INFORMING EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS CHANGE: Recommendations for Assessing Population-Wide Child Development at Kindergarten Entry
Pathways is an initiative of the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation, in collaboration with NC Child, the NC Partnership for Children, Inc., and BEST NC.
This report contains a summary of the proceedings and recommendations of a data workgroup convened by the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation, May-August 2019, with support from North Carolina’s Preschool Development Grant. The workgroup’s goals were:

- To create recommendations for what measure—or portfolio of proxy measures—would best track children’s development at kindergarten entry at the population level. Recommended measure(s) are:
  - Accessible and inclusive across language, race and ethnicity
  - Inclusive of all domains of development—Health and Physical Development, Emotional and Social Development, Approaches to Play and Learning, Language Development and Communication and Cognitive Development
  - One piece of a larger puzzle that includes families, communities and schools to represent the child’s full experience and context at kindergarten entry
  - Aligned with NC Pathways Measures of Success Framework

- To develop communications and messaging to accompany recommendations that provide transparency about the process, explanations, and suggestions that are targeted to different audiences—policy makers, communities, early educators, and all families.

- To identify next steps that build on the existing body of work in NC and further this work including any specific recommendations for action, research or evaluation.

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SUBMITTED TO
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Executive SUMMARY

Early childhood development provides the foundation for lifelong learning and success, and kindergarten entry is a critical point in that continuum. Population-level data on how children are developing at kindergarten entry can help improve the early childhood system and supports that are available to children and families by identifying gaps, tracking trends over time, and informing early childhood investments and professional development.

In order to serve these functions, population-level data on child development at kindergarten entry must be valid, reliable, equitable, representative of a holistic approach to child development, and communicated in an appropriate and responsible manner.

A workgroup of North Carolina experts in early childhood data and measurement—funded under the Preschool Development Grant and convened by the NC Early Childhood Foundation—met in 2019 to develop recommendations for North Carolina on how to best measure child development at kindergarten entry at the population level. The workgroup’s results are intended to inform the NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading initiative, NCDHHS’ Early Childhood Action Plan, and state practice around use of early childhood data.

The workgroup’s recommendations include the following:
RECOMMENDATION ONE

North Carolina should use the following criteria that describe an ideal measure(s) of child development at kindergarten entry:

- A tool, technique or approach developed for the purpose of describing child development at kindergarten entry at the population level.
- Reliable and valid for its intended purpose as a population-level measure.
- Validated for use with its intended population, inclusive of different racial or ethnic groups, children with disabilities, children in dual language learning families, and others.
- Comprehensive—includes the five major domains of child development.
- Includes family or community input and relies on multiple informants.
- Captures a continuum or spectrum of development in each domain.
- Feasible—not too long or complex and does not overburden teachers or respondents.
- Has been assessed for inter-rater reliability, if it is a direct assessment/teacher report measure.

RECOMMENDATION TWO

North Carolina should not use the North Carolina Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA) as a population-level measure of child development at kindergarten entry. The NC KEA is a formative assessment that provides teachers with a tool to use in the classroom to individualize and improve instruction for children and to communicate with parents. Because the KEA was not developed for the purpose of providing summative, aggregate data and there has not been a study of inter-rater reliability, the data that the KEA produces is not adequate for aggregation to the population level.
RECOMMENDATION THREE

North Carolina should use multiple measures to describe child development at kindergarten entry that meet criteria established in Recommendation 1. North Carolina should further explore:

- Healthy and Ready to Learn National Outcome Measure, which uses data from the National Survey of Children's Health.
- Valid and reliable direct child assessments and teacher-report measures. Inter-rater reliability needs to be part of the criteria for selecting a teacher report measure. The use of sampling should be explored to mitigate the burden of data collection.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR

North Carolina should identify and recommend best practices in mitigating racial bias in child assessments, including by:

- Convening a panel to review how “traditional” child development constructs are defined and measured.
- Reviewing available research around methods to reduce bias in child assessment.
- Developing recommendations for a set of data methods criteria that North Carolina can use that represent best practices in identifying and mitigating bias in child assessments.

North Carolina should identify additional child development constructs to highlight strengths of children of color that build readiness at kindergarten entry, including by:

- Examining research on additional constructs that highlight development strengths of children of color that support readiness. Examples include: risk-taking, creativity, flexibility, persistence, self-confidence, awareness of racial and social identities, awareness of self, language diversity, narrative skills, resourcefulness, and differential awareness of the importance of gesture/tone/eye contact.
- Identifying additional research that is needed on constructs of child development that include developmental strengths of children of color.
RECOMMENDATION FIVE

North Carolina should develop and use communication strategies and tools for multiple audiences on the child development data it collects, including messages on how data can and cannot be used. This messaging should:

- Be race- and ethnicity-explicit.
- Focus on and strengthen the role of the early childhood system and public schools in supporting children and families, while also identifying opportunity gaps.
- Inform and improve child and family systems.
- Inform the interpretation of data reports.
- Identify how schools can and should be ready for all children and families.
- Acknowledge child development strengths and needs.
- Promote resiliency while also addressing inequity and bias.
- Describe a developmental continuum.
- Present child assessment data within the larger context of family, school and community.
Early childhood development provides the foundation for lifelong learning and success. A child’s early relationships, settings and experiences shape development in the key areas of cognition, approaches to learning, language and literacy, social and emotional development and physical development. As a result, high quality early childhood interventions can be particularly impactful in creating long-term outcomes for children and families and providing a powerful return on investment for communities.

Data is one tool (among others) that can help us to learn how children and families are doing, allow us to reflect on the effectiveness of strategies and investments, shape teaching and school practices to meet individual student needs, and identify where extra supports are needed. Because data can be such a powerful driver in our schools, communities and systems, it is critical that the data being used is valid and reliable and communicated in an appropriate and responsible manner. For example, data collected for one purpose may not be accurate and meaningful if used for another purpose.

