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# Kindergarten Entry Assessment Tools & Transition Practices



A Review for New Hampshire's  
Preschool Development Grant Birth to Five



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## Introduction

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Entering kindergarten represents a major transition for children and their families as they begin the world of formal schooling. As they move from home and/or early childhood care and education (ECCE) settings to kindergarten classrooms, children often encounter substantial changes in environments, expectations, and levels of independence (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

New Hampshire's Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) seeks to strengthen the kindergarten transition process. It also aims to improve coordination between ECCE programs and schools. These goals are aligned with the overall aims of the PDG B-5 grant, which is to better integrate the state's ECCE system and improve the well-being of young children and families across the state.

To help address these goals, the New Hampshire PDG B-5 team is assembling a Kindergarten Transition Taskforce. The Task Force will include a group of cross-sector stakeholders to address findings from the PDG B-5 needs assessment that highlighted challenges for children and their families during the kindergarten transition process.

The goal of this brief is to summarize relevant research evidence for the Kindergarten Transition Taskforce as they endeavor to improve the transition experience for New Hampshire children and their families. The University of New Hampshire (UNH) contracted with Abt Associates, an independent research firm, to support this brief. The development of this brief was also supported by partnerships with the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services and the New Hampshire Department of Education. To that end, the focus of this brief is twofold:

- (1) We report findings from a review of **kindergarten entry assessment (KEA) tools** designed to measure children's skill and knowledge development across multiple domains. Our review compared KEA tools in terms of their research evidence, alignment with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, alignment with New Hampshire Kindergarten Readiness Indicators, and implementation features (e.g., trainings, costs, scoring and reporting systems).
- (2) We describe an array of **transition practices**; that is, activities that facilitate or bridge children's move from home and/or ECCE settings to kindergarten, often by creating connections between families, communities, and educators. We reviewed key dimensions of twenty specific practices, including whether the practice is evidence-based and whether the intervention employs a child-centered approach. Additional dimensions include the resources required to support the practice, the intended timing of the activity as before or after kindergarten entry, and key players to involve in the practice such as caretakers and educators.

### New Hampshire Kindergarten Readiness Indicators

New Hampshire's Kindergarten Readiness Indicators are aligned with national Head Start standards as well as New Hampshire's Early Learning Standards for children from birth to age five. Specific indicators for kindergarten readiness cover the following six domains:

1. Language Arts & Literacy
2. Cognition & General Knowledge: Logic & Reasoning/Mathematics
3. Cognition & General Knowledge: Science & Social Studies
4. Approaches to Learning (including Creative Art Expression & Music)
5. Social & Emotional Development
6. Physical Development & Health

As the Kindergarten Transition Taskforce works to provide smooth, comfortable, and effective transitions to all New Hampshire children and families, our hope is that this brief can be used to help develop guidance for districts and programs in selecting KEA tools and implementing transition practices suited to their local context.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

**Assessment Tools:** Out of twelve KEA tools reviewed, we recommend three to be used in New Hampshire:

- Teaching Strategies Gold® (TS Gold)
- Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP)
- Child Observation Record Advantage (COR Advantage)

We selected these tools based on their research evidence, use in New Hampshire and other states, alignment with New Hampshire’s Kindergarten Readiness Indicators, and alignment with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework.

**Transition Practices:** Kindergarten transition practices that ease children’s entry into school typically focus on skill-building, engaging families, information sharing, and aligning practices between early childhood care and education settings and kindergarten classrooms. Rigorous evidence on the efficacy of specific practices is limited. Some promising transition practices include those that are child-centered and build connections among educators, early care providers, families, and communities. District and school staff should consider their individual context, the specific needs of families, and resource limitations when developing plans for kindergarteners’ transitions.

### Kindergarten Entry Assessment Tools

A key goal of our review of kindergarten entry assessment (KEA) tools was to identify those tools that were reliable, valid, and appropriate for the New Hampshire context. We approached this task in three steps, which we briefly describe here. Additional detail about each step can be found in **Appendix A**.

**Step 1:** First, we developed a comprehensive list of twelve KEA tools that we might review, collated from KEA tools currently used in New Hampshire and other states.

