

Early Childhood Assessment within the Context of Early Childhood Programs

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Overview of talk

- Provide information on the use of assessment at different levels of the Head Start system
- Discuss some key issues pertaining to assessment in early childhood programs
- Overview of the design and structure of the Head Start National Reporting System and the affiliated Quality Assurance and System Improvement Contract

Assessment in Head Start and Early Childhood

Assessment within Head Start: Local Assessment Efforts

- Screenings – 45 days into program, follow-up screening as needed
 - Identify whether a child needs further testing to determine the presence of a disability or special need. NOT used for diagnosis or determination of need.
 - Standardized screeners chosen by program

Assessment within Head Start: Local Assessment Efforts

- Local Assessments – ongoing
 - Provide information used for individualization of services for children and families
 - Assessments chosen by Head Start programs and typically linked to curriculum
 - Child Outcomes Framework provides guidance on domains and indicators - some indicators legislatively mandated

What do the local screeners and assessments look like?

- Limited information
- From Program Information Report at time developing NRS (2002), assessments were:
 - Galileo, Work Sampling, CORS, or Creative Continuum (46%)
 - Locally developed assessments/portfolios (22%)
 - Other observational system (19%)
 - Direct assessments (8%)
 - State-mandated assessments (5%)

What do the local screeners and assessments look like? (cont'd)

- Little sense of what these assessments look like in practice
- Benefits of local assessment
 - Linked to curriculum, so allow for individualization and direct connections to daily practice
 - Unclear whether appropriate for aggregating for center- or program-level improvement

Assessment within Head Start: National Assessment Efforts

- Head Start National Reporting System
 - Multiple potential uses, including:
 - Program self-assessment and improvement
 - Identification of technical assistance needs
 - National performance measurement
 - Standardized, direct assessment of early language, literacy, math, and teacher reported social emotional development
 - Fall and spring of each Head Start year

Assessment within Head Start: National Assessment Efforts (cont'd)

- Benefits of NRS
 - Standardized measures across all programs, allows Head Start programs to compare themselves to all programs nationally and to comparable programs
 - But, by itself, insufficient for identifying improvements a program may want to make in response
 - Short length and ease of administration, but limited range of domains and measures as a result

Assessment within Head Start: Research and Evaluation

- Provide broader picture of how Head Start children are faring, what factors are related to their outcomes, and what can be done to improve their well-being.
- Nearly always involve child assessment, typically direct assessment

Assessment within Head Start: Research and Evaluation

- Current studies include:
 - FACES, Head Start Impact study
 - Early Head Start Evaluation, Survey
 - Variety of grants related to assessment and curriculum
- Benefits of research and evaluation
 - Help us better understand Head Start in order to further improve it
 - But not typically linked to the well-being of any specific group of children in any specific program

Assessment within Head Start: Summary

- Many different types of assessments, each with a different purpose
- Each can play a role in helping improve Head Start children's development locally and nationwide

Key Issues Related to Assessment in Head Start and Other Early Childhood Programs

- Despite presence of assessments lack of agreement in the field about what's appropriate:
 - What types of assessments? With what characteristics? For what purposes?
 - Difference between screening and assessment?
 - How to assess cultural and linguistic minorities?
 - How to assess social emotional development and other domains?
 - How to assess infants and toddlers?

Windows of Opportunity

- Assessment is proliferating in early childhood programs nationwide – this is not a Head Start phenomenon
- This is a perfect opportunity for experts to weigh in on some of the major issues related to early childhood assessment
 - To be meaningful, this guidance would need to address issues of assessment in all kinds of early childhood settings, for all different purposes

The National Reporting System and Related Efforts

The Head Start National Reporting System

- President's *Good Start, Grow Smart* initiative – spring 2002
- Timeline
 - *Good Start, Grow Smart* announced spring 2002
 - Cognitive assessment field tested spring 2003
 - Roll out fall 2003
 - Social emotional component field tested spring 2006
 - Rolled out fall 2006

The Head Start National Reporting System: Cognitive Assessment

- Direct assessment, 15 to 20 minutes in length
- Assesses vocabulary, math, letter recognition, plus language screener
- Assessment in both English and Spanish
- Development of instrument
 - Local assessments reviewed
 - Decision to work with existing direct assessments
 - Identification of candidate measures
 - Development of battery of instruments
 - Field test of instruments and training
 - Assessment revisions
 - Ongoing evaluation

The Head Start

National Reporting System: Social Emotional Development Rating

- Teacher ratings
- Assesses approaches to learning, cooperative classroom behavior and relations with other children, behavior problems
- Development of instrument
 - Identified candidate measures
 - Development of battery of instruments
 - Field test of instruments
 - Ongoing evaluation

The National Reporting System Quality Assurance and System Improvement

- Conducted with nationally representative sample every year of NRS
 - Trained contractor staff observe 350 NRS assessments
 - Speak with about 250 program staff
 - Observe local trainings in some rounds

The National Reporting System

Quality Assurance and System Improvement

- Key findings include:
 - High levels of fidelity in implementation
 - Most programs use NRS information in program management
 - Most programs report children respond positively, though almost half say assessment is too long
 - Programs express concerns including
 - Use of data
 - How NRS was developed
 - Timeliness of materials and reports

The National Reporting System Quality Assurance and System Improvement

- Resulting improvements have included:
 - Broadcast on use of NRS for program improvement
 - Learning from *Assessment Initiative*
 - Technical reports
 - Resolved issues of delayed reports and materials
 - Development of social emotional rating
 - Streamlined refresher training

Learning From Assessment

- Help programs better understand, and make better use of, assessments
- Team of experts: researcher, practitioners, regional staff
- Added questions to QA study to better understand current practices
- Products will inform practitioners about principles of good assessments, way to use assessments
- The work of this committee could be especially helpful for this effort