Kindergarten entry is one point in a continuum of early childhood development that is interrelated and complex. It is a critical point because it marks the transition from one setting or system to another and provides an opportunity to assess children and use data for a variety of important purposes. Commonly used child assessments at kindergarten entry include screenings which identify child needs, and formative assessments, which help teachers individualize instruction.

There is also a need for population-level child development data at kindergarten entry. This type of aggregate data can help improve the early childhood system and supports that are available to children and families by identifying gaps, tracking trends over time, and informing early childhood investments and professional development. In order to serve these important functions, population-level child development data should reflect a rigorous process to ensure that it is valid, reliable, equitable and representative of a holistic approach to child development.
In December 2018, North Carolina received funding from the federal Administration of Children and Families for a Preschool Development Grant (Birth-Five). The grant was designed to support state early learning system planning efforts. In North Carolina, one aspect of the grant’s work was partnering with the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation (NCECF) to convene an Early Childhood Data Advisory Council (ECDAC) and a data workgroup. The data workgroup, focused on developing recommendations for a population-level measure of child development at kindergarten entry, is the subject of this report.

Pathways to Grade Level Reading
The work of the ECDAC and the data workgroup is an extension of the NC Pathways to Grade Level Reading initiative. Founded in 2015, this collaborative effort (an initiative of the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation, in partnership with NC Child, the North Carolina Partnership for Children, and BEST NC) has developed shared measures of success on the pathway to ensuring that every child is reading on grade-level by third grade and prioritized policy action areas to achieve that goal. The work is cross-sector, action-oriented, and long-term. The Pathways Measures of Success Framework identifies being developmentally ready at kindergarten entry as a Literacy Development Milestone. The workgroup’s recommendations will contribute to the discussion about how to best measure progress on this milestone.

Early Childhood Action Plan
In February 2019, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services published its Early Childhood Action Plan.¹ This plan established NCDHHS’ vision that all North Carolina children will get a healthy start and develop to their full potential in safe and nurturing families, schools, and communities. The plan includes ten goals, including “Young children across North Carolina will reach their developmental goals by the time they enter kindergarten.” The data workgroup’s recommendations will contribute to the discussion about how best to measure progress on this goal of the Early Childhood Action Plan.

Data Work Group Purpose
In May 2019, NCECF, with contracted partners, convened the Child Development at Kindergarten Entry Data Workgroup (Appendix A contains details on workgroup membership). This group was tasked with developing a population-level measure of child development at kindergarten entry—or portfolio of measures—to be used to identify needs and track trends, inform investments in early childhood services, and guide professional development and programming. This report is a summary of the workgroup’s process and recommendations.
Workgroup PROCESS

The workgroup met four times between May and August 2019. See meeting arc below. The meetings were designed to confirm and explore the scope of work, introduce the intersection of workgroup discussions with principles of racial equity, learn about research in the field, and draft recommendations. The use of a racial equity lens was an important aspect of workgroup discussions and is discussed further, below.

In monthly meetings, members reviewed progress, discussed readings and meeting materials, heard expert presentations, worked together in small groups, and identified next steps. By the fourth meeting, several discussion themes had emerged and the workgroup had identified several recommendations regarding the assessment of child development at kindergarten entry, which are presented below. The workgroup used a consensus-building process in the final workgroup meeting to ensure the recommendations accurately reflect workgroup discussion and received broad-based support.

DATA WORKGROUP MEETING ARC
Racial Equity Lens

The workgroup embedded a racial equity lens in all of its planning and meetings. Facilitators were intentional in probing how traditional concepts about assessment, child development, and readiness for school might perpetuate the disenfranchisement of children of color or children with vulnerabilities or (actively or passively) ignore opportunities to identify and celebrate child strengths—especially strengths that were not a typical or traditional component of common assessment systems. CounterPart Consulting provided racial equity training to workgroup members and helped facilitate each workgroup meeting, to ensure that an intentional and explicit racial equity lens was used at every step. Key principles included:

1. Inequity is bolstered by structural and historic factors, which continue to operate. A primary course of action is to disrupt these factors with strategies that intentionally and explicitly address racial inequities and the needs and strengths of children and families of color.

2. Lenses help us see better. A racial equity lens helps us see the existence and impact of structural racism, and thus craft and implement an appropriate response. This lens focuses our attention on power and ownership, asking who has power and how existing structures work to perpetuate inequitable power over resources and outcomes.

3. A racially equitable society would be one where race or ethnicity is not a meaningful predictor of access, opportunities, and outcomes.

For the workgroup, explicit attention to racial equity meant:
• Ensuring the workgroup’s recommendations meaningfully focus on access to resources
• Interrupting traditional concepts and norms
• Addressing disparities from the front-end
• Broadening the understanding of the diversity of strengths children and families may have
• Centering children of color in addition to white children
WORKGROUP PRINCIPLES

The workgroup adopted and used the Pathways to Grade-Level Reading Initiative Principles:

- We will be data-and research-driven and informed by developmental science.
- We commit to acknowledging and eliminating systemic inequities and racial, ethnic, socioeconomic and ability disparities in early childhood experiences, opportunities, and outcomes.
- We will focus on the whole child, birth-through-age-eight, in the context of his or her family and community, using a multi-dimensional systems lens.
- We will be transparent, collaborative and accountable to one another.
- We will be informed by and hold ourselves accountable to families and communities.
- We will have a strength-based approach, highlighting protective factors and preventative solutions, and be guided by compassion.
- We will work to ensure that each child has the opportunity to fulfill his or her potential.
- We will prioritize solutions that are actionable and sustainable, and we will have high expectations of what is achievable. We will be results-oriented, embracing innovation and seeing change as opportunity.

