

Legislative Report Early Childhood Assessment



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State of Iowa
Department of Education
Grimes State Office Building
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INTRODUCTION

Iowa Code section 279.60: Assessments - access to data - reports

The 2014 General Assembly passed legislation requiring local school districts to complete the following:

- Administer Teaching Strategies GOLD early childhood assessment to every resident prekindergarten or four-year-old child whose parent or guardian enrolls the child in the district;
- Administer a valid and reliable universal screening instrument as prescribed by the Iowa Department of Education (Department) to every kindergarten student enrolled in the district (Iowa Code section 270.60);
- Collect from each parent guardian or legal custodian of a kindergarten student enrolled in the district, information including, but not limited to, preschool attendance and demographic factors;
- Report the results of assessments and preschool information to the Department no later than January 1 of that school year; and
- Submit findings and recommendations annually in a report to the governor, the general assembly, the Early Childhood Iowa state board, and the Early Childhood Iowa area boards.

REPORT OF PRESCHOOL PARTICIPATION

Districts reported the number of students who had attended preschool at any time twelve months prior to registering for kindergarten. Districts gathered the information through parent reports or district records. Three categories of preschool attendance were reported: 1) district sponsored preschool, 2) non-district preschool, or 3) no preschool. Non-district sponsored preschool programs include programs such as Head Start, local private preschools, and preschools funded by Early Childhood Iowa scholarships. Since the amount of time devoted to instruction may vary by program requirements, the data collected and analyzed should be interpreted with caution. In 2017-2018, 38,309 children entered kindergarten. Districts indicated that based on parent reports, 82 percent of students entering kindergarten attended a preschool program.

Data Source: Student Reporting in Iowa, fall 2017 files

PRESCHOOL—ASSESSMENT TOOL USED

Iowa Code section 279.60 requires preschool programs under the authority of the Iowa Department of Education (Department) to administer Teaching Strategies GOLD™ (GOLD). This is an online, ongoing, portfolio-based assessment system for children from birth to grade three. GOLD blends portfolio-based assessment for all areas of development and learning with performance tasks to predict school success across developmental areas. Specifically, the developmental domains on GOLD are: social-emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy, mathematics, social studies, science and technology, and the arts. Documentation for each child is also collected on an ongoing basis across areas of development and examined regularly to assist teachers in completing progress checkpoints. Three times a year, teachers complete a progress checkpoint for each child across the required developmental domains based on analysis of portfolio evidence. Levels used to indicate how a child is doing at a checkpoint are based on widely held expectations for child development.

KINDERGARTEN—ASSESSMENT TOOL USED

The Department aligned the kindergarten assessment requirements of Iowa Code section 279.60 with Iowa Code section 279.68, the statutory requirements for ensuring that all students are at benchmark in reading by the end of third grade. This law requires each school district assess all students enrolled in kindergarten at the beginning of the school year for their level of reading or reading readiness on a locally determined or statewide assessment. Locally determined assessments that districts select must meet minimum standards for reliability and validity established by the Department. In order to support districts in the implementation of

Iowa Codes section 279.68, the Department reviewed early literacy assessments for universal screening and progress monitoring to determine valid and reliable instruments.

Additional information regarding the assessment tools reviewed, the review process, and process results is located on the [Iowa's Multi-Tiered System of Supports](#) webpage under the heading FAST/IGDIs State Adoption. The following results are based on an analysis of kindergarten data from the fall 2017 assessment window.

Table 1 depicts the various types of kindergarten literacy assessment instruments used in school districts. Each of these assessment tools measures early literacy concepts including print, letter names, and sounds and beginning sounds (phonemic awareness) in young children.

Table 1. Percent of Iowa School Districts and Kindergarten Assessment Tool Administered in Fall 2017

Kindergarten Assessment	# Districts Used as Default Assessment in Fall 2017	% Districts Used as Default Assessment in Fall 2017
FAST Kindergarten Composite	327	98.2%
AIMSweb Plus	4	1.2%
STAR Early Literacy	2	0.6%
TOTAL	333	100.0%

Data Source: FastBridge Learning Data System, fall 2017

PRESCHOOL—ASSESSMENT RESULTS

In the GOLD Comparative Report, children were compared to a readiness benchmark reflecting objectives and performance typical of students at entry to kindergarten. The objectives and readiness benchmarks for specific domains were established by the Teaching Strategies research team. Data shown in Table 2 represents preschool children who met the GOLD kindergarten readiness benchmark in various developmental domains in spring 2017.

