

Goal 3. Early Learning:

Improve the health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes for all children from birth through 3rd grade, so that all children, particularly those with high needs, are on track for graduating from high school college- and career-ready.

Goal Leader: Ann Whalen, Senior Advisor to the Secretary, Delegated the Authority of the Assistant Secretary, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE)

Public Benefit

Each year, about 4 million children enter kindergarten in the United States. They live in cities, suburbs, and rural areas. They speak many languages, come from diverse cultures, and have differing abilities, which may require individualized services and supports. Parents and caregivers send their children to school believing that one day their children will be able to pursue their dreams—whether that is teaching, protecting their communities as police officers, making scientific discoveries, or helping companies and organizations succeed. All parents hope their child will start school ready for success. And many parents turn that hope into action, seeking out supportive and high-quality early learning opportunities. Unfortunately, not every parent finds those opportunities, and access to high-quality early learning opportunities differs across states and communities. There are large disparities in enrollment based on geography, race, and socioeconomic levels. As a result, too many children enter kindergarten a year or more behind their classmates in academic skills and socio-emotional development.¹ For some children, starting school already behind can trap them in a cycle of continuous catch-up in their learning. As a nation, we must ensure that all children, regardless of family circumstance, immigration status, the color of their skin, disability, or their zip code, have access to high-quality early learning opportunities.

Advances in education, developmental psychology, neuroscience, medicine, and economics have helped to demonstrate the benefits of quality early education for young children and that the years from birth to age five are a critical period in children’s learning and development, providing the necessary foundation for more advanced skills.² For example, at kindergarten entry, children with bigger vocabularies at an early age have higher reading and mathematics achievement and fewer behavior challenges.³ A robust body of research shows that children who participate in high-quality preschool programs have better health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes than those who do not participate. The gains are particularly powerful for

¹ Yoshikawa, Hirokazu, Christine Weiland, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, Margaret R. Burchinal, Linda M. Espinosa, William T. Gormley, Jens Ludwig, Katherine A. Magnuson, Deborah Phillips, and Martha J. Zaslow. Investing in our future: The evidence base on preschool education. Vol. 9. Society for Research in Child Development and Foundation for Child Development, 2013.

² Yoshikawa, H., Weiland, C., Brooks-Gunn, J., Burchinal, M., Espinosa, L., Gormley, W., & Zaslow, M. J. (2013). Investing in Our Future: The Evidence Base for Preschool Education. Policy brief, Society for Research in Child Development and the Foundation for Child Development. Retrieved from the Foundation for Child Development website: fcd-us.org/sites/default/files/Evidence_Base_on_Preschool_Education_FINAL.pdf

³ Maczuga, S., Morgan, P., Farkas, G., Hammer, C., Hillemeier, M., & Scheffner, C. 24-Month-Old Children With Larger Oral Vocabularies Display Greater Academic and Behavioral Functioning at Kindergarten Entry. *Child Development*, Volume 86, Issue 5, pages 1351–1370, September/October 2015.

children from low-income families and those at risk for academic failure who, on average, start kindergarten 12 to 14 months behind their peers in preliteracy and language skills.⁴

Studies also reveal that participating in quality early learning can boost children’s educational attainment and earnings later in life.⁵ Children who attend high-quality preschool programs are less likely to utilize special education services or be retained in their grade, and are more likely to graduate from high school, go on to college, and succeed in their careers than those who have not attended high-quality preschool programs.⁶ Research also suggests that expanding early learning—including high-quality preschool—provides society with a return on investment of \$8.60 for every \$1 spent with half of this benefit from increased earnings and improved health outcomes for children when they grow up.⁷

The Administration began efforts to increase investments in early learning in its first term and has continued to request additional funding in each subsequent budget proposal—through Head Start, child care, home visiting, IDEA Part C, ELC, and Preschool Development Grants. States and local communities have welcomed the opportunity to partner with the federal government through these early learning programs.

From 2011 to 2013, 20 (of the 40 states that applied for ELC) were awarded grants. These grantees had committed to align, coordinate, and improve the quality of early learning programs across multiple funding streams supporting children from birth through age 5 and serve as model early learning and development systems. By December 2014, nearly 14,000 early childhood programs are ranked in the highest quality tiers of the 20 ELC states’ rating systems—a 63 percent increase since the states applied for their grants—with significantly more children enrolled in the highest quality-rated early learning programs than ever before.⁸ National technical assistance is also available to help all states in building such systems.

In 2013, the President’s Budget proposed a landmark investment to expand access to high-quality preschool, Preschool for All. The President’s overarching vision has been captured in the bipartisan *Strong Start for America’s Children Act* reintroduced in the 114th Congress. This legislation would fund voluntary, high-quality preschool for all four-year old children from families earning below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Line in a state-federal partnership, and encourage states to spend their own funds to support preschool for young children with family incomes above that income level. The legislation would also expand Early Head Start-child care partnerships to help raise the quality of services for infants and toddlers and increase IDEA funding for young children with disabilities.