These principles were supported and promoted through the workgroup’s use of informed discussions, with supplementary readings, invited presentations, and feedback.

"The facilitators really listened to everyone’s voice and tried to make sure everyone was heard. Did a great job getting folks to consensus and to agree on next steps."
WORKGROUP RESOURCES

National Resources and Frameworks
The workgroup reviewed position papers and frameworks from the following national agencies.

• National Research Council
• National Center for Children in Poverty
• Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes
• Child Trends
• Ounce Prevention Fund
• Head Start

Invited Presentations
The workgroup received presentations from several subject matter experts, including:

• Dr. Rich Lambert, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, on the North Carolina Kindergarten Entry Assessment
• Dr. Cynthia Dewey, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, on the North Carolina Kindergarten Entry Assessment
• Dr. Dan Tetreault, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, on the North Carolina Kindergarten Entry Assessment
• Dr. Katherine Paschall, Child Trends, on the Healthy and Ready to Learn National Outcome Measure
• Mandy Ableidinger, North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation, shared a summary of national meeting on population-level measures of child development
• Todd Dalrymple, The Duke Endowment, shared a summary of national meeting on population-level measures of child development

WORKGROUP FEEDBACK

Process feedback was collected through one-on-one conversations with workgroup members and using regular, post-session online surveys. Workgroup members provided input on progress towards objectives, integration of the racial equity lens, their own engagement, and process facilitation and organization. For example, feedback on the utility of small group activities guided the structure of future meetings and the inclusion of more small group discussions. Online surveys also were used to probe workgroup members for ideas and input on content prior to workgroup sessions and to confirm key concepts for integration into recommendations. During the final meeting, a consensus process was used to develop the final recommendations. Workgroup members were then able to reflect after the meeting and review recommendations again through survey to provide additional feedback on specific recommendation language.
Key CONCEPTS

Several concepts informed and helped frame the workgroup’s conversations.

FRAMING THE ISSUE

North Carolina has long strategized on how best to support children so that they enter school healthy and ready to succeed. In 2000, the North Carolina School Improvement Panel published *School Readiness in North Carolina: Strategies for Defining, Measuring, and Promoting Success for All Children.*² This consensus document established four strategy areas that needed attention: Ready Children, Ready Families, Ready Schools, and Ready Communities. The Panel stressed that school readiness is not exclusively a characteristic or trait exhibited by children at a discrete point in time. Readiness is also a process, which is influenced by the actions of the adults in young children's lives. Not only should adults ensure that young children are supported to be “ready” for school, but families, communities and schools should be supported to be “ready” to meet each child’s needs. The NC School Improvement Panel established that:

- All children are ready for school and can succeed at some level.
- Readiness should be defined broadly to include community, school, family, and children’s developmental levels.
- Readiness definitions and measurements should be holistic, including multiple domains of a child’s development and taking individual and cultural differences into account.
- Data on children’s readiness should be used to design individualized curriculum but not to determine a child’s placement in school.
- Schools have the responsibility to be “ready” to serve all children.

The data workgroup maintains that an accurate, actionable, and equitable discussion of measuring child development at kindergarten entry must:

- Encompass the above readiness concepts
- Recognize the contributions of all caregivers and educators to a child’s development
- Explore how “readiness” is conceptualized, defined, and assessed, using a racial equity lens
THEMES

Prompted by the Ready Children, Families, Schools, and Communities framework, workgroup discussion sessions incorporated several themes, which helped the workgroup critically review and challenge existing approaches to defining, measuring, and communicating about child development, and to develop its recommendations for the state on equitable, valid, and reliable approaches.

Strengths-Based
The workgroup discussed the identification or development of child assessment measures and processes that could summarize, at the population-level, the strengths and assets of children (and families), rather than just the needs.

Systems Focus
The workgroup discussed how the desired population-level data could inform and advance early childhood systems, including supports and services for families and caregivers. Workgroup members stressed that child development and “readiness” are the products of multiple stakeholders, including families, educators, and the community, not solely a characteristic of a child. To ensure a systems focus, a discussion of readiness must include how schools can be ready to support each child, whatever his or her developmental status when he or she arrives at kindergarten.

Resiliency and Adversity
The workgroup asked how population-level data generated by appropriate tools could be used to foster resiliency and address adversity in children, families, and communities. Resiliency and adversity are not innate characteristics children have when they enter kindergarten but the result of experiences over time. Can the data that are generated about child development at kindergarten entry be used thoughtfully and meaningfully to acknowledge and disrupt the structural and systemic elements that cause adversity?

Promoting Equity and Addressing Bias
Using a racial equity lens and having intentional and explicit discussions about race, the workgroup explored how structural racism impacts the development and use of child assessment measures. In particular, the workgroup discussed data collection processes, including the data collectors’ implicit biases and cognitive bias that may be inherent in instrument development.

Developmental Focus
Early childhood development is multidimensional with overlapping domains and a continuum of development within and across domains. The workgroup discussed the challenges of accurately measuring and interpreting child development at one point in time. The workgroup was concerned that the use of “cut off” points to establish a dichotomy of “ready” versus “not ready” does not result in an accurate representation of child development at kindergarten entry.
ACTION AREAS

Workgroup members indicated that the work presented opportunities to:

- Better understand current efforts and processes
- Hear diverse perspectives that could inform readiness concepts and assessment
- Build on and advance prior work accomplished in the state
- Better align the use of standards and assessments between the preschool and kindergarten years
- Identify measures and tools for tracking population-level progress across the state, which also could inform understanding of progress among different demographic groups
- Positively impact the work of educators and schools

Using feedback generated prior to and discussion during the first workgroup session, the conversation in sessions two through four was grouped into action areas: what we measure, how we measure, and how we talk about what is measured. Figure 1 represents the questions the group identified in each of these areas.

