

# Kindergarten Entry Assessment Guidance

## Introduction

This guidance from the Division of Early Childhood Services, New Jersey Department of Education provides school districts with information about creating or choosing a kindergarten entry assessment by September 2023. The updated *2022 Elements of High-Quality Preschool Programs (N.J.A.C 6A:13A-6.1(a)2)* includes the implementation of a comprehensive, developmentally appropriate **kindergarten entry assessment (KEA)** within the first *six to eight weeks* of school to measure children’s knowledge, skills, and behaviors at the beginning of kindergarten. The alignment of developmentally appropriate practices, curricula and assessments from Preschool to Third grade benefits students in a high-quality early learning continuum. School districts may choose a KEA or create one of their own. A Kindergarten Entry Assessment should measure the essential domains of child development, including social-emotional development, cognitive development, language and literacy development, mathematical and scientific reasoning, and physical development (Yun, C., Melnick, H., & Wechsler, M., 2021).

### Elements of High-Quality Preschool Programs

*Transition* [\(N.J.A.C 6A:13A-6.1\)](#)

- (a) The district board of education shall include in its three-year preschool program plan and/or annual update transition initiatives from program entry to kindergarten through grade three that describe:
1. The process for collaborating with other preschool through grade three administrators in the school district;
  2. **Implementation of a comprehensive, developmentally appropriate kindergarten entry assessment within the first six to eight weeks of school to measure children’s knowledge, skills, and behaviors at the beginning of kindergarten;**
  3. Methods for communicating to a child’s new kindergarten and elementary teachers' information about the child, including the results of the kindergarten entry assessment;
  4. The process for identifying the curriculum and pedagogical information about the preschool program and communicating it to the kindergarten and elementary teachers; and
  5. The process for providing information to parents about the kindergarten program and the transition plan from preschool through grade three.

Key Components	Considerations for Choosing or Creating High-Quality Comprehensive Kindergarten Entry Assessment
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One or more assessments that measure essential domains of child development including social-emotional development, cognitive development, language and literacy development, mathematical and scientific reasoning, and physical development through authentic assessment.</li> <li>• Includes direct assessment, observation-based assessment, portfolios including anecdotal notes and examples of children’s work or a combination of the three.</li> <li>• Measures the essential domains of child development in ways that are appropriate, inclusive, and culturally relevant for children from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds and with varying abilities.</li> <li>• Aligns to developmentally appropriate practices and NJ Kindergarten Learning Standards.</li> <li>• Assessment results inform teachers of students’ skills along a developmental learning progression or continuum and results provide actionable information teachers can use to guide instruction. Educators are included in selecting or developing assessments.</li> <li>• Aligns to a system of ongoing formative assessment within a P-3 continuum.</li> </ul>

Key Components	Considerations for Choosing or Creating High-Quality Comprehensive Kindergarten Entry Assessment
Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administered in entirety within the first six to eight weeks of school.</li> <li>• Administration procedures are fair for all children and practical for teachers.</li> <li>• Administrators and practitioners are provided with regular access to training in administering, scoring, and interpreting the results of assessments.</li> <li>• Sufficient time is allotted, allowing educators to assess, reflect on results, and create instructional plans based on results.</li> <li>• Ideally administered by the child’s classroom teacher. If another test administrator is used, this person is familiar with the child.</li> <li>• Assessment results are used to inform families about their child’s skills and behaviors.</li> <li>• Districts create a plan for how a KEA will fit into beginning of the year activities and with other assessment systems.</li> </ul>
Validity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence that the tool is valid and reliable, i.e., the tool assesses the skills and abilities it is designed to measure, and assessment results are consistent regardless of who administers the tool, or when/where it is administered.</li> <li>• Assesses what children know and can do in authentic situations.</li> <li>• Aggregated data can be used to inform policy at the district and school levels.</li> <li>• Districts work to continuously evaluate and improve the assessment to ensure data informs instruction and is useful for educators and families.</li> </ul>

Adapted from Yun, Melnick, Wechsler & Learning Policy Institute, 2021.

What a KEA is:	What a KEA is <u>not</u> :
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observational</li> <li>• Performance based</li> <li>• Formative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only content benchmarks</li> <li>• Results determine kindergarten entry</li> <li>• Solely paper or computer based</li> </ul>

### Developmentally Appropriate Best Practices for Assessing Kindergarten Students

High-quality early childhood P–3 programs encourage children’s learning through developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) integrated into the daily classroom instruction and environment. KEAs should be developmentally appropriate through design and implementation. KEAs like all early childhood assessments should be based on a P–3 learning progression and provide formative information inclusive of all children regardless of their socioeconomic, cultural, or linguistic backgrounds. Assessments within the kindergarten year should be ongoing, strategic, reflective, and purposeful so they can support student learning by providing much needed data to guide classroom instruction and support whole child development.

