by providers based on varying program-dictated criteria or even the preferences of the provider. There are advantages to this approach as well, particularly if there is variation among the demographic characteristics of Pre-K children, the curriculum used in programs, and/or the qualifications of teachers.

Preference for Administration and Reporting Frequency of at Least Two Times Per Year

Finally, of the 50 Pre-K programs that collect child outcome data as part of the monitoring process, just three report policies requiring the annual administration and reporting of such data. Twenty-seven report that such measures must be administered and reported two or three times during the school year. Two additional Pre-K programs report policies that require that these activities take place even more frequently. These policies are in line with recommendations to document children's learning over time. Ten Pre-K programs have measure-dependent policies, typically with developmental screens administered once per year and observation protocols administered two times per year.

An additional eight programs do not specify how frequently child outcome measures must be administered and reported. Our survey did not ask these latter programs to report the average number of times measures are conducted and administered in practice. Yet, given the degree of measure choice available in these eight programs, we suspect that in practice they mirror the policies of the measure-dependent Pre-K programs. Future research will be needed to verify that this is, indeed, the case.

As evidence of the benefits of access to Pre-K continues to accrue at the same time that state and federal budgets are being pinched, the monitoring of these programs has become increasingly important. The collection of child outcome data as part of this monitoring poses unique assessment challenges, yet can provide critical data for program improvement and professional development. An ETS report on early literacy assessment issued eight years ago concluded that "monitoring the literacy development of young children and evaluating the effectiveness of programs cannot be accomplished by administering a single test during the academic year."[95] The results of our survey appear to indicate that states are, for the most part, complying with that recommendation. As the systems supporting the documentation of Pre-K enrollees' learning evolve, it will be important to monitor progress in this important segment of our educational system.

[95] Jones, 2003.

Appendix: *Specific Child Outcome Measures that Must or May Be Used as per Pre-K Policy*

	Direct Assessments											
Pre-K Program	Batelle Developmental Inventory[1]	Brigance Inventory of Early Development[2]	Carolina Curriculum[3]	Devereux Early Childhood Assessment[4]	DIAL-3[5]	Expressive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test[6]	Expressive Vocabulary Test[7]	Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading-K[8]	Get it, Got it, Go[9]	Language and Emerging Literacy Assessment[10]	PALS[11]	Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test[12]
Alabama First Class Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Program[30]										X		X
Alaska Pilot Prekindergarten Program					X							X
Arizona Early Childhood Block Grant – Prekindergarten Component												
Arkansas Better Chance/Arkansas Better Chance for School Success												
California State Preschool Program												
Colorado Preschool Program												
Connecticut School Readiness												
Delaware Early Childhood Assistance Program (ECAP)												
District of Columbia Charter School Pre-K (DC Charter)												
District of Columbia Pre-kindergarten Expansion and Enhancement Program (DC PEEP)												
Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Program								X				
Georgia Pre-K Program												
Illinois Preschool for All	X	X										
Iowa Shared Visions												
Iowa Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SVPP)												
Kansas At-Risk Four-Year-Old Children Preschool Program												
Kansas Pre-K Pilot Program												
Kentucky Preschool Program		X	X									
Louisiana Cecil J. Picard LA4 Early Childhood Program												
Louisiana 8(g) Student Enhancement Block Grant Program												
Louisiana Non-Public Schools Early Childhood Development Program (NSECD)												
Maine Public Preschool Program												
Massachusetts Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) and Grant 391 Program												
Michigan Great Start Readiness Program												
Minnesota Head Start												
Missouri Preschool Project												
Nebraska Early Childhood Education Program – Ages 3 to 5												
Nevada State Prekindergarten Education Program						X						X
New Jersey Former Abbott & Expansion Districts (Abbott)												
New Jersey Former Early Childhood Program Aid Districts (ECPA)												
New Jersey Former Early Launch to Learning Initiative Districts (ELLI)												
New Mexico PreK												
New York Universal Prekindergarten												
North Carolina More at Four Pre-Kindergarten Program												
Ohio Early Childhood Education[31]									X			
Oklahoma Early Childhood Four-Year-Old Program												
Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten												
Pennsylvania Education Accountability Block Grant (EABG)												
Pennsylvania Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program (HSSAP)												
Pennsylvania Kindergarten for Four-Year-Olds & School-Based Pre-K (K4)												
Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts												
Rhode Island Prekindergarten Demonstration Project												X
South Carolina Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP)					X							
South Carolina Half-Day Child Development Program (4K)												
Vermont Early Education Initiative												
Vermont Prekindergarten Education – Act 62												
Virginia Preschool Initiative											X	
Washington Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)				X								
West Virginia Universal Pre-K												
Wisconsin Head Start State Supplement												

			Observation Checklists and Scales																Portfolios	Local Det'd	
Pre-LAS[13]	Test of Preschool Emergent Literacy[14]	Woodcock-Johnson Subtest 10[15]	Assessment, Evaluation, & Programming System[16]	Ages & Stages Questionnaire®[17]	Child Observation Record[18]	Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum[19]	Developing Skills Checklist[20]	Early Childhood Observation System (subset)[21]	Early Learning Accomplish. Profile[22]	Early Learning Scale[23]	Galileo Plus[24]	Hawaii Early Learning Profile[25]	Learning Accomplishment Profile (LAP) 3[26]	Teaching Strategies GOLD[27]	Transdisciplinary Play-Based Assessment[28]	Work Sampling System[29]	State-developed		Pre-K Standards aligned	Head Start aligned
														X						
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										X										
																				X

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