

# Recommendations on Ohio's Kindergarten Readiness Assessment

## May 2019



**EARLY CHILDHOOD COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT  
ADVISORY GROUP**

# EARLY CHILDHOOD COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT ADVISORY GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS ON OHIO'S KINDERGARTEN READINESS ASSESSMENT

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## Introduction

The Office of Early Learning and School Readiness at the Ohio Department of Education convened the Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment Advisory Group to discuss the purpose, challenges and recommendations to improve the administration, content and supports for Ohio's Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA). The group (see Appendix A for list of members) met between February 2018 and April 2019. Members were identified in collaboration with the major education associations in Ohio, with an emphasis on kindergarten and early childhood teachers, administrators, and advocates. This document summarizes the Advisory Group's recommendations including the background, critical perspectives, identified concerns and actions for improvement. While the group was meeting, Senate Bill 216 of the 131st General Assembly was enacted, which codified the Advisory Group's charge to make improvement recommendations to the superintendent of public instruction for consideration by September 1, 2019 (see Appendix B for SB 216 language).

Ohio's Strategic Plan for Education *Each Child, Our Future* was adopted in 2018 and includes several strategies that relate to the work of this committee including: working with parents, caregivers, community partners and educators to meet the needs of the whole child (strategy 7), teacher and instructional supports (strategy 3), meaningful assessment across all learning domains (strategy 5), promoting the importance of early learning (Strategy 8) and developing literacy skills across all ages, grades and subjects (Strategy 9). Strategy five on assessment includes a specific goal of the Department to create a more balanced KRA that provides useful information, is attentive to implementation barriers and recognizes test administration issues.

## Background

Ohio has measured a student's skills at kindergarten entry since 2004 using the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment-Literacy (KRA-L). This tool was a short 15-minute screening tool that was implemented statewide as a measure of language and literacy skills in areas such as upper- and lower-case letter identification, rhyming identification, rhyming production and alliteration identification. Ohio reported the results of the KRA-L annually at the district level, as well as by key student demographic characteristics including, by poverty, race/ethnicity, and disability. Spurred by the Ohio Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council recommendations for a comprehensive KRA, national research publications calling for comprehensive measures of school readiness<sup>1</sup> and the opportunity given to states in the Early Learning Challenge Grant to develop comprehensive kindergarten readiness assessments, Ohio set out in 2011 to create a new tool that would be a comprehensive measure of readiness at kindergarten entry.

Ohio's comprehensive KRA was developed for Ohio by a team of early childhood and assessment experts, as well as Ohio and Maryland educators. The KRA covers the widely recognized essential areas of readiness, including Mathematics, Language and Literacy, Social Foundations (which includes Social-Emotional Learning and Approaches Toward Learning) and Physical Well-being and Motor Development. Potential assessment items were developed, tested with kindergarten teachers and students, and then analyzed using statistics. What resulted after two years of development and an additional year of testing was an initial version of the KRA that included 63 items to measure school readiness. After an item-reduction process, the current KRA is in its second version with a **total of 50 items**. The items are either observed by the teacher or answered by the student and cover skills, knowledge and behaviors. The KRA in Ohio is

administered once in the fall for all first-time kindergarten students in public and community schools. Chartered Non-Public schools may opt-in to using the KRA. Per Ohio Revised Code 3301.0715, schools administer the KRA two weeks prior to the first day of school and no later than November 1. The kindergarten teacher of record scores the student's performance on the KRA.

The assessment produces an "On Track/Not On Track" score in Language and Literacy that can be used by schools as one option from a list of approved diagnostic tools to meet the state's Third Grade Reading Guarantee requirement to administer a reading diagnostic for kindergarten students. Many schools use the KRA for this purpose which allows schools to administer only one assessment for two purposes. The KRA also produces an overall score of Demonstrating Readiness, Emerging Readiness or Approaching Readiness that indicates a student's readiness to engage in the kindergarten curriculum (see Appendix C for statewide data from the KRA 2014 – 2017).

Since the implementation of a new comprehensive kindergarten readiness assessment in Ohio, the Department has provided online and in-person professional development as well as technical assistance on the use of the assessment. The Department has also focused on improving the implementation and supports that surround the tool to facilitate the effective use of assessment results. Through the years the KRA has been in use, significant improvements have been made. These improvements include:

- Reduced the assessment items from 63 to 50 items from its initial development
- Flexibility in online and application features for data entry and instant on demand reporting;
- Reducing wait time and increasing immediate in-person support for questions about using the technology for the assessment, as well as questions about the assessment itself in the established Help Desk;
- Providing immediate scoring information for students, classrooms, and schools;
- Making new professional development materials to be topic-specific (i.e. data driven instruction and practices) and professional development materials available on-demand.
- State law change to allow specific items (performance and selected response) to be administered up to 2 weeks before the start of school to alleviate teacher burden during school.