A KEA provides a baseline for each child as they enter kindergarten. As school districts choose or create a KEA, it is critical to ensure the assessment will support teachers in identifying students’ skills and will inform individualized and/or whole group instruction. Assessments should be authentic and well-balanced between teacher observations and well-chosen performance tasks. High-quality KEAs should align with kindergarten standards, curricula, and instruction and be embedded into daily routines. Teachers can accomplish this alignment by observing young children in play, spontaneous conversations and interactions, as well as, while children are participating in a group or individual activity.

Early childhood researchers recommend a P–3 continuum aligns assessments over time as part of educators’ professional best practices. Portfolios can be passed along from each grade level starting with preschool. Assessments should be given for intended purposes and produce valid and reliable results for all students. It is crucial for the students’ classroom teacher to be responsible for administering the KEAs. This way, the teacher can better understand

children's development and growth. If other certified staff members are conducting a KEA, they should understand early childhood development. The data should be reviewed and discussed with the classroom teacher in a timely manner.

There should also be a system in place for collecting assessment data and observations for instant access to review all assessment documents as needed. Educators can use this information in planning curricula within their programs and guide learning experiences in moment-to-moment interactions with children. Educators can be intentional in their teaching to help children progress in developmentally appropriate skills to meet individualized learning goals.

### Ensuring Equity in a Kindergarten Entry Assessment

Guaranteeing equity during a KEA should be at the forefront of implementation to ensure validity and reliability. A KEA must accurately assess children inclusive of diverse special learning needs and abilities, cultural heritage, and linguistic background. Using assessments that are culturally or linguistically inappropriate may underestimate children's true abilities and competencies (Regenstein, Connors, Romero-Jurado, and Weiner, 2017). To ensure equity during a KEA, districts should consider the following:

- Children are provided an appropriate version of the same English assessment in their dominant language;
- Assessors are fluent in both English and the dominant language of the child;
- Assessors are trained on the indicators of typical language development for children who speak another language;
- Assessors are knowledgeable about the child's culture and community context;
- Children with disabilities are given a variety of adaptations to demonstrate their skills and competencies through alternative means (e.g., a child with hearing loss or speech impediment may sign);
- Children with disabilities are provided accommodations to respond to a question or task (e.g., allowing more time to complete a task);
- When creating and/or utilizing formal or informal assessments, educators should be developmentally, culturally, and linguistically sensitive. Assessors must be aware of and work against the possibility of implicit and explicit bias; and
- Teachers should be trained on how to avoid implicit and explicit bias when giving assessments and reviewing collected data.

### Engaging Parents and Families in Kindergarten Entry Assessment Results

Establishing and maintaining a positive home-school partnership is an essential component of a successful kindergarten experience for children. Sharing KEA results with families can be an effective strategy to increase family engagement and reinforce classroom learning at home (Baldwin and Wade, 2012). Families can become more engaged with their child's learning experiences when they are aware of their child's skills. When sharing KEA results with families, districts should be mindful of the families' individual perspectives, barriers, and needs. Parents and families should receive results from educators who explain the information in a culturally and linguistically responsible manner. Care must be taken to effectively communicate a child's development across the domains and how to extend classroom learning at home.

Educators may consider sharing data in the following ways:

- Parent-Teacher Conferences;
- Family letters in the family's primary language; and
- Online information portal provided by the school or district.

Educators may support families in understanding and using the results by:

- Avoiding educational jargon;
- Focusing conversations on the potential for growth and improvement;
- Co-developing an action plan for growth specifying the role the teacher, parent or caregiver, and child will play in achieving that goal; and
- Providing families with the most relevant resources to support their children's learning (e.g., websites, learning activities, lists of afterschool programs) and assisting them in understanding how to use those resources.

## Next Steps: Continuing to Monitor Students' Progress

Developmentally appropriate assessment practices and progress monitoring routines enable educators to assess children's growth over time. A continuum of assessments from preschool to the early grades aligned to high-quality curriculum provides educators with a clear progression for children's development. Building these assessment systems that inform instruction and support family engagement foster meaningful analysis of students' development.

Getting Started
<b>Guiding Questions to get started if a comprehensive KEA is currently being utilized:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is the current KEA developmentally appropriate and high-quality?</li><li>• What are the strengths and challenges of the current KEA?</li><li>• Which essential domain does the KEA measure?</li><li>• What else does the KEA still need that might be missing?</li></ul>
<b>Guiding Questions to get started if a comprehensive KEA is not currently being utilized:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How does the district currently assess incoming kindergarten students during the first six to eight weeks of the school year?</li><li>• Can the essential domains be measured using the current district assessments to form a developmentally appropriate, high-quality KEA? If not, what additional improvements are needed for a comprehensive KEA?</li></ul>

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