**Step 2:** We assessed the extent to which each of these tools was well aligned with

- ✓ New Hampshire’s Kindergarten Readiness Indicators and
- ✓ The Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework.

**Step 3:** After applying the Step 2 criteria, five KEA tools were eligible for in-depth review at Step 3. For each of these KEA tools we assessed the extent to which research evidence supported the tool’s reliability and validity. We reviewed peer-reviewed articles, state research reports, academic reports, and reports from the tool developer. Of the five tools we reviewed, three emerged as having stronger evidence than the others: (1) Teaching Strategies GOLD® (TS GOLD), (2) Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP), and (3) Child Observation Record Advantage (COR Advantage). In the sections that follow, we describe the findings of our review for each tool in more detail. We also provide information on the resources needed to use these tools (e.g., trainings and costs) and the reporting systems available for each.

A summary of the tools we reviewed and how they progressed through each of the steps is provided below in Exhibit 1. For additional detail, please see Appendix A.

**Exhibit 1. KEA Tools Reviewed for this Brief**

KEA Tools	Step 1: Included in Initial Review	Step 2: Passed Alignment & Utility Review	Step 3: Passed Psychometric Review
Ages and Stages Questionnaire	✓		
Ages and Stages Questionnaire: Social and Emotional	✓		
Bracken School Readiness Assessment	✓		
Brigance Early Childhood Kindergarten Screen III	✓	✓	
Child Observation Record	✓	✓	✓
Desired Results Development Profile	✓	✓	✓
Developmental Indicators for Assessment of Learning	✓		
Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening for Kindergarten	✓		
Qualls Early Learning Inventory	✓		
STAR Early Literacy	✓		
Teaching Strategies Gold	✓	✓	✓
Work Sampling System	✓	✓	

### Research Terminology Used in This Report

**Construct validity** is the extent to which an assessment tool accurately measures what it claims to measure.

**Concurrent (or discriminate) validity** entails the comparison of a new tool and a well-established tool that are designed to measure similar (or different) constructs. If a child performs similarly on two assessments that are designed to measure similar constructs, this suggests the new measure has concurrent validity. If two assessments are designed to measure different constructs, researchers may assess whether the two assessments show distinct patterns. If so, this provides evidence for discriminate validity.

**Fairness** is an assessment tool's ability to accurately assess children from different backgrounds, such as dual language learners or children with developmental disabilities. If children from different backgrounds perform similarly on an assessment or if the differences in performance can be explained by research-backed differences in a subgroup's development abilities, then a measure is considered fair for the relevant subgroup.

**Item difficulty** refers to how many children correctly respond to an item on the assessment. When an assessment has many difficult items for a particular age group, the overall score will tend to be low. When it has many easy items for a particular age group the overall score tend to be high. In both cases there will limited variability in children's scores, making it difficult or impossible to distinguish children's true skill level.

**Interrater reliability** describes the extent to which different raters are consistent in assessing the same child or group of children. When the interrater reliability scores are high, this suggests the assessment can be used to produce consistent scoring by different people.

## Recommendation 1: Teaching Strategies GOLD®.

**Summary of Tool.** Teaching Strategies GOLD (TS GOLD) is an observation-based system focused on **six domains** of children's development and learning to help support effective teaching and assessment.<sup>1</sup> It is suitable for children ages **birth through third grade**. The tool provides robust reporting features through its **online software** program that includes reports at the child, classroom, or customizable group level in addition to reports to support teacher implementation such as a documentation status report and a report for families. First released in 2010, TS GOLD was **updated in 2015** to extend the age range to include children up to third grade. All of the original items from the 2010 version were maintained, but the 2015 version adds items in math and literacy and rating scale categories to account for the advanced skills of older children. Teaching Strategies also offers an abbreviated version of TS GOLD; however, the research available is for the full version of the tool.