## Key Perspectives

Before the Advisory Group could develop recommendations about improving the KRA, the group began by discussing the needs of individual stakeholder groups relative to the assessment. The Advisory Group first identified eight types of stakeholders with their own perspectives about needs and challenges. These key perspectives included Children, Families, Kindergarten and Preschool Teachers, School Administrators, Early Childhood Advocates, State Agencies and Researchers/Experts. Below is the summary of identified needs and wants for each of these groups:

Children want an assessment that is engaging, developmentally appropriate, accessible, stress and anxiety-free, play-based and fun.

Families want an assessment that is accessible to all children, tells them information in a family-friendly way that provides them with tools to further support their children's development, is strength-based, supports what is next for their children's learning and development and provides them with a reflection on how their child may compare to other children the same age

Kindergarten Teachers want an assessment that is useful to them, informs their instruction, efficient, easy to administer, can measure progress over time, developmentally appropriate, engaging and fun for students, and provides data that is meaningful and useful.

Preschool Teachers want an assessment that tells them where the children they taught “ended up” in their readiness for kindergarten.

School Administrators want to be able to choose an assessment that aligns and supports resources such as class composition and balance, a tool which meets multiple requirements and uses, provides useful data, is mindful of the human resources, helps inform decision making, measures progress and is efficient.

Early Childhood Advocates want a valid and reliable assessment that can inform public policy and strategic investments, is accessible to all children and early learning environments, and developmentally appropriate and purposeful.

State Agencies want an assessment that informs their resource allocation and provides valid and reliable data for each child that can be sub-grouped; a tool that is evidence-based, is aligned to current research, and understood as purposeful.

Researchers and experts want an assessment that is valid and reliable over time that can provide information by demographic groups; is relevant to practice, and easy to understand.

Across a year of in-person meetings, the Advisory Group represented these groups and their key perspectives, either directly or through shared observations, interactions and experiences to identify the prevalent concerns about the KRA. While the Advisory Group focused on concerns, they also acknowledged many successes from the implementation of the KRA. Successes included using the KRA scores to connect with preschool programming, support local investments, and as an identifier for parent and student supports. The KRA also provided local schools with a comprehensive readiness measure across essential domains of school readiness not available before statewide. Since each group reflected varied needs and wants from a kindergarten readiness assessment, the Advisory Group also acknowledged that every need or want across these groups could not be met with a single set of recommendations.

## Identifying Concerns

The Advisory Group spent time studying Ohio’s Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) in its current form, including reflecting on the KRA and how its use was branded and communicated about to the field, how and when it is administered, what it measures and how skills and knowledge are assessed. They also discussed the current resources being used including the online data collection system, professional development, in-person technical supports, and available reporting options. The Advisory Group addressed needs in three areas:

1. *Process of Administration* (including the timeframe of the assessment, who can assess, timing of the administration—one time or throughout the year and timing of results);
2. *Content of Assessment* (how and what developmental areas are measured)
3. *Supports* (professional development, technology system, reports, online and remote support).

**Process of Administration:** As the multiple facets of KRA administration were examined, the Advisory Group identified four concerns: time, teacher burden, results and limitations.

Time: Time was a primary concern for teachers and administrators in at least three ways. The first concern is that the KRA takes too much time to administer taking away valuable instructional time during the first few months of school. The second concern is the timeframe associated with the window for administration. The current administration window requires administration anytime between two weeks before the start of the school year and November 1st. Because this

administration window occurs during the first few months of the school-year it challenges teacher-child relationship building; learning school routines, expectations, and students interacting with new peers. Additionally, the length of the administration window questions the quality of data when teachers administer the KRA later in the window where students may perform better due to spending more time in a kindergarten setting. The third concern is the amount of time that teachers were required to spend in training, a feeling that was compounded when kindergarten teachers were hired very close to the start of the school year. The training requirement created a cost, staffing, and time burden for school districts when the teacher of record is the only person who can score the KRA.

**Teacher burden:** Another concern focused on the burden placed on the kindergarten teacher. Currently, the kindergarten teacher of record is the only person required to be trained in the administration and scoring of the assessment. As a result, the group expressed a need to allow other school personnel to be trained to administer and score the assessment which would alleviate the teacher as the sole administrator of the assessment.

