

## **Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA) Frequently Asked Questions (11-20-13)**

### **1) What is the KEA?**

- a. Michigan's KEA is an authentic observational system for assessing children in the first 45 days of kindergarten that has proven to be valid and reliable. It helps teachers observe children in the context of everyday experiences, which is an effective way to get to know them well and find out what they know and can do.

### **2) What is the purpose of the KEA?**

- a. Provide teachers and parents with important criterion-based information about a child's learning and development in five domains at the beginning of kindergarten so that teachers can inform individual instruction and parents can provide learning opportunities beyond the school day.

The KEA is not a kindergarten screener, teacher evaluation tool, or kindergarten readiness assessment. Those uses are inappropriate for this assessment.

### **3) What are the five domains?**

- a. Mathematics – Learning early mathematical concepts strengthen young children's problem-solving and reasoning skills. The ability to count, measure, identify shapes, compose and decompose numbers is essential to future academic success and to participate in daily life activities.
- b. Literacy and Language – Literacy begins with language development. Language allows children to participate both cognitively and affectively within the school setting. Reading, writing, and speaking provide the tools children need to interact with others and to represent their ideas, thoughts, and experiences. Effective communication with others is basic to this dimension.
- c. Approaches toward Learning – A child's attitude toward, and interest in, learning define his or her approaches toward learning. Curiosity, creativity, independence, cooperation, and persistence are some of the approaches that enhance early learning and development. This domain is manifested in every other domain.
- d. Social and Emotional Development – Developing strong relationships with adults and other children help children positively participate in classroom and school activities. In addition, developing strong relationships help children develop characteristics such as self-confidence that are useful when trying to make and keep friends and when cooperating in groups.
- e. Physical Well-Being and Motor Development – Healthy children are ready children. Healthy children are more prepared to learn and perform at higher levels. Large/gross and small/fine motor skills are essential for health and for accomplishing school tasks such as cutting, coloring, using a pencil, keyboarding, and navigating the internet.

#### **4) Why these domains?**

- a. In 1995, the National Education Goals Panel identified these five essential dimensions (developmental domains) of early development and learning as relevant to school readiness.

Child Trends, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research center, reports the following about the importance of assessing these five domains.

School readiness, a multi-dimensional concept, conveys important advantages. Children who enter school with early skills, such as a basic knowledge of math and reading, are more likely than their peers to experience later academic success, attain higher levels of education, and secure employment. Absence of these and other skills may contribute to even greater disparities down the road. For example, one study found that gaps in math, reading, and vocabulary skills evident at elementary school entry explained at least half of the racial gap in high school achievement scores.

In addition, their report includes the importance of assessing the noncognitive domains.

While cognitive development and early literacy are important for children's school readiness and early success in school, other areas of development (i.e., health, social development, engagement) may be of equal or greater importance.

Retrieved from Internet on June 5, 2013: <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=early-school-readiness>.

Furthermore, research about school readiness suggests that a child's approaches toward learning are powerful predictors of his or her later success in school.

The Child Mental Health Foundations and Agencies Network [FAN] (2000)

#### **5) Is the KEA developmentally appropriate?**

- a. Yes the KEA is developmentally appropriate. It is an observational assessment. The data is collected by the kindergarten teacher during the children's daily activities; therefore it is culturally and linguistically responsive and inclusive of all children and families.

#### **6) Is the KEA research-based?**

- a. Yes it is research-based. It is thoroughly grounded in the most current research about how children develop and learn. Within the KEA assessment guide are comprehensive summaries of important research findings about each objective and how it is a predictor of school success. Educators will not have to wonder whether they are focusing on what is most important for children's development and learning. The teaching strategies that are provided in relation to each objective reflect the most current thinking about best practices in early childhood education.

**7) Is the KEA valid and reliable?**

- a. The KEA has been rigorously and extensively field tested by independent researchers who measured the reliability and validity of the tool. That field testing was representative of a national sample. That field testing determined that the KEA is both reliable and valid. Teacher's ratings are consistent and stable and the KEA can be used to effectively assess children from birth through kindergarten.

**8) What kinds of reports does the KEA provide?**

- a. The KEA provides aggregated and disaggregated reports that show what a child knows and is able to do in the five domains assessed.

**9) Is participation free?**

- a. Yes, there is no cost to districts, schools, or teachers for participating.

**10) Can developmental kindergarten teachers participate?**

- a. Yes, all teachers of kindergarten age students can sign up for the fall pilot.

**11) When do we have to complete the assessment?**

- a. The goal of the KEA is to capture the knowledge, skills, and abilities that students have when they arrive at kindergarten. This means the assessment has to be administered within the first 45 days of school and the data needs to be entered into the online reporting system within the first 55 days of school.