### Summary of Research.

We identified seven peer-reviewed articles, one developer report, and three research reports on the 2010 version of TS GOLD.<sup>2</sup> There was broad support for GOLD's **concurrent validity** when compared with other direct assessment measures (Teaching Strategies, 2013; Lambert et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2018; Russo et al., 2019; Williford et al., 2013). One study supported the assessment's **construct validity** and the appropriateness of the assessment's range of item difficulty for children ages birth through kindergarten (Kim et al., 2014). Two studies also supported the assessment's range of **item difficulty**. These studies focused on the 2015 version of TS GOLD, which extended the age range of the 2010 version (Lambert, 2017a; Lambert, 2017b). One study supported teacher's ability to accurately detect differences in children's abilities across different age groups (Lambert et al., 2014). Multiple studies supported teacher's ability to detect children's development over time, which was demonstrated by assessing the same children multiple times throughout the school year (Lambert et al., 2014; Lambert, et al., 2015b). Two studies demonstrated strong **inter-rater reliability** across teachers when using TS GOLD to assess the same children (Lambert et al., 2014; Lambert et al., 2015a).

The research showed modest support for the tool's ability to assess children from a few **vulnerable populations**. Two studies supported the tool's fairness for children with disabilities, three studies supported the assessment's fairness for dual language learners, and one study supported the tool's fairness for children across socio-economic backgrounds (Lambert et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2018; Williford et al., 2013).

**Limitations** of the tool also emerged in several studies. Some studies found that scores for children in the same classroom were more similar to one another when using TS GOLD vs. other direct assessment measures (Miller-Bains et al., 2017; Williford et al., 2013). This might suggest that TS GOLD's ratings are capturing something more than children's abilities. Another study found that teachers did not use all scores in the range (Lambert, 2017b). Two other studies questioned the discriminant validity of TS GOLD. These studies found stronger relationships between learning domains measuring different constructs (math and literacy) than the associations between the same learning domain (literacy and literacy) when comparing TS GOLD to other direct assessments (Miller-Bains et al., 2017; Russo et al., 2019).

### TS GOLD Alignment and Use

TS GOLD is being used or piloted as a KEA tool in **nine other states**.

It **aligns** with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (Teaching Strategies, 2015) and all of New Hampshire's Kindergarten Readiness Indicators.

The New Hampshire PDG B-5 **survey** results show TS GOLD is currently used by 5% of those teachers who use a formal assessment tool.

<sup>1</sup> See <https://teachingstrategies.com/solutions/assess/gold/>

<sup>2</sup> We summarize research for the two versions separately to account for items added in 2015. However, we believe the research for the 2010 version is still applicable, as all of its items remain in the 2015 version.

### **Recommendation 2: Desired Results Development Profile–Preschool**

**Summary of Tool.** The Desired Results Development Profile (DRDP) is an observation-based tool that was developed by the California Department of Education. The DRDP was designed to improve the quality of programs and services offered to children and families. There are both **preschool and kindergarten versions** of the DRDP. The preschool version (DRDP-PS) is suitable for children from early infancy until kindergarten entry and covers eight domain areas. The kindergarten version (DRDP-K) can be used throughout kindergarten and covers eleven domain areas. There is an **online platform** that provides reports that allow educators to view groups of children’s domain or overall scores within a certain rating period or see progression of the same child/children across multiple reporting periods.<sup>3</sup>

**Summary of Research.** We identified two peer-reviewed studies on DRDP-PS. The first study compared children’s school readiness scores with aspects of parenting and children’s self-regulation (Sutter et al., 2017). This study demonstrated that children’s school readiness, as measured by DRDP-PS, follows the expected relationships with parenting styles and children’s self-regulation. The second study found that DRDP-PS was a fair assessment for children who are dual language learners (Nguyen et al., 2019).

#### **DRDP Alignment and Use**

The DRDP was developed in **California** and is used by **Illinois** (Center for Child and Family Studies at WestEd, 2015).

The New Hampshire PDG B-5 survey found the DRDP is not currently used in New Hampshire.

However, the measure **aligns** with New Hampshire’s Kindergarten Readiness Indicators and the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework.

### **Recommendation 3: Child Observation Record.**

**Summary of Tool.** Child Observation Record (COR) Advantage is an observation-based assessment tool that examines **children ages birth through kindergarten** across **nine domains** of learning (COR Advantage, 2020). The developer offers an **online dashboard** to support planning and implementation of the assessment, in addition to reporting available at the child, classroom, and program or school levels that is filterable by demographic features. The COR Advantage was originally developed in 1993. For the purposes of this review, we focus on the most recent version that was released in 2012.