**Results:** Timing of results emerged as another area of concern. In years' past, the KRA results were not immediately available, which limited the usefulness of the information for teachers. Technology was made available in fall 2018 that gave an immediate result to teachers once the KRA was completed for a student. However, a related concern was shared that teachers need to be able to change scores to items, even after a child has completed the assessment. This feature is not currently available and should be considered in technology enhancements.

**Limitations:** As Advisory Group members discussed the needs of a statewide measure, they identified the multiple expectations of teachers and schools for measuring student growth over the academic year. Because the KRA is a one-time snapshot of readiness based on the Ohio Early Learning and Development Standards that end at kindergarten entry, it cannot be used in this way without additional work to design items that allow pre- and post-measurement. This connection between the need to measure skills over time and across grade bands and the limitation of the KRA to do so was identified as a primary contributing factor to feelings that the KRA was not useful.

**Content of the Assessment:** While examining content of the KRA, two concerns emerged. The first relates to the item types (selected response, performance and observation items) and the amount of time needed to prepare for the administration of these items. More specifically, the observation items are particularly burdensome given they require classroom activities, opportunities, or centers to be created/set up for the children to be observed.

A second concern centered on developmental areas assessed by the KRA. The developmental areas currently covered by the assessment are Mathematics, Language and Literacy, Social Foundations, and Physical Well-being and Motor Development. It was represented to the group that other assessments are more useful in capturing child performance in some of the areas measured by the KRA. This means that some teachers would use more than one assessment thereby duplicating efforts. For example, mathematics and language and literacy are areas kindergarten teachers already assess throughout the year in order to measure student growth. The tools already in place to measure these areas can be used throughout the year, measure growth across grades, and provide information linked to the curriculum for student supports by teachers and parents. The KRA cannot be used in this way.

**Supports:** Supporting teachers and administrators (including data managers, EMIS coordinators and Special Education directors) using the KRA was another area of much discussion. School leaders, teachers and advocacy groups reported that KRA data were not provided timely enough to be useful. Moreover, there was

a desire that data be provided in ways that are more easily understood so the information could be better used for decision-making. Specific examples included using data for budgeting, staffing and classroom composition considerations; as well as instructional needs identification, supports and differentiation. Reports and tools within the online system created with these uses in mind would maximize the usefulness of the KRA. Additionally, the Advisory Group shared that there was widespread confusion about the purpose of the assessment and that professional development supports should be bolstered to reflect the purpose more explicitly.

## **Recommendations for Improvement**

To address these concerns with Ohio's Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, the Advisory Group identified three recommendations for improvement. Those recommendations are:

### ***Recommendation 1: Shorten the KRA by reducing the number of items within the assessment***

A primary concern for teachers is that the current 50-item version of the KRA is too long and takes too much time to administer. To address this concern, the Advisory Group reviewed an item analysis from psychometric experts of WestEd that showed the extent to which the existing KRA could be reduced while still maintaining strong validity and reliability of results from the KRA. Based on this analysis, the Advisory Group recommends reducing the number of items from 50 to a range of items between 25 and 30 such that the amount of time to administer the assessment is cut in half. This will have a positive impact on time and effort, while also reducing the duplication of effort by teachers who already assess literacy and math skills using different tools. The Advisory Group values a statewide KRA score that provides a readiness indicator, and every effort should be made to maintain the established validity and reliability of the KRA.

If the KRA can be significantly shortened to lessen the amount of time it takes to administer, then the developmental domains currently assessed should be maintained. To that end, the Advisory Group recommends, based on recommendations from WestEd's psychometric experts, that the Department re-engage Ohio teachers in summer 2019 to review the KRA items that could be used in a shorter tool. A pilot test should also be done by no later than fall 2019 to ensure that the updated tool addresses the articulated concerns, including how long the tool takes to administer. When a shorter assessment is achieved, the technology system, professional development resources, and teacher training options will need to be updated.

### ***Recommendation 2: Shorten the KRA timeframe for administration (administration window)***

Another primary concern for teachers and administrators is that the current KRA takes too much time at the start of the school year where other classroom activities and instruction are more critical. The Advisory Group recognizes that for some students, kindergarten may be the child's first time in school and may need time to adjust to a new environment, new expectations, and new routines. Additionally, teachers and administrators believe that the current administration window compromises the state and districts' understanding of children's readiness for kindergarten when the tool (per Ohio Revised Code 3301.0715 (A)(2)) can be given up to two weeks prior to the start of the year (selected response and performance items only) through November 1.

The Advisory Group recommends shortening the administration window to begin any time after July 1 and extend no more than twenty instructional days after the start of each school-year. This improvement will provide a more accurate account of children's preparedness for kindergarten. If this recommendation is taken, the Department will need to seek a change to the state law cited above.