**12) What is the benefit of completing the assessment only once?**

- a. Teachers can learn the strengths their students bring in their first few weeks of school. Once teachers enter the information into the on-line system, they have immediate access to individual student and class reports that the system will generate. Teachers can use these reports to inform their instruction and to share the strengths of children with parents and families.

**13) How long is it going to take to complete the assessment?**

- a. This is an observational measure based on children's participation in the kindergarten classroom. Completion times vary from teacher to teacher, and it gets easier and quicker with time. Based on experiences from others using the tool, the estimate for entering checkpoint information on-line is 20 to 60 minutes per child with additional time devoted to gathering evidence for entering the checkpoint information.

**14) What if my district requires that I administer other initial assessments to all my students? Can I use the information that I collect for that process for the KEA?**

- a. Yes, you can use the information you collect and the results of other assessment tools or screeners you currently use to inform the KEA. You will see that you are likely already collecting many pieces of information that align with the objectives and dimensions of a KEA.

**15) What are we required to do to complete the KEA?**

- a. Teachers will make focused observations of students. Teachers will use the on-line system to record their observations about the developing skills, abilities, and behaviors of the students.

**16) What do we do if the student doesn't demonstrate a skill at first but does demonstrate it within the observation period?**

- a. Some children will need time to become accustomed to the classroom. If the student demonstrates the knowledge, skill or behavior during the observation period, it should be recorded.

**17) Does this mean that we must wait until the end of the 45 days to enter the data on-line?**

- a. Teachers should not wait until the end of the observation period to enter data. Because the KEA is an observation-based tool, teachers need time to observe. But it is appropriate to enter data over time. The tool will be available to teachers at the start of the school year.

**18) How does documentation work?**

- a. Documentation is the evidence teachers gather to support the professional judgment about the child's developing skills, abilities and behaviors. Teachers can store their documentation on-line or through files, and can combine the on-line and paper file documentation options.

**19) Who conducts the observations and data entry?**

- a. Kindergarten teachers have the expertise and professional judgment to conduct the observations and to use the on-line system. Data entry into the on-line system is more than a technical task. It requires judgment about the student's developing level of skill. Teachers learn how to use the KEA to evaluate the developing skill levels of the students during the training that is being provided by the state.

**20) Can paraprofessionals help gather documentation?**

- a. Yes! Paraprofessionals or other support people in the classrooms can, under the teacher's direction, help gather documentation in the forms of photos, videos, or work samples for the teacher to review and evaluate. Because paraprofessionals have not been trained in using the tool, they should not be asked to enter information into the online system. To ensure student privacy, teachers should never share their password with anyone.

**21) Can physical education teachers observe and enter data for the objectives related to students' physical development?**

- a. In order to assure that the data is reliable and of high quality, only people trained on the KEA observation protocol may observe and enter data. However, kindergarten teachers may consult their physical education teacher colleagues to help set up activities so that the kindergarten teacher can observe students' physical development.

**22) What is the difference between data entry and documentation?**

- a. Data entry is the process of making judgments about students' skills, knowledge and abilities. Documentation is the evidence teachers gather to support their judgments.

**23) When can teachers begin gathering documentation?**

- a. Some teachers may begin gathering documentation before school starts for the year as they meet with the children and families prior to the first day. Other teachers may not have the opportunity to begin gathering documentation until children start attending school. Once teachers have ample information collected to assess a student's knowledge, skills and behaviors, they can begin entering the information in the online system.

**24) There are some items that our curriculum does not cover until later in the year. How do we gather data on that?**

- a. Keep in mind that we are observing the skills and abilities of children at the start of the kindergarten year, not what we hope they develop during the year.

**25) How do we know we are using the tool correctly?**

- a. Teachers are strongly encouraged to complete inter rater reliability activities. This will assist teachers in feeling confident that their rating of individual students' abilities is consistent with the rating another teacher would provide for that same student.

**26) How is the State supporting the participating teachers and districts?**

- a. Participating teachers are being provided with training prior to the start of the school year. Trainers have been trained in Michigan to assist with ongoing support. During implementation, technical support will be made available through on-line guidance; customized individual assistance; and customized webinars. We will also be following up after the completion of the KEA to receive feedback on your experiences.

**27) Is the KEA aligned with the Michigan Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Prekindergarten?**

- a. Yes, the KEA aligns well with the Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Prekindergarten.

**28) What if a child has a late start to school? Do I still use the KEA with them?**

- a. All students who start school by the third week of school should be assessed with the KEA.

**29) What if a child is excessively absent from school? Do I still use the KEA with them?**

- a. If a student is absent from school 15 days or more, you do not need to complete the KEA for them.

**Specific Questions**

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