**Summary of Research.** We identified one peer reviewed study on the 2012 version of the COR (Wakabayashi et al., 2019). The study supported the **inter-rater reliability** of teachers using the tool, finding that there was very little difference in the way teachers rated the same children. The study generally supported COR Advantage’s **concurrent validity** when compared with direct assessment measures, with the exception of the social-emotional domain, which demonstrated a weaker relationship with the direct assessment of social-emotional skills. The consistency of these findings for the Spanish-speaking study sample suggest the tool can be used with dual language learners, as well.

#### **COR Advantage Alignment and Use**

The COR Advantage is currently being used in New Hampshire. We did not identify any other states that are using it as a KEA. The tool aligns with both the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework and all six New Hampshire Kindergarten Readiness Indicators (COR

<sup>3</sup> Cost information is available for agencies within California. The developer WestEd will need to be contacted for out of state cost information.

## Kindergarten Transition Practices

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The transition to kindergarten marks an important milestone for families and children. It may be accompanied by excitement, discomfort, and/or stress. ECCE settings, kindergarten classrooms, parents, and community groups may implement formal **transition practices**, which are activities that help children make the change from ECCE settings, including their homes and communities, to more formal school environments. These practices are meant to “serve as a bridge for children and families as they move into kindergarten” (Cook & Coley, 2017) and ideally include some level of participation from families, ECCE providers and teachers, and districts, including kindergarten teachers. The practices may focus on building children’s skills, engaging families in the process, sharing information, and/or aligning practices between kindergartens and preschools.

Our goal for this brief was to compile a list of model transition practices. To do this, we drew from research literature; recommendations of national organizations (e.g., National Association for the Education of Young Children, Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center); and, a 2019 kindergarten teacher survey conducted by the University of New Hampshire and the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services as part of the state’s PDG B-5 planning grant.

Our list includes twenty model transition practices. With so many practices available to help children and their families, it may be difficult to choose which ones to focus on. To facilitate local decision-making and implementation, we grouped and tagged the twenty transition practices on five key dimensions to produce the ***Kindergarten Transition Practices Menu***, beginning on the next page.

The *Menu* groups the transition practices on a **time** dimension, which describes when practices may occur: before kindergarten entry, after kindergarten entry, or over a flexible time frame. The *Menu* then tags each practice with the following:

- **Responsible parties.** Transition practices may need one or several parties for successful implementation, including the ECCE setting, the kindergarten program, or parents/families.
- **Resource-intensiveness.** This category captures not only the time and funding required for implementation, but also the coordination needed at the school, district, or community level. Options are lower, moderate, or higher.
- **Child-centeredness.** Transition practices either directly involve the child in the activity or are directly focused on children (i.e., are specific to a particular child rather than the full class; development of an Individualized Education Program is an example).
- **Supported by the research.** Transition practices are considered to be supported if there is any level of research that indicates that the specific practice is linked to positive child outcomes.

Following the menu we summarize takeaways for each of these dimensions, responding to the following questions:

- **Timing:** When is the best time to implement transition practices?
- **Responsible parties:** Who should be involved in transition practices?
- **Resource-intensiveness:** How does resource availability affect implementation of transition practices?
- **Child centeredness:** Why are child-centered practices important?
- **Supported by the research:** Which transition practices are supported by the research?





# Kindergarten Transition Practices Menu

## Before Kindergarten Entry



### Readiness camps



Elementary schools or other community organizations may host summer programs that are designed to teach rising kindergarteners the academic and social-emotional skills that they'll need for success in kindergarten. This program is particularly suitable for students who did not participate in a formal preschool experience.

### Transferring student records



ECCE providers may share student records (including IEPs and assessments) with kindergarten teachers.

### Completing surveys



Schools/kindergarten classrooms may ask parents to complete surveys on their child. This may provide information on the child's educational background, family culture, strengths, and areas where particular support is needed.

### Orientation sessions



Kindergarten classrooms may host orientation sessions, in which parents can visit the class and learn more about what to expect for their child's kindergarten entry.