***Recommendation 3: Allow other education professionals beyond the kindergarten teacher of record to administer and score the KRA***

Currently, the kindergarten teacher of record is the only person who can administer and score the KRA for a student. If the KRA could be administered and scored by other education professionals in the school, the kindergarten teachers' burden would be significantly reduced. The Advisory Group recommends that these additional professionals also be trained on the KRA administration and how to provide supports to students prior to their taking the KRA.

***Recommendation 4: Significantly invest in the rebranding of the KRA so that the public and users understand what its purpose is and how it should be used by schools, teachers, and families.***

Since its launch in 2014, the KRA has been viewed by administrators and teachers as having limited utility or benefit, resulting in negative perceptions relative to the tool and the intended purpose for teachers, parents, schools, and districts. The KRA was designed with the following intended purposes:

- *Benefit Children.* The KRA can identify the strengths and challenges of individual children and inform instruction.
- *Assist Teachers.* The KRA can provide teachers with information about each child's skills, abilities, and learning needs. It enables teachers to identify potential gaps in skills and knowledge (for individual children and at the classroom level).
- *Inform Families.* Families can learn about a child's strengths and areas of need.
- *Advise School Leaders and Early Childhood Programs.* The data can provide schools and programs information about the learning needs of children.
- *Inform Community Leaders and Policy Makers.* The KRA can enable stakeholders, including the business and philanthropic communities to make well-informed programmatic, policy, and funding decisions.

The Advisory group expressed that not all these purposes can be met with the KRA and that there is great difficulty in expecting the KRA or any other single tool to accomplish such an array of needs for children, teachers, families and administrators. The Advisory Group recommends that the tool, in its revised form, be re-branded and that the Department make a significant investment in communications around the new tool, its intended purposes, and maintaining continuity of data use and analysis. More specifically, the Advisory Group recommends the process of rebranding include a clear message around the primary purpose of the KRA to inform community leaders and policy makers, but that rebranding will help with identifying more of a clear purpose for teachers, families and school leaders. This communications effort should include, but not be limited to:

- Creating videos, trainings and informational opportunities to share the purpose of the KRA;
- Communicating how data and tools available to teachers, administrators and districts can be used to support current and additional activities, like applying for grant money or strategic planning;
- Redesigning the information families receive that provides easily understood language and more guidance on how families can support their children's readiness in specific areas, at home and as supports to their classroom experiences.

To assist in the process of rebranding, the Advisory Group recommends that the Department convene a committee of teachers and school personnel to assist with communication and messaging around the intended purpose of the KRA, its utility, and overall usefulness for Ohio's varied audiences and stakeholders.

## Conclusion

In summary, the Advisory Group worked diligently to identify the concerns stakeholders have about Ohio's Kindergarten Readiness Assessment and their varying perspectives. The recommendations put forward, should they be implemented, will significantly improve the balance between having statewide data to inform policy, advocate for early childhood resources and supports and reduce teacher and school burden around test administration. These recommendations will further increase the usefulness of the KRA and contribute to the activities under way to realize the vision that each child in Ohio is challenged to discover and learn, prepared to pursue a fulfilling post-high school path and empowered to become a resilient, lifelong learner who contributes to society.

## Appendices

Appendix A: Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment Advisory Group Members

Appendix B: Senate Bill 216 Language

Appendix C: Summary of Statewide KRA Data Findings (2014 – 2017)

Appendix D: Citations

## Appendix A: Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment Advisory Group Members

Name	Affiliation	Role
Brenda Boeke *representing BASA	Minster Local Schools	Superintendent
Joni Close	Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton	President
Matt Deevers	Summit Education Initiative	Senior Research Associate
Laurie Dinnebeil	University of Toledo	Distinguished Professor, Early Childhood Education & Special Education
Rebekah Dorman	Invest in Children, Cuyahoga County Office of Early Childhood	Director
Cathleen Farrell	Cincinnati Public Schools	Kindergarten Teacher
Amanda Hedrick	Shawnee State University	Preschool Director
Margaret Hulbert	United Way of Greater Cincinnati	Senior Vice President Chief Public Policy Officer
Mark Jones	Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators	Associate Executive Director
Shannon Jones	Groundwork Ohio	Executive Director
Beth Kelly	Paulding Local Schools	Kindergarten Teacher
Kim Kingsbury	Canton City School District	Director of Curriculum
Robyn Lightcap	Dayton Learn to Earn	Executive Director
Joelle Magyar *representing BASA	Brecksville-Broadview Heights Schools	Superintendent
Jim Nichols *representing OAESA	Indian Hill Primary School	Principal
Linnea Olbon	Canton City Schools	Director of Early Childhood
Nancy Osko	State Support Team, Region 2	Literacy Consultant
Susan Pelton	Copley-Fairlawn City Schools	Kindergarten Teacher
Sara Roseberry *representing OAESA	Hardin-Houston Elementary School	Principal
Stacey Smith	State Support Team, Region 8	Educational Consultant
Deb Sockrider-Hahn	Lima City Schools	Preschool Teacher
Qianna Tidmore *representing OAEYC	Invest in Children, Cuyahoga County Office of Early Childhood	UPK 2.0 Program Manager
Nicole Vitale	Cleveland Metro School District	Executive Director of Early Childhood Education and PK-12 Literacy
Michelle Unger	New Albany Plain Local Schools	Principal
Scot West	Gallia Local Schools	Director of Preschool & Digital Academy