In addition, Strong Start includes authorization for [Preschool Development Grants](#), which were first funded by Congress in 2014. Last year 18 states (of the 36 that applied) were awarded grants to create or expand high-quality preschool programs for 4-year-olds in over 200 high-need communities. This program builds on the achievements of ELC by expanding access to preschool programs that include the following nationally recognized standards: high staff qualifications; professional development for teachers and staff; low staff-child ratios; small class sizes; full-day programs; developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive

⁴ Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development. From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development. (2000). Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips, eds. Board on Children, Youth, and Families, Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

⁵ See, e.g., Yoshikawa, et.al., Investing in Our Future: The Evidence Base on Preschool Education, 2013.

⁶ Center for Public Education. (2008). The Research on Pre-K. Alexandria, VA.

⁷ White House Council of Economic Advisors. The Economics of Early Childhood Investments, https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/early_childhood_report1.pdf

⁸ At a Glance: Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge Year 2014 Progress Update <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/2014apr/rtt-elic-2014-apr-progress.pdf>

instruction and evidence-based curricula and learning environments that are aligned with states' early learning standards; inclusive programs for children with disabilities; employee salaries that are comparable to those for K–12 teaching staff; ongoing program evaluation to ensure continuous improvement; strong family engagement; and onsite comprehensive services for children.

Providing children, including children with disabilities and those who are ELs, with quality early education experiences is essential to strengthening our nation's economy. Significant new investments to expand access to high-quality early learning, improve the early childhood workforce, and support comprehensive assessment systems are necessary to help states, local communities, and parents close the school readiness gaps between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers. Only then can we ensure that all children graduate from high school prepared to succeed in college, careers, and life.

Analysis and Next Steps

Objective 3.3: Measuring Progress, Outcomes, and Readiness. Improve the capacity of states and early learning programs to develop and implement comprehensive early learning assessment systems.

Objective Leader:

Libby Doggett, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Early Learning, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE)

Explanation and Analysis of Progress:

The Department, in consultation with OMB, has determined that performance toward this objective is making noteworthy progress. As part of ELC, 11 states chose to use funds to address the use of comprehensive assessment systems, though all ELC states include comprehensive assessments as part of their program standards on which their TQRIS is based. These states are doing the difficult work of creating coordinated and comprehensive assessment systems that organize information to help early childhood educators, families, program directors, administrators, and policymakers to make informed instructional and programmatic decisions. A comprehensive assessment system coordinates the various types of valid and reliable screening, diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments that children are likely to receive throughout their early learning years, such as screenings for possible developmental delays, assessments of ongoing developmental progress, diagnostic assessments, and measures that examine children's accomplishments on developmentally appropriate standards-based benchmarks. As they create these comprehensive systems, states are updating and selecting screening and assessment tools that are valid and appropriate for the populations being served; educating users about the purposes of each assessment; coordinating assessments to avoid duplication; training early childhood educators to administer, interpret, and use the results of assessments; and involving parents in decisions regarding learning and development strategies for their children.

In addition, 19 ELC states are or will be using KEAs that cover all the essential domains of school readiness and are aligned with their states' early learning and development standards. Wisconsin did not elect to direct ELC funds toward the development of a comprehensive KEA, though they are funding an exploratory study. As part of a KEA, information is collected through observations, one-on-one discussions, small group activities, and through the use of technology. Results help early childhood educators better understand the status of children's learning and development when they enter kindergarten so the educators can individualize

instruction. Educators can share information with parents so that they can make informed decisions about their children’s education. Educators are using findings from the KEA to inform to inform instruction and help close the readiness gap at kindergarten and in the early elementary school grades.

The Department surpassed the 2015 performance target of 9 states collecting and reporting disaggregated data on the status of children at kindergarten entry using a common measure. Eleven ELC states (CA, CO, DE, KY, MD, MA, MI, NC, OH, OR, and VT) are implementing their KEAs in the 2015–16 school year. The remaining eight states that chose to implement KEAs (GA, IL, MN, NJ, NM, PA, RI, WA) will begin after the 2015–16 school year. The 18 Preschool Development Grants states are required to report on the school readiness of the children participating in their high-quality preschool programs, with strong encouragement to use a KEA. We expect to have this data in spring 2017 for the second year of the grant.

On April 7, 2015, ELC TA cohosted a webinar with CEELO and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) focusing on the essential elements of a comprehensive assessment system, promising implementation strategies, key capacity-building considerations, and tools that can support this work at the state level. On June 6, 2015, ELC TA held the National Working Meeting on Early Learning Assessment in New Orleans, Louisiana. The one-day working meeting provided states with the opportunity to work together to address persistent problems associated with the implementation of comprehensive early learning assessment systems with a specific focus on child assessments, including KEAs. In August, 2015 ELC TA released a brief, statewide KEA Data Collection and Reporting in ELC states, in response to a request from a ELC state for information about issues that need to be considered in planning and implementing a statewide KEA data collection and reporting system. The report includes information on practices in five ELC states (Kentucky, Maryland, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Vermont and Washington).