### Classroom observations



ECCE providers may observe kindergarten classrooms to understand the expectations for their students. Kindergarten teachers may observe early care classrooms to learn more about incoming students.

## Information sharing



Kindergarten teachers can share information with parents/caregivers via phone, email, or mail.

### Family visits



Kindergarten teachers may host classroom visits, so parents/caregivers and children can explore the space and meet the teacher.

### Supporting kindergarten enrollment



ECCE providers may set up events or distribute information with parents/caregivers to support kindergarten enrollment.

### Home visits



Kindergarten teachers may visit students' homes to meet them and their family.

### Key:



Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)



Kindergarten



Parents/Family



Resource Intensive (Lower)



Resource Intensive (Moderate)



Resource Intensive (Higher)



Child-Centered



Supported Practice



# Kindergarten Transition Practices Menu

## After Kindergarten Entry



### Abbreviated days



Schools may shorten the length of the school day at the beginning of the year, while children adjust to the kindergarten schedule.

### Staggered school entry



Kindergarten students start the school year in smaller groups before meeting with the full class.



## Flexible Time Frame



### Kindergarten entry assessments



Kindergarten teachers may use entry assessments to gather information about students' skills and development.

### Reading books about kindergarten



Parents/caregivers can read books about kindergarten with their child before the start of the school year, to help them prepare for the transition and build literacy skills. Community libraries may also be involved with this practice.

### Collaboration in IEP development



Kindergarten teachers, special education staff, parents, and ECCE providers may all work together to develop or update an IEP for kindergarten students.

### Meetings between early care and kindergarten providers



ECCE providers and kindergarten teachers may meet to discuss specific students and share questions/concerns.

### Joint trainings



Schools/districts may coordinate joint trainings between ECCE and kindergarten teachers, to ensure alignment.

### Aligned curricula



ECCE providers may take steps to align their curriculum with kindergarten standards. This may include teaching social skills that will be expected in a kindergarten classroom or using dramatic play areas to act out being in a K classroom.

### Transition plan



Transition teams may develop transition plans for students, including key activities and resources.

### Transition team



ECCE providers, kindergarten providers, parents, district staff, community center staff, PTA/PTO representatives, and other key stakeholders may work together to create and implement a transition plan and oversee students' transition to kindergarten.

### Community partnerships



ECCE or kindergarten providers may build partnerships with mental health agencies, family resource centers, or other community agencies. These partnerships may include sharing referrals and resources.



### **When is the best time to implement transition practices?**

Kindergarten transition practices can reach children and their families before, during, and after their entry into kindergarten. Sometimes kindergarten teachers may not receive their class lists until late in the summer (and immediately before the school year begins), which limits the practices that they can implement before kindergarten entry. Likewise, ECCE providers may not receive information about where their children are enrolling in kindergarten until late in the year, if at all. Then the list of transition practices that are possible to implement may be limited to after kindergarten entry, if ever. Some transition practices, such as meetings between kindergarten and preschool teachers, can be implemented at various time points or on an ongoing basis to suit the specific context. These flexible time frame transition practices may be the easiest for teachers to implement, given that they can adjust the practice to meet their schedule, rather than their schedule to implement the practice.

### **Who should be involved in transition practices?**

ECCE providers and teachers, kindergarten teachers, families and community parenters (e.g., mental health services, family resource centers, libraries) all have a role to play in the transition to kindergarten. Practices that facilitate connections through communication, coordination, and collaboration may be particularly important for successful transitions. Because these connections are so important, programs such as Head Start have formal kindergarten transition policies focused on engaging families, coordinating with kindergarten programs, and fostering connections between parents, districts, and community organizations (Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, n.d.).

Children transition to kindergarten from a variety of ECCE settings, including Head Start, center-based programs, family-based programs, and informal care (e.g., staying at home with a caregiver, care at a grandparent's house). Because early learning experiences vary, it can be difficult for kindergarten teachers to understand what types of experiences their incoming children have had (Purtell et al., 2020). This makes clear communication between children's ECCE providers and kindergarten teachers all the more important. It may be helpful to designate one leader or department who is responsible for transition practices across both preschool and kindergarten, especially if preschool and kindergarten classrooms are not located in the same building or otherwise in close proximity (Purtell et al., 2020).