## Appendix B: Senate Bill 216 (131<sup>st</sup> General Assembly) language

SECTION 5. (A) The Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment Advisory Group, as convened by the Department of Education, shall submit recommendations to the Superintendent of Public Instruction regarding ways to improve the use and administration of the kindergarten readiness assessment required under division (A)(2) of section 3301.0715 of the Revised Code. In developing its recommendations, the Advisory Group shall consider appropriate areas of content for the assessment and efficient procedures for administering the assessment. (B) The State Superintendent shall review the recommendations submitted under division (A) of this section and shall report final recommendations regarding the assessment to the General Assembly in accordance with section 101.68 of the Revised Code not later than September 1, 2019.

## Appendix C: Summary of Statewide KRA Findings (2014 – 2017)

	Fall 2014 114,961	Fall 2015 112,945	Fall 2016 117,871	Fall 2017 118,113
Overall Demonstrating Readiness (270 – 298)	37.3%	40.1%	40.6%	41.5%
Overall Approaching Readiness (258 – 269)	39.1%	37.1%	36.3%	36.2%
Overall Emerging Readiness (202 – 257)	23.6%	22.8%	23.1%	22.4%
Overall On Track for Language & Literacy (263 – 298)	62.6%	63.2%	62.3%	61.7%
Overall NOT On Track for Language & Literacy (202 – 262)	37.4%	36.8%	37.7%	38.3%
AVERAGE Overall Score	266	266.7	266.5	266.8
AVERAGE Language & Literacy Score	265.7	266.1	265.5	265.4
AVERAGE Mathematics Score	267	265.7	264.9	265.0
AVERAGE Physical Well-Being & Motor Score	268.3	270.3	270.8	271.3
AVERAGE Social Foundations Score	268	271.6	272.9	274.0
Percent of children DEMONSTRATING by Race				
American Indian or Alaskan Native	27.9%	31.4%	30.1%	33.8%
Asian or Pacific Islander	39.8%	38.6%	41.1%	40.2%
Black, Non-Hispanic	20.7%	23.5%	23.9%	25.2%
Hispanic	21.3%	22.3%	23.0%	24.9%
Multiracial	33.8%	34.4%	34.6%	36.3%
White, Non-Hispanic	42.9%	46.2%	47.0%	47.8%
Other*	23.6%	27.2	26.6%	16.3%
Percent of children DEMONSTRATING by Sex				
Female	42.7%	45.3%	45.7%	46.2%
Male	32.2%	35.3%	35.9%	37.2%
Other*	23.6%	27.2%	26.6%	16.3%
Percent of children DEMONSTRATING by Disability				
Children with Disabilities	12.3%	15.1%	14.8%	15.2%
Children without Disabilities	39.7%	42.6%	43.4%	44.7%
Other*	23.6%	27.2%	26.6%	16.3%
Percent of children DEMONSTRATING by Economic Disadvantage				
Children economically disadvantaged	23.8%	26.0%	26.7%	27.5%
Children NOT economically disadvantaged	52.6%	55.6%	57.0%	57.3%
Other*	23.6%	27.2%	25.6%	16.3%
Percent of children DEMONSTRATING by Limited English Proficiency				
Children identified LEP	10.8%	10.9%	13.3%	13.7%
Children NOT identified as LEP	38.6%	41.7%	42.3%	43.3%
Other*	23.6%	27.2%	26.6%	16.3%

## Appendix D: Citations

<sup>1</sup>Ohio Business Roundtable, 2010. *The Talent Challenge 2*. Retrieved November 30, 2018 from:  
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b57aaaf196d455db487895db/t/5b6353fb03ce6459fc316b4e/1533236221281/talent+challenge.pdf>