What We Measure

Workgroup discussions on what should be assessed or measured when children enter kindergarten included what traits, skills, and developmental domains traditionally were assessed and needed to be re-visited, using a racial equity lens. Since the 1990s, “traditional” concepts of child development group skills into five domains:³

- Physical well-being and motor development
- Social and emotional development
- Approaches to learning
- Language development
- Cognition and general knowledge

The workgroup explored how, while these traditional domains are critical for child success in school, measuring only these domains can under-value strengths of children and families of color. These discussions informed workgroup recommendations on the characteristics of a strong measure of child development at kindergarten entry (Recommendation 1).
QUESTIONS IDENTIFIED BY THE GROUP:
WHAT WE MEASURE, HOW WE MEASURE, & HOW WE USE DATA

**Constructs**
- What are we assessing?
- Are we assessing the right things?
- Are all domains of development being assessed?
- Do these constructs represent the strengths of children of color?

**Data Collection**
- Was the tool developed for this purpose (formative vs summative)?
- What is method (parent survey, interview, observation)?
- How is implicit bias of data collector factored in?
- How can the best practices be balanced with feasibility and cost?

**Scoring and Interpretation**
- Does it reflect the continuum of child development or is it dichotomous?
- Does it provide individual scores for different domains of development or a composite score?
- How can it identify strengths/assets as opposed to just deficits?

**Messaging**
- Can results support the improvement of the system rather than child?
- How can we represent kindergarten as one point in a pathway?
- How do we have targeted messaging for a variety of stakeholders – families, teachers, schools, communities, policymakers?

**How will the data be used?**
- How can we support various stakeholders in interpreting this data?
- How can we promote the appropriate use of the data and mitigate potential misuses?
How We Measure

The workgroup explored how child development constructs are measured with a focus on the influence of structural racism and bias in assessing children’s development and interpreting assessment data. The workgroup discussed the purposes, strengths and weaknesses of different types of assessments, such as direct child assessments, screenings, and parent-report versus teacher-report tools. These discussions informed workgroup recommendations on the use of measures and specific tools for capturing population-level data on child development (Recommendations 2, 3 and 4).

The workgroup learned about and discussed numerous tools, including North Carolina’s Kindergarten Entry Assessment (NC KEA), which is identified in the Early Childhood Action Plan as a measure of interest for tracking progress on one of the plan’s goals. Experts on the NC KEA presented to the workgroup on the instrument’s development, design, structure, and limitations. These discussions informed workgroup recommendations on the use of the NC KEA and other tools for capturing population-level data on child development (Recommendations 2, 3 and 4).

How We Talk About What Is Measured

The workgroup discussed how aggregate child development data should be used. They clarified that the purpose of looking at population-level child development data is to track trends, identify gaps for additional investments, and inform professional development and programming. The group identified concerns about data being misinterpreted or misused at the state and community level. These discussions informed workgroup recommendations on the use of the NC KEA and other tools for capturing population-level data on child development (Recommendation 5).
RECOMMENDATIONS

The Child Development at Kindergarten Entry Data Work Group was tasked with developing a set of recommendations for a population-level measure—or portfolio of measures—that describe child development at kindergarten entry. The purpose of this measure(s) is to provide data that allow North Carolina to identify and track trends over time, drive and inform additional investments in the early childhood system, and guide professional development and program modifications.

The following recommendations represent a set of steps to move this important work forward, understanding that it will take a longer-term process to develop high-quality and inclusive child development data that drives North Carolina’s early childhood system.

RECOMMENDATION ONE

North Carolina should use the following criteria that describe an ideal measure(s) of child development at kindergarten entry:

- A tool, technique or approach developed for the purpose of describing child development at kindergarten entry at the population level.
- Reliable and valid for its intended purpose as a population-level measure.
- Validated for use with its intended population, inclusive of different racial or ethnic groups, children with disabilities, children in dual language learning families, and others.
- Comprehensive—includes the five major domains of child development.
- Includes family or community input and relies on multiple informants.
- Captures a continuum or spectrum of development in each domain.
- Feasible—not too long or complex and does not overburden teachers or respondents.
- Has been assessed for inter-rater reliability, if it is a direct assessment/teacher report measure.
The workgroup’s purpose was to develop recommendations for what measure—or portfolio of measures—would best track children’s development at kindergarten entry at the population level. Thus, one of the first priorities for the workgroup was to establish the characteristics of a strong measure. The workgroup initially relied on the Pathways for Grade Level Reading initiative data measure criteria to guide discussions. A strong measure of child development at kindergarten entry would be:

- Research-based. Connected clearly to the top-line result through research
- Actionable. Is something that can be reasonably affected through state or local legislation; policy, program or practice change; or community action
- Impactful. Will impact the lives of a number of NC children and families
- Easily Communicated. Can be easily understood by parents, policymakers, and other key stakeholders
- Decreases Inequities. Will reduce gaps and inequities that currently exist among North Carolina populations

Through discussion and feedback, additional criteria for a strong measure to describe child development at kindergarten entry were developed. These criteria represent several priorities for the workgroup, including:

- Ensuring that the tool or tools used to capture data are appropriate for the intended use, which is to produce population-level data on child development at kindergarten entry. The tool or tools must be valid and reliable for this purpose, and for all populations.
- Ensuring a comprehensive portrait of child development emerges, inclusive of but not limited to a spectrum of development in the five major domains.
- Recognizing that parents and other stakeholders may have valuable information to share on child development and that this information should be solicited in the data collection process, in valid and reliable ways.
- Acknowledging the burden of data collection and urging a consideration of feasibility in the final choice of tool or tools.

The group also noted that it would likely not be possible to find a single measure that validly and reliably assesses all children on all critical child outcomes at entry to school and suggested that multiple kinds of measures would be needed.