### **How does resource availability affect implementation of transition practices?**

Some transition practices are more resource intensive than others, meaning that they require more time, funding, and/or coordination to implement. Higher-intensity transition practices (i.e., involving comprehensive communications and partnerships or child-centered practices) may sometimes produce greater positive impacts for children (Purtell et al., 2020). Yet, the research shows that teachers often implement lower-intensity practices—likely due to limited time and funding, as well as the increased coordination that is needed.

### **Why are child-centered practices important?**

Child-centered practices are those that involve the child as an active participant or individualize the activity for a particular child and their family. These practices help build children's skills and comfort levels. They may also provide child-level information that kindergarten teachers need to understand different children's backgrounds and experiences. Because these skill-building activities are so important, some ECCE programs (such as Head Start) require use of learning activities that specifically aim to teach children the content-based and social-emotional skills that they will need to succeed in kindergarten and approach the transition with confidence (Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, n.d.).

#### **Key Considerations**

- In some cases, families may need additional support to fully engage in the transition process. Helping families understand relevant policies (such as the Individual with Disabilities Education Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act), and translating materials into preferred languages may facilitate their engagement.
- Not all children can be supported in the same way. In some cases, it may make sense to involve a child's social worker, mental health counselor, or other support as a part of the transition process.

Child-centered activities are particularly critical for more vulnerable populations, such as children who have special needs and may have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). These children, in particular, will benefit from child-centered transition practices, so that the district and school can coordinate with ECCE providers and/or families about children's emerging needs (Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, 2020; Reardon & Portilla, 2016).

### Child-Centered Practices in Head Start

Parents and/or teachers can read books with their children about kindergarten. This activity familiarizes children with kindergarten and helps them learn important early reading skills. Head Start published a list of approximately 20 books that discuss the kindergarten transition:  
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/selected-childrens-books-about-kindergarten>

### Which transition practices are supported by the research?

There is relatively limited research available on the effects of specific transition practices, but a few practices have been studied and found to be successful; these practices are tagged as “Supported” in the *Kindergarten Transition Practices Menu* shown above. To date, research indicates that promising strategies include: joint trainings between kindergarten and ECCE providers, kindergarten readiness camps, coordinated transition teams, and practices that promote family engagement (such as family visits).

Across several studies, when kindergarten teachers and early care providers met to discuss and coordinate curricula, children's social behaviors, language skills, and academic outcomes in reading, writing, and math improved (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Cook, 2017; Ahtola et al., 2011). This coordination can help ECCE providers understand the types of content- and behavior-based skills that their children need before kindergarten entry. It also helps kindergarten teachers understand the types of experiences that their children have prior to kindergarten entry.

Kindergarten readiness camps (also known as “kinder camps”) are also considered a promising practice. One study found positive associations between these camps and children's readiness skills (e.g., literacy, math, social-emotional, and gross-motor development; Khan et al., 2017). Though these camps may be resource intensive to implement, they might be particularly effective for children who have not previously attended a formal preschool and may need additional support.

Programs and districts may also consider “transition and alignment summits”. These teams bring key stakeholders together to form transition teams to receive information and resources about transition practices and create transition plans for their children (The National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning, 2014). Similarly, some schools and districts create a calendar of transition practices that emphasize connections between family and school, child and school, peers, and community (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000). Creating venues for elementary schools and ECCE providers in a given community to come together may facilitate this process and encourage continued communication.

Practices that bring families and/or children into schools and kindergarten classrooms before kindergarten entry may also be important. One study found that when parents and children visited kindergarten classrooms in advance, children demonstrated significantly higher academic scores by the end of the kindergarten school year (Schulting et al., 2005). As an added bonus, bringing parents into the classroom at the beginning of the year for a visit or event may encourage continued family engagement over the remainder of the kindergarten school year.

Although many gaps remain in the knowledge base, many of these practices seem promising in terms of the connections that they foster between families and the education system. Additionally, these practices may improve information sharing and alignment between ECCE settings and kindergarten classrooms.