On August 27, 2015, the Department posted [EDFacts Data Set: Kindergarten Entry Assessment Data Collection through EDFacts Metadata and Process System \(EMAPS\)](#) as part of the *Annual Mandatory Collection of Elementary and Secondary Education Data through EDFacts* to explain the data that will be collected through EMAPS for KEAs in the School Year (SY) 2016–17, SY 2017–18, and SY 2018–19 EDFacts package. The team will address public comments received, post responses for 30 days, and then post a final regulation.

In FY 2013, the Department made [EAG](#) awards to support the development and enhancement of KEAs. Texas and two state consortia, one led by Maryland and the other led by North Carolina, were awarded EAG grants. KEAs under this program should be aligned with state early learning standards and cover all essential domains of school readiness. Three additional ELC grantees are participating in the Maryland consortium (Massachusetts, Michigan, and Ohio) as well as a number of non-ELC states. Eight states are partnering with North Carolina: Delaware, Iowa, Maine, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Washington, DC. Together the ELC and EAG programs support 29 states in creating incentives for states to implement KEAs.

On an annual basis through their APRs, OSEP continues to require state Part C and Part B, section 619 programs to report on child outcomes for children that received at least 6 months of IDEA services. OSEP funds a technical assistance center to support states in collecting high-quality data within their outcomes measurement system and in using that data for program improvement.

Challenges and Next Steps:

Assessment in early learning is in its infancy. Many states are starting from scratch developing valid and reliable measures for KEAs. As a result, constructing and testing these instruments and implementing them across every school in the state will be challenging and will take time. In addition, states will need to ensure that the KEAs are implemented in a balanced way that does not result in the loss of a significant amount of instructional time. Additionally, two of the three EAG grantees that are consortia may experience challenges coordinating across states due to differences in their policies and procedures. Preschool Development Grants states are required to report on the status of children in kindergarten served by the grants in the high-need communities, but they are not required to use a KEA, and funding may be a challenge at the federal, state and local levels. The Departments are working with these grantees to minimize these coordination challenges.

The Departments of Education and HHS will continue to reach out to CEELO, Education Commission on the States, CCSSO, NIEER, and other organizations that share our interest in advancing quality KEAs, share resources, and develop strategies that might increase our collective impact. The Departments are using national activities funds to develop case studies of four states’ approaches to KEAs through the Department of Education’s Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development Policy. The objectives of this study are to document the processes, accomplishments, challenges, and solutions of four states (Maryland, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Washington) implementing KEAs and to share what they have learned with federal and state policymakers and the field. Of particular interest was identifying what is working well and what lessons have been learned in these states that were early adopters of KEAs. Data collection occurred between January and June 2015 in the four case study states, 12 districts, and 23 schools in the study. The final report is expected in July 2016. CEELO and ELC TA will continue to monitor state progress in development and implementation of KEAs and highlight best practices through webinars and meetings.

This year OSEP used Part C child outcomes data in making annual determinations of performance based on state performance plans and annual performance reports. OSEP-funded TA centers will continue to work with states to support them collecting high-quality child outcomes data that is reliable and valid, and using this data for program improvement efforts.

U.S. Department of Education Indicators of Success	Baseline	2013 Actuals	2014 Actuals	2015 Actuals	2015 Current Year Target	Current Year Results	2016 Out-Year Targets	2017 Out-Year Targets
3.3.A. Number of states collecting and reporting disaggregated data on the status of children at kindergarten entry using a common measure	SY: 2010 2	3	5 ⁹	11 ¹⁰	9	MET	14	16 ¹¹

NA = Not applicable.

TBD = To be determined.

Academic Year (AY) is a collegiate year spanning August–May; School Year (SY) spans August–July and is aligned with a P–12 school year; Fiscal Year (FY) corresponds to a federal fiscal year; Calendar Year (CY) spans January–December.

⁹ Five ELC states implemented their KEA (OR, KY, VT, MD, and OH) in the 2014–15 school year. One state (DE) had planned to implement its KEA in 2014–15 year, but later adjusted its timeline to implement during the 2015–16 school year. As such, the FY14 actual is revised from six to five states.

¹⁰ Eleven ELC states (CA, CO, DE, KY, MD, MA, MI, NC, OH, OR, and VT) are implementing their KEAs in the 2015–16 school year. The remaining eight states that chose to implement KEAs (GA, IL, MN, NJ, NM, PA, RI, WA) will begin after the 2015–16 school year. Wisconsin did not select to implement a KEA, but is implementing a statewide literacy assessment and is exploring the development and use of a KEA.

¹¹ There will be difficulty collecting ELC data in out-years because some grantees will no longer be reporting APR data.

Data Sources and Frequency of Collection:

3.3.A. Race to the Top (RTT)-Early Learning Challenge (ELC) Technical Assistance Center; annually