Having established the characteristics of a strong measure or measures, the workgroup turned to considering available tools and specifically tools already in use in North Carolina such as the North Carolina Kindergarten Entry Assessment (NC KEA). The work group heard presentations on the NC KEA, reviewed the tool and discussed whether it would be an appropriate tool for capturing the desired information. The workgroup’s consensus decision is presented in Recommendation 2.
RECOMMENDATION TWO

North Carolina should not use the NC KEA as a population-level measure of child development at kindergarten entry. The NC KEA is a formative assessment that provides teachers with a tool to use in the classroom to individualize and improve instruction for children and to communicate with parents. Because the NC KEA was not developed for the purpose of providing summative, aggregate data and there has not been a study of inter-rater reliability, the data that the NC KEA produces is not adequate for aggregation to the population level.

The workgroup learned about the NC KEA through readings and presentations from the NC KEA technical team and from the Department of Public Instruction. The NC KEA was developed as a formative assessment in response to a mandate by the North Carolina General Assembly and the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Grant and has been used broadly since 2016-17. The NC KEA is administered by teachers to capture the development of each child at kindergarten entry to inform instruction and education planning and to communicate with parents.

While the legislation creating the NC KEA indicates that the goal is for data that can be used both for improving instruction for individual children and for understanding child development at kindergarten entry on the aggregate level, the current NC KEA is not appropriate for the second of these goals due to two concerns: the nature of the assessment, and its validity and reliability for this purpose.

Workgroup discussions focused on the nature of the NC KEA as a formative assessment that provides teachers with useful information to individualize instruction to the needs of the child. Formative assessments typically are used to collect data over time, generating multiple observations from one or more sources. The information that is produced tends to be descriptive in nature, rather than diagnostic or conclusive about child development or achievement. Summative assessments, on the other hand, are designed to make a valid and reliable conclusion about development, learning, or achievement at a specific point in time.

A formative assessment can be used as one component of a comprehensive assessment system, as defined by the U.S. Department of Education.

In addition, the workgroup revisited its criteria from Recommendation 1, which align with the NC KEA legislation and state that the NC KEA should be "reliable, valid, and appropriate for use with all children, including those with disabilities and those who are English language learners." To date, inter-rater reliability and external validity have not been established for the KEA.

The workgroup therefore determined that data from the NC KEA are not adequate for producing population-level information about child development at kindergarten entry.

The workgroup then considered what other tools would be adequate and appropriate for collecting the needed data (Recommendation 3).
Starting in the 2020-21 school year, NC kindergartners will be assessed during the first 60 days of school using a subset of Teaching Strategies Gold® developmental progressions instead of the current NC Kindergarten Entry Assessment content. The new assessment system will be called the NC Early Learning Inventory (ELI), to better highlight the need to understand the full continuum of development from birth through third grade.

TS Gold® is an ongoing, observation-based assessment system that helps teachers and administrators capture the development of each child to inform instruction and education planning and to communicate with parents. It is a nationally-normed, valid and reliable tool with an inter-rater reliability component built into the technology platform, which can be used as a tool for professional development to help teachers across NC make reliable (and comparable) ratings of children’s development. The Office of Early Learning at the NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) has shared several advantages of shifting from the NC KEA content to TS Gold® developmental progressions. The advantages most relevant for the recommendations of this workgroup include:

- Assessment of a broader range of skills, from birth through the third grade, including support for measuring social-emotional learning
- A way to measure inter-rater reliability, which makes it more likely that an appropriate use of the data could be aggregation to inform the state about overall child development on the various domains
- New aggregate reporting and data export features for school and district administrators’ use
- Closer alignment with NC Pre-K and other early education programs that already use the TS Gold® system for assessing preschoolers. This can support smoother transitions from preschool to kindergarten for individual children and potentially expands the state’s ability to understand NC children’s aggregate development starting in preschool or earlier.

NCDPI held regional meetings in January 2020 with school district leaders to share the upcoming changes and to support the planning for professional development on the new system. In March, the Department held train-the-trainer sessions to provide district trainers with access to materials to train the teachers, coaches, and administrators in their districts. Teaching Strategies and the NC Office of Early Learning will provide follow-up support throughout the year. Data from the NC ELI will be available in the fall of 2021.

North Carolina could do more work in the next year to determine whether it is appropriate to aggregate those data to inform the state about children’s development at the population level. Of the more than 20 states that have some type of statewide contract for the use of TS Gold®, 12 states have a contract for kindergarten use specifically. Each of those 12 does some sort of aggregated reporting, though it varies somewhat from state to state.
RECOMMENDATION THREE

North Carolina should use multiple measures to describe child development at kindergarten entry that meet criteria established in Recommendation 1. North Carolina should further explore:

- Healthy and Ready to Learn National Outcome Measure, which uses data from the National Survey of Children’s Health.
- Valid and reliable direct child assessments and teacher-report measures. Inter-rater reliability needs to be part of the criteria for selecting a teacher report measure. The use of sampling should be explored to mitigate the burden of data collection.

The workgroup reviewed numerous instruments, tools, and approaches for collecting the desired information. The review included an overview of instrument validity and reliability, as well as discussions of burden or feasibility. The workgroup developed Recommendation 3 to acknowledge the possibility that any one tool or instrument may be insufficient to capture the desired, comprehensive information about child development, as informed by the criteria in Recommendation 1.

One instrument that was identified as promising for future consideration is the National Survey of Children’s Health, Healthy and Ready to Learn National Outcome Measure. For this parent-report tool to provide useful data, North Carolina would need to

- Oversample throughout the state in order to collect enough data to provide information on the school district level and about different demographic groupings.
- Ensure that the tool is validated for use with different populations.

Other approaches that were discussed include direct child assessments and teacher-report measures. In these cases, there was discussion of the burden that such approaches would place on the individuals tasked with data collection. Sampling was suggested as a promising and appropriate method to explore for mitigating this burden.