### How many transition practices should be implemented?

On average, kindergarten classrooms in the United States implement about three transition activities each year, although kindergarten teachers of ethnic and racial minority, immigrant, or urban children tend to engage in fewer transition practices (Cook & Coley, 2017). The most common practices include

outreach to parents (e.g., sending letters or calling home) and opportunities for children and families to visit kindergarten classrooms (Little et al. 2016; Cook & Coley, 2017). Some research shows that children who experience a greater number of transition practices have better academic and behavioral outcomes (Cook & Coley, 2017; Schulting et al. 2005). Yet, this research also emphasizes that *quality* likely matters more than quantity (Cook & Coley, 2017). This means that to the extent possible, teachers and providers should focus on implementing transition practices well by considering ways to interact meaningfully and authentically with families and children versus trying to implement a longer list of practices superficially.

Finally the research also highlights that fewer transition practices are typically offered at traditionally underserved schools (Little et al., 2016; Schulting et al., 2005). This is especially true for those schools that serve low-income families or English language learners, who may benefit most from extra support during the transition process.

### **Which resources can support family engagement during the transition process?**

There are a number of frameworks and tools that administrators, teachers, and practitioners can use to guide their approach to engaging families in the transition process. For example, the [Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships](#) provides a framework for integrating family engagement in schools by outlining key challenges and goals for both families and educators. This framework can guide decisions about how to best implement transition practices to support successful interactions between schools and families to support student achievement (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Additionally, the [Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework](#) may support ECCE programs in engaging families in the transition process. This framework identifies the foundations for supporting successful partnerships and engagement, with a particular emphasis on “equity, inclusiveness, cultural and linguistic responsiveness” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement, 2018).

### **Summary**

We identified a comprehensive list of kindergarten transition practices that practitioners may implement in order to smooth the kindergarten entry process. We recommend that practitioners consider implementing practices that are child-centered, evidence-based, and/or facilitate communication between key parties (e.g., ECCE providers and kindergarten teachers). These decisions about which specific transition practices to implement are best made at a local level, where information about local context and needs (including timing and resource availability) is well known.

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## Appendix A. Approach Used to Identifying and Reviewing KEA Tools

In this section we describe our approach to reviewing the KEA tools, which included three steps.

### Step 1: Developing a List of KEA Tools for Review

We identified twelve potential KEA tools to review:

1. Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ)
2. Ages and Stages Questionnaire: Social and Emotional (ASQ:SE)
3. Bracken School Readiness Assessment (BSRA)
4. Brigance Early Childhood Kindergarten Screen III
5. Child Observation Record (COR)
6. Desired Results Development Profile (DRDP)
7. Development Indicators for Assessment of Learning (DIAL)
8. Phonological Awareness Literacy Screen for Kindergarten (PALS-K)
9. Qualls Early Learning Inventory
10. STAR Early Literacy
11. Teaching Strategies GOLD®
12. Work Sampling System (WSS)

We compiled this initial list based on two criteria:

**(1) KEA tools that were currently used by educators in New Hampshire.**

To make a determination about this criterion we relied on information collected in a state-wide survey of kindergarten teachers. This survey was conducted by the University of New Hampshire and the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services in 2019 as part of the state's PDG B-5 planning grant. This survey asked 209 teachers about which KEA screening and assessment tools they currently used: 53% of teachers reported using a formal screening or assessment tool, 30% of teachers reported not using any assessment tool, and 17% reported using a non-standardized assessment tool. (See box for teachers' use of specific tools.)

**(2) KEA tools used<sup>4</sup> by other states for kindergarten entry, according to a 2017 state scan.<sup>5</sup>**

Across the country, states are identifying, piloting, and implementing a variety of KEA tools. According to the scan, twenty-nine states have already implemented one. Of them, 16 are using a commercially developed tool and 13 have developed and implemented their own state-specific tool. We included all of the commercially available tools used in other states in our initial list of twelve. We did not include tools that were developed or adapted by states.

#### 2019 New Hampshire Kindergarten Teacher Survey

Of the 53% of teachers who reported using of formal screening or assessment tool:

- Teachers reported using the following **screening** tools:
  - 30% used PALS
  - 12% used ASQ:SE
  - 9% used DIAL
  - 6% used ASQ
  - 10% used another tools
- Teachers reported using the following **assessment** tools:
  - 5% used TS Gold
  - 5% used BSRA
  - 4% used Brigance
  - 3% used COR
  - 2% used WSS
  - 10% used another tool

<sup>4</sup> Following Weisenfeld (2017), we considered a state to be “using” a particular KEA tool if its purpose was for aggregating state-level information.

