



Florida Association for the  
Education of Young Children



An Affiliate  
of **naeyc**

## POSITION STATEMENT

**SUBJECT:** Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA) System

**PROBLEM:** Children entering kindergarten in 2017 were assessed using the STAR assessment that was administered using computer technology. This Kindergarten Entry Assessment was disconnected from the VPK assessment system. While both tools measure literacy and numeracy, they are not the same which means that teachers and administrators lose the ability to measure learning gains over time. The results of Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA) scores were published and used to provide a “readiness rate” for VPK providers. The KEA was not administered consistently in all schools, as anecdotally reported by kindergarten teachers in several school districts.

The assessment literature is replete with guidance and examples of best practice. Florida’s KEA system is inconsistent with developmentally-appropriate practice for young children according to the literature. Further, the implication of publishing KEA scores has already resulted in VPK providers acquiring computers with plans to expand the use of screen-time to “teach to the test.” This is counter to recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics<sup>1</sup> and the National Association for the Education of Young Children<sup>2</sup> which could have detrimental effects, particularly with the most vulnerable children.

There are several problems related to this Kindergarten Entry Assessment System as follows:

- The KEA was administered using technology (computer and a mouse, tablets, etc.) which is not developmentally-appropriate and unfamiliar for many children.
- The KEA is typically administered three months after the VPK year ends. This is problematic as summer regression for children’s retention of learning is well-documented in the literature.
- The KEA is an inaccurate measure of children’s learning gains for their VPK experience.
- The KEA should be a measure of children’s current knowledge for instructional purposes. Using the KEA scores as a measure of VPK provider performance is an inappropriate use of the assessment, as noted by many experts in the field.
- The scores are inconsistent with other quality measures of VPK providers, e.g. NAEYC and APPLE accreditation which are holistic in approach addressing both process and structural indicators of quality.

**BACKGROUND:** The 2017 Legislature session created the Florida Committee for Grade Level Success. This 17-member committee was charged with developing a series of recommendations to guide the development of a

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<sup>1</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics, downloaded from: <https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/Pages/American-Academy-of-Pediatrics-Announces-New-Recommendations-for-Childrens-Media-Use.aspx>.

<sup>2</sup> NAEYC Position Statement, downloaded from: [https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/topics/PS\\_technology\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/topics/PS_technology_WEB.pdf).

coordinated early childhood assessment system for publicly-funded programs. The Committee developed a set of recommendations that, if implemented, would address the concerns noted in this paper as follows:<sup>3</sup>

- Maintain the screening requirement that all children who participate in the School Readiness program be screened within 45 days of enrollment and a minimum of annually, typically in their birth month. This is to assess development and identify what, if any, issues may require further attention to identify and treat special needs.
- Procure an observation-based assessment for children birth through age five that will be used among School Readiness and VPK participants. This tool will be used to measure growth in specific areas of development by age and used to inform individualized care and instruction.
- Use the same direct assessment tool(s) and processes at the beginning and end of VPK and upon kindergarten entry. The tool(s) will be used to measure child growth and inform individualized care and instruction. These results also will help inform accountability and program effectiveness.
- Modify the current readiness rate calculation. Currently, the kindergarten readiness assessment is the sole data point used to determine the effectiveness of VPK programs. Given there is a 90-day gap between the end of VPK and the beginning of kindergarten, it is recommended that accountability move to measuring growth during the VPK year. Measuring growth is essential for Providers that serve students entering the program severely behind, so they can show the progress made, even though the students may not have reached “readiness”.
- Invest sufficient resources in the assessment tool(s), training, and outside spot checks to ensure fidelity/quality assurance, and commensurate, appropriate payment rates to ensure early childhood providers can pay for staff professional development, planning and implementation time.
- Stage implementation with sufficient time for the new assessment system to be successful. A five-year implementation plan is broadly outlined; in a state as large and diverse as Florida this will help ensure reliable, consistent results and appropriate accountability. Current practices and work would stay intact and be modified on a rolling basis during the five-year implementation period as appropriate.
- Ensure the tool(s) used meet the guiding principles and recommended domains of development outlined in this report. This may require new tools or additions to existing tools to ensure all domains are appropriately addressed.
- Rigorously and regularly analyze the results from the child assessment tools to inform ongoing improvement.

#### **SOLUTIONS / ACTION REQUESTED:**

- Develop a plan to implement the Grade Level Success Committee’s recommendations to ensure a coordinated early childhood assessment system.
- Develop a realistic schedule and timeline for implementation.
- Discontinue publishing readiness rates based on the KEA system and use the results from the KEA to inform kindergarten instruction to avoid harmful and unintended consequences for young children.

For more information, contact:

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<sup>3</sup> Committee for Early Grade Success: Recommendations for a Coordinated Early Childhood Assessment System in Florida, December 1, 2017. University of Florida, Lastinger Center.