While Recommendation 3 directs state stakeholders towards adequate and appropriate instruments, it also recognizes that further work is necessary to develop a valid and reliable process for collecting data that will meet the criteria established in Recommendation 1. As presented in Recommendation 3, this includes a consideration of techniques such as sampling, to help mitigate the burden or expense of data collection. This also includes verification that the tool or tools chosen are considered valid and reliable for the populations that they will be used to describe.

Having identified suggestions for the tools or instruments North Carolina might consider as good sources of child development information, the workgroup turned to a discussion of how to identify, respond to, and neutralize implicit bias. The workgroup’s recommendation on this topic is presented in Recommendation 4.
RECOMMENDATION FOUR

North Carolina should identify and recommend best practices in mitigating racial bias in child assessments, including by convening a technical panel to:

• Review how “traditional” child development constructs are defined and measured.
• Review available research around methods to reduce bias in child assessment.
• Develop recommendations for a set of data methods criteria that North Carolina can use that represent best practices in identifying and mitigating bias in child assessments.

North Carolina should identify additional child development constructs to highlight strengths of children of color that build readiness at kindergarten entry, including by:

• Examining research on additional constructs that measure other development strengths that may support readiness, such as: risk-taking, creativity, flexibility, persistence, self-confidence, awareness of racial and social identities, awareness of self, language diversity, narrative skills, resourcefulness, and differential awareness of the importance of gesture/tone/eye contact.
• Identifying additional research that is needed on constructs of child development that could measure strengths of children of color.

Workgroup members explored the presence of implicit bias in how constructs such as “school readiness” were defined and the development of tools or data collection processes or approaches to measure development and readiness. One idea that emerged through discussion was the extent to which current frameworks do not do enough to highlight alternative developmental factors that may be strengths of children of color or other children facing structural barriers to opportunity. The workgroup crafted Recommendation 4 in such a way as to call attention to possible bias in traditional ideas about child development and encourage the state to explore methodologies to mitigate or neutralize bias.

The workgroup challenged how we currently view school readiness and child development at kindergarten entry by providing examples of the types of assets or strengths that currently may not be adequately explored or captured using existing tools or approaches.

Together, Recommendations 2, 3 and 4 explore the state’s current options for capturing data that meet the criteria established in Recommendation 1. Because Recommendation 2 urges the state to not use the NC KEA to supply population-level information on child development, Recommendations 3 and 4 provide a blueprint for the state to use in identifying or developing an adequate and appropriate approach.

Recommendation 5 summarizes the final set of actions the workgroup discussed: how to communicate about the data that are collected.
RECOMMENDATION FIVE

North Carolina should develop and use communication strategies and tools for multiple audiences on the child development data it collects, including messages on how data can and cannot be used. This messaging should:

- Be race- and ethnicity-explicit.
- Focus on and strengthen the role of the early childhood system and public schools in supporting children and families, while also identifying opportunity gaps.
- Inform and improve child and family systems.
- Inform the interpretation of data reports.
- Identify how schools can and should be ready for all children and families.
- Acknowledge child development strengths and needs.
- Promote resiliency while also addressing inequity and bias.
- Describe a developmental continuum.
- Present child assessment data within the larger context of family, school and community.

Messaging should target different stakeholder groups including (but not limited to) families, early educators and administrators, schools and programs, policy makers and legislators, other funders, and other states.

The workgroup discussed the need for messages about child development to be inclusive and driven by technically accurate information. The workgroup also discussed the different ways publicly-available data on child development could inform early childhood systems development and the types of assistance or support that should accompany a communications strategy. Communications should focus on how the early childhood system can support children rather than focusing on child or family-based deficiencies. Communications should situate population-level child development data within the larger system, which includes roles and responsibilities for families, schools, communities, and other actors. The information needs of multiple stakeholders should be considered, and data reports and their limitations should be appropriately conveyed.
Next STEPS

These recommendations add to the state and national conversations around what tool(s) can be used to capture valid and reliable information about child development at kindergarten entry. They provide a blueprint for how NC can and should consider and address race and bias in the definition and measurement of child development and readiness, and how to communicate about development within the holistic context described by the NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading initiative and the NC Early Childhood Action Plan. The recommendations provide strategies for the state to strengthen its data-driven processes in identifying needs, developing new resources, and informing professional development to ensure that every child is supported, and his or her strengths recognized, at the critical milestone that is entry to kindergarten.

The project described and this report were supported by the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Initiative (PDG B-5), Grant Number 90TP0046-01-00, from the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The report’s contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Child Care, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
REFERENCES


4 N.C. Gen. Stat. § 115C-83.5. Available online at: https://www.ncleg.gov/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/PDF/BySection/Chapter_115C/GS_115C-83.5.pdf

5 A formative assessment can be used as one component of a comprehensive assessment system, as defined by the U.S. Department of Education as “a coordinated and comprehensive system of multiple assessments—each of which is valid and reliable for its specified purpose and for the population with which it will be used—that organizes information about the process and context of young children’s learning and development in order to help early childhood educators make informed instructional and programmatic decisions.” Full site: US Department of Education, Definitions. Available online at: https://www.ed.gov/early-learning/elc-draft-summary/definitions
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: WORKGROUP MEMBERS