<sup>5</sup> See Weisenfeld (2017).



## Step 2: Initial Review of KEA Tools for Alignment and Utility

We reviewed each of the twelve KEA tools to assess the extent to which they:

- ✓ Aligned with New Hampshire’s Kindergarten Readiness Indicators, and
- ✓ Aligned with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework

Below we describe each of these factors in greater detail.

1. **Alignment with New Hampshire’s Kindergarten Readiness Indicators.** New Hampshire’s Department of Education, Head Start State Collaboration Office, and Head Start Directors Association developed a set of kindergarten readiness indicators (New Hampshire Department of Education et al., 2014). These indicators cover six areas of development:

- a. Language Arts and Literacy,
- b. Cognition and General Knowledge: Logic & Reasoning/Mathematics,
- c. Cognition & General Knowledge: Science & Social Studies,
- d. Approaches to Learning,
- e. Social & Emotional Development, and
- f. Physical Development & Health.

These indicators are intended to clarify the key skills and developmental milestones expected of children at kindergarten entry. Specifically, they can be used to guide the content areas and activities in ECCE programs, support alignment of preschool and kindergarten programs, keep parents informed of the expectations upon kindergarten entry, and support teachers in assessing a child’s readiness for school.

We compared New Hampshire’s indicators with the domains in each KEA tool to identify the degree of alignment. Tools that met five or six of New Hampshire’s Kindergarten Readiness Indicators we considered “well aligned.”

2. **Alignment with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework.** The federal Office of Head Start (OHS) has dedicated considerable resources to identifying and defining key developmental outcomes to guide programmatic and teaching standards in ECCE programs. As a result of this work, OHS (2015) has developed an Early Learning Outcomes Framework required of all Head Start grantees that spans five areas of learning:

- a. Approaches to Learning;
- b. Social and Emotional Development;
- c. Language and Literacy;
- d. Cognition; and
- e. Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development.

The Framework’s five elements each include domains, sub-domains, goals, development progressions, and indicators. We compared each of the twelve KEA tools on our list to these five areas to assess their alignment with the Framework. Tools that aligned with all five of the Framework’s elements at the goal level

3. **Excluding Ineligible Tools:** After scoring each KEA tool on the criteria described above, we excluded tools that were not “well aligned” with New Hampshire Kindergarten Readiness Indicators nor Head State Early Learning Outcomes Framework. In this way we identified five tools that were eligible for Step 3:

- (1) Brigance Early Childhood Kindergarten Screen III,
- (2) Child Observation Record,
- (3) Desired Results Developmental Profile,
- (4) Teaching Strategies Gold, and
- (5) Work Sampling System.

## Step 3: In-depth Review of the Research

We then conducted an in-depth review of the existing research literature for the five tools identified in Step 2. We focused on the psychometric properties for each KEA tool. As part of this work we made sure

to include research studies that included vulnerable populations, although research focused on vulnerable children was notably limited.<sup>6</sup> We assessed each tool's psychometric properties in terms of reliability and validity.

We were careful to consider research only on the version of the tool that we reviewed in Step 3. The review included peer-reviewed articles, state research reports, academic reports, and reports from developers. We excluded dissertations and reports on adaptations of a tool from the scan. Studies that focused on an outcome other than school readiness or academic outcomes also were excluded. Furthermore, many assessment measures have several versions. The version of tool used in each study was considered to ensure the research aligned with the version of the tool being considered.

Finally, we recommended three tools based on the availability and results of research literature that could support the reliability and validity of the tool. Both the Brigance Early Childhood Kindergarten Screen III and Work Sampling System lacked research on the latest version of the tool published by the developer.

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<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of the PDG B-5 grant, New Hampshire defines vulnerable children as those living in poverty, who have special learning needs, experiencing homelessness, with incarcerated parents, or who have experienced adverse childhood experiences.