



USES AND MISUSES OF KINDERGARTEN READINESS ASSESSMENT RESULTS

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As early learning programs expand, states and schools are increasingly using kindergarten readiness assessments (KRAs) to measure the developmental progress of children as they enter kindergarten. These assessments can provide valuable information to educators and policymakers, but the results of these assessments have sometimes been used inappropriately.

HOW SHOULD KINDERGARTEN READINESS ASSESSMENTS RESULTS BE USED?

- > KRAs can be valuable to practitioners to improve teaching and learning at the school level. Many KRAs are administered by teachers, and the best KRAs help teachers understand where their students are, not only in reading and math but in developing social and emotional skills as well. This information can improve teachers' practice in numerous ways; for example, they can use the results of KRAs to inform curriculum planning, and to collaborate more effectively with early childhood providers, parents, and each other.
- > KRAs can be valuable to policymakers as an overall measure of strengths and challenges in the entire population of children entering kindergarten and in the health of early childhood systems. States like Maryland use aggregate data from KRAs to gain an understanding of each incoming kindergarten class, and have used that information to strengthen the state's early childhood system and effectively target resources. Rich data from KRAs help government maximize its efficiency in serving children and families, particularly those from low-income backgrounds.

WHAT ARE SOME POTENTIAL MISUSES OF KINDERGARTEN READINESS ASSESSMENTS?

- > Kindergarten readiness assessments are not designed to determine whether any individual child is ready for kindergarten and should not influence whether a child can enroll in kindergarten.
- > Some states have considered using kindergarten readiness assessments to measure the effectiveness of individual early childhood providers, and indeed, two states have already built KRA into their accountability systems. *This is a mistake.* Leading experts on child development have argued that accountability testing on kindergarteners is simply not developmentally appropriate. Even beyond that problem, the flowchart on the next page details the multiple problems with using KRA results for preschool program accountability:
 - o No existing KRA has been designed and validated for accountability purposes.
 - o Most KRAs are teacher-administered, and there are no systems in place to ensure sufficient consistency among assessors so that the results are reliable for accountability purposes.
 - o Because preschool attendance is not compulsory, using proficiency on KRAs as an accountability measure for preschools gives those preschools an incentive to not enroll the children who need help the most, which could deprive those children of having any preschool experience.
 - o There are no pretests in place to use KRA as the post-test in a growth measure.
 - o There are no systems currently in place to reliably attribute proficiency (or the lack thereof) to any individual preschool provider.
- > These same issues make it inappropriate to use KRA results in teacher evaluation.

Kindergarten readiness assessments can help educators and policymakers do a better job of teaching young children, and mobilizing resources on their behalf. But misusing KRA results can have just the opposite effect. Policymakers should support kindergarten readiness assessments for the valuable information they provide, and ensure that the results of those assessments are used only as intended.



KINDERGARTEN READINESS ASSESSMENT (KRA) FOR ACCOUNTABILITY PURPOSES

A decision tree in which many incorrect decisions are needed to end up using KRA results for program accountability.