- Dr. Margaret Burchinal, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, UNC Chapel Hill
- Todd Dalrymple, The Duke Endowment
- Dr. Marian Earls, Community Care of North Carolina
- Dr. Dale Epstein, Child Trends
- Carla Garrett, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Office of Early Learning
- Brittany Gregory, Durham’s Partnership for Children
- Dr. Martinette Horner, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- Dr. Steve Jackson, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development and Early Education
- Dr. Vivian James, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Office of Early Learning
- Rachel Kaplan, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development and Early Education
- Dr. Richard Lambert, University of North Carolina at Charlotte
- Collin McColskey-Leary, East Durham Children’s Initiative
- Mary Martin, Child Care Services Association
- Dr. Kim McCombs-Thornton, North Carolina Partnership for Children
- Karen McKnight, Head Start State Collaboration Office, Department of Public Instruction Office of Early Learning, Head Start State Collaboration Office
- Kerry Moore, Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools
- Rebecca Planchard, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
- Dr. Christopher Scott, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- Dr. Kristi Snuggs, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development and Early Education
- Dr. Elizabeth Snyder-Fickler, Duke Center for Child and Family Policy
- Whitney Tucker, NC Child
- Hayley Young, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services

Coordination & Facilitation of Workgroup by:
- Dr. Sarah Heinemeier, Compass Evaluation and Research
- Kate Irish, Kate Irish Consulting
- North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation

Racial Equity Leadership by:
- Kathleen Crabbs, CounterPart Consulting
- Dr. Sterling Freeman, CounterPart Consulting
APPENDIX B: MEETING AGENDAS

MAY 6, 2019 • 12:00—4:00

PATHWAYS TO GRADE-LEVEL READING INITIATIVE
CHILD DEVELOPMENT AT KINDERGARTEN ENTRY DATA WORKGROUP

Work Group Goal:
- To create recommendations for what measure—or portfolio of proxy measures—would best track children's development at kindergarten entry at the population level. Recommended measure(s) are:
  » accessible and inclusive across language, race and ethnicity;
  » inclusive of all domains of development - Health and Physical Development, Emotional and Social Development, Approaches to Play and Learning, Language Development and Communication and Cognitive Development;
  » one piece of a larger puzzle that includes families, communities and schools to represent the child’s full experience and context at kindergarten entry; and
  » aligned with NC Pathways Measures of Success Framework.
- To develop communications and messaging to accompany recommendations that provide transparency about the process, explanation and suggestions that are targeted to different audiences—policy makers, communities, early educators, and all families.
- To identify next steps that build on the existing body of work in NC and further this work including any specific recommendations for action, research or evaluation.

MEASURE(S)
- Free of linguistic, racial and cultural bias
- Holistic—all domains of development
- Part of larger context of families, schools and communities

COMMUNICATIONS
- Clear messaging on purpose of measure
- Messaging targets to stakeholders: policymakers, communities, early educators and families

NEXT STEPS
- Identify the work that still needs to be done
- Make recommendations for further research, action and discussion

Meeting Purpose: To review roles and responsibilities of the work group, guiding principles and criteria for a good measure(s), and review landscape of kindergarten entry measures. Identify measures/states to review in depth at the next meeting and any other key areas of study before the next meeting.

Meeting Outcomes:
- Confirm guiding principles and criteria for measure(s)
- Identify measures/models and key questions for further study and discussion
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Presenter(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>LUNCH</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:15</td>
<td>Welcome and Introductions</td>
<td>Mandy Ableidinger</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:30</td>
<td>Background and Context</td>
<td>Mandy Ableidinger</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Pathways to Grade-Level Reading Initiative</td>
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<td>• NC Early Childhood Data Advisory Council</td>
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<td>• State Level Collaboration: PDG and ECAP</td>
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<td>• Social-Emotional Health Data Workgroup</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• How will this measure be used?</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:45</td>
<td>Work Group Roles and Responsibilities</td>
<td>Kate Irish</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Review goal of work group</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Roles and responsibilities of work group members and consultants</td>
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<td>• Work Group Process Map</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:00</td>
<td>Framing within the Context of Whole Child, Family, Community</td>
<td>Kate Irish</td>
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<td>• Current Context</td>
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<td>• Building off 2000 Ready for School Goal Team</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• School Readiness Definition</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:15</td>
<td>Racial Equity Lens</td>
<td>Kathleen Crabbs, Sterling Freeman</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Describe how racial equity lens was applied and elevated through Pathways work so far.</td>
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<td>• Grounding Definitions</td>
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<td>• Discussion: Collect group's experience and questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:00</td>
<td>Criteria for a Strong Measure(s) of Child Development at Kindergarten Entry</td>
<td>Kate Irish, Kim McCombs-Thornton, Kathleen Crabbs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Review Pathways Criteria Measures</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Discussion: Is there anything missing? What do we need to add that are specific to this work group?</td>
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<td>2:20</td>
<td>BREAK</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:30</td>
<td>Overview of Kindergarten Entry Measures and Aggregate Data</td>
<td>Sarah Heineimeier, Dale Epstein, Marian Earls</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Review best practices/national recommendations on child measures</td>
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<td>• Review other state models</td>
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<td>• Other measures:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>» Dale Epstein, Child Trends - Healthy and Ready to Learn National Outcome Measure (NOM)</td>
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<td>» Marian Earls - National Survey of Children's Health</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Discussion and Questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:00</td>
<td>NC Kindergarten Entry Assessment</td>
<td>Cindy Dewey</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Overview of NC KEA</td>
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<td>• Implementation Updates</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:45</td>
<td>Identify Questions and Content Areas for Further Study/Discussion at Next Meeting</td>
<td>Kate Irish</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• What information, data, etc. do you need at the next meeting?</td>
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<td>• What expert presentations would be helpful?</td>
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<td>3:55</td>
<td>Conclusion and Meeting Evaluation</td>
<td>Kate Irish</td>
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<td>• Meeting evaluation form</td>
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Next Meeting: June 3rd
**Meeting Purpose:** Building on racial equity training and last meeting discussion, envision ideal measures and messaging around child development at Kindergarten entry.