Table 2. Spring 2017 Assessment of Kindergarten Readiness for Preschool

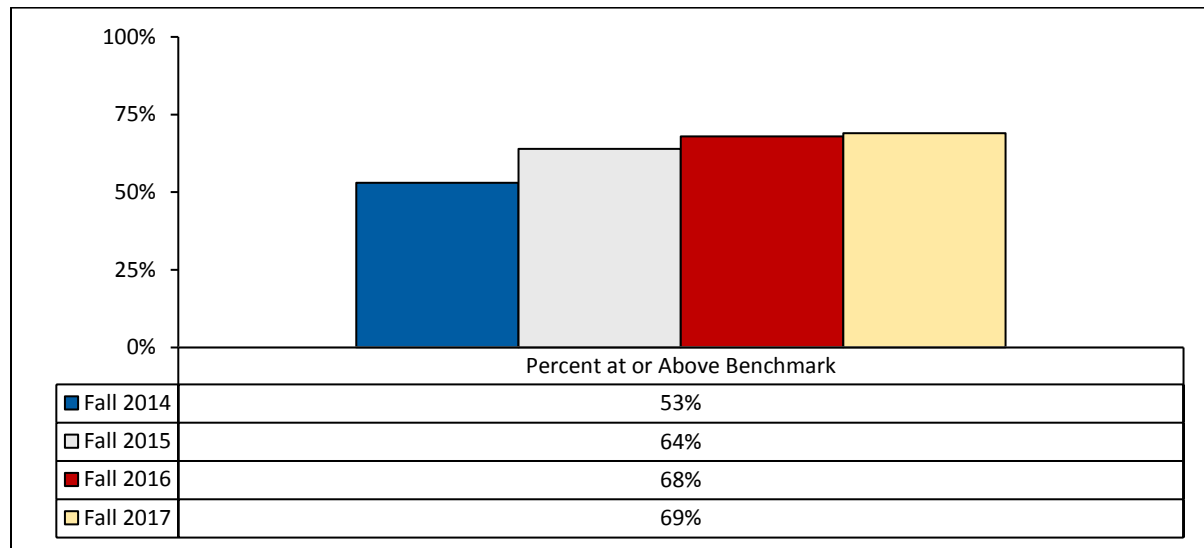
Teaching Strategies Area of Development	Number of Children	Percent At or Above Benchmark
Social-Emotional	23,937	91.9%
Physical	24,618	94.3%
Language	22,960	88.3%
Cognitive	23,901	92.2%
Literacy	23,652	92.2%
Mathematics	20,910	81.2%

Data Source: Teaching Strategies GOLD Online Assessment System, spring 2017

KINDERGARTEN—ASSESSMENT RESULTS

To determine kindergarten performance, students are compared based on a criterion or benchmark aligned with relevant outcomes. A composite or total score is calculated based on assessment subtests. The composite score is reported to determine the percent of children at benchmark meeting expectations in regard to early reading skills at the beginning of kindergarten. In fall 2017, 37,880 kindergarten students were assessed using one of the approved early literacy screening assessments; data indicate 26,056 students (69 percent) of those assessed were at or above the benchmark for kindergarten (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Percent of Students in Kindergarten At or Above Benchmark in Beginning Reading Skills Using an Approved Early Literacy Screening Assessment Measure (N=37,880)



Data Source: Iowa TIER Data System, fall 2014-2016; FastBridge Learning Data System, fall 2017

SUMMARY

Results suggest statewide efforts to increase proficiency of literacy skills are working. Supporting statewide efforts include implementation of the Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards, the National Association for the Education of Young Children Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria, the Head Start Program Performance Standards, and early literacy instructional strategies. Ongoing efforts in the alignment of assessment, curriculum, and instruction will assist in closing the achievement gap for young children. Recommendations supportive of such efforts include the following:

- Continue state funding supporting the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of quality preschool programming.
- Support quality preschool programs through maintaining program standards and implementation of Iowa Early Learning Standards (IELS) in order to prepare children for success in kindergarten.
- Support quality professional development that addresses the Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards, IELS, and the alignment of IELS with the kindergarten standards of the Iowa Core.
- Provide technical assistance through area education agency (AEA) early childhood staff.
- Continue work focused on preschool with Collaborating for Iowa's Kids (C4K), a partnership between the Department, AEA's, and local education agencies. The intent of the C4K collaborative is to effectively and efficiently work as a comprehensive educational system to accomplish agreed-upon high-impact priorities. The initial work