- Review existing measures including NC KEA
- Identify and discuss key decision points about measure(s)
- Discuss process for next meeting—use of rubric based on measure criteria and visioning exercise

**Agenda**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>LUNCH</td>
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<td>12:15</td>
<td>Welcome and Introductions</td>
<td>Mandy Ableidinger</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:20</td>
<td>Work Group Goal and Process</td>
<td>Kate Irish</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Work group goal</td>
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<td>• Process map and meeting purpose</td>
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<td>• Parking lot</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:30</td>
<td>Resources, Rules, Stories and People</td>
<td>Kathleen Crabbs, Sterling Freeman</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Review group norms</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Themes from racial equity training</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:50</td>
<td>Review Key Themes from Last Meeting</td>
<td>Kate Irish</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Summarize key themes</td>
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<td>• Review thematic analysis visual</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:10</td>
<td>Visioning Exercise</td>
<td>Kate Irish</td>
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<td>• Small group exercise to envision ideal measures</td>
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<td>• Share out</td>
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<td>2:00</td>
<td>BREAK</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:10</td>
<td>National Survey of Child Health—Healthy and Ready to Learn National Outcome Measure</td>
<td>Katie Paschall, Child Trends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:35</td>
<td>NC Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA)</td>
<td>Dan Tetreault, DPI, Rich Lambert, UNC Charlotte</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:10</td>
<td>NC Transitions Project</td>
<td>Kristi Snuggs, DCDEE</td>
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<td>3:25</td>
<td>Identify and Discuss Key Decision Points for Recommending Measure(s)</td>
<td>Sarah Heinemeier</td>
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<td>• Review pre-survey findings</td>
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<td>• Review visioning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Identify areas for further discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:45</td>
<td>Review Process for Next Meeting and Assessing Information About Measures</td>
<td>Sarah Heinemeier</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Use rubric to begin reviewing/evaluating tools including those identified at the last meeting</td>
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<td>» MCLASS</td>
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<td>» TRC-TS Gold</td>
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<td>» ECLS-K Suite</td>
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<td>» SWYC</td>
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<td>3:55</td>
<td>Meeting Evaluation and Conclusion</td>
<td>Kate Irish</td>
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<td>• Meeting evaluation form</td>
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**Next Meeting: July 17**
**Meeting Purpose:**
- Clarify what NC should measure to describe child development at Kindergarten entry
- Review assessment tools using rubric and develop short list of promising tools
- Identify strategy to obtain additional parent and teacher feedback

**Agenda**

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Presenter(s)</th>
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<tr>
<td>9:00-9:15</td>
<td><strong>Welcome and Introductions</strong></td>
<td>Mandy Ableidinger</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:15-9:25</td>
<td><strong>Work Group Process for Next 2 Meetings</strong></td>
<td>Kate Irish</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:25-9:35</td>
<td><strong>Review Key Themes from Last Meeting</strong></td>
<td>Kate Irish</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:35-10:15</td>
<td><strong>Child Assessment Through Racial Equity Lens: What Should Be Measured and How is it Measured?</strong></td>
<td>Kathleen Crabbs, Sterling Freeman</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:15-11:00</td>
<td><strong>What Should NC Measure at Kindergarten Entry?</strong></td>
<td>Kate Irish</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:00-11:45</td>
<td><strong>How should the child indicators be measured?</strong></td>
<td>Sarah Heinemeier</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:45-12:00</td>
<td><strong>GET LUNCH &amp; BREAK</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>12:00-12:30</td>
<td><strong>Assessment Tool Review Discussion—Large Group</strong></td>
<td>Sarah Heinemeier</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:30-12:50</td>
<td><strong>Stakeholder Input—Hearing from Teachers and Parents</strong></td>
<td>Kathleen Crabbs, Sterling Freeman</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:50-1:00</td>
<td><strong>Meeting Evaluation and Conclusion</strong></td>
<td>Kate Irish</td>
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**Next Meeting:** August 28
Meeting Purpose:
- Review and synthesize data work group progress to date
- Review recommendations and reach consensus

Agenda

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>12:00-12:10</td>
<td>Welcome and Introductions</td>
<td>Mandy Ableidinger</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:10-12:40</td>
<td>Recap and Synthesis of Data Work Group</td>
<td>Kate Irish, Sarah Heinemeier</td>
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<td>Review meeting goals</td>
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<td>Review synthesis matrix</td>
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<td>12:40-1:00</td>
<td>Recap Child Trends Paper:</td>
<td>Mandy Ableidinger</td>
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<td>Measuring Young Children's Development and School</td>
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<td>Readiness: A Scan of Population-Level Measures</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:00-1:45</td>
<td>Recommendation 1: Measure Criteria</td>
<td>Kate Irish, Sarah Heinemeier</td>
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<td>Review measure criteria</td>
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<td>Consensus on recommendation</td>
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<td>1:45-2:30</td>
<td>Recommendation 2: Specific Tool(s)</td>
<td>Kate Irish, Sarah Heinemeier</td>
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<td>Review tool(s) and recommendation</td>
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<td>Consensus on recommendation</td>
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<td>2:30-2:45</td>
<td>BREAK</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:45-3:15</td>
<td>Recommendation 3: Racial Equity in Child Assessment</td>
<td>Kathleen Crabbs, Sterling Freeman</td>
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<td>Constructs</td>
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<td>Review recommendation</td>
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<td>Consensus on recommendation</td>
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<td>3:15-3:45</td>
<td>Recommendation 4: Communications</td>
<td>Kate Irish, Sarah Heinemeier</td>
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<td>Review recommendation</td>
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<td>Small groups identify messaging and communications</td>
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<td>strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:45-4:00</td>
<td>Meeting Evaluation and Conclusion</td>
<td>Kate Irish</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Meeting evaluation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Review next steps</td>
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</table>
The NC Early Childhood Foundation promotes understanding, spearheads collaboration, and advances policies to ensure each North Carolina child is on track for lifelong success by the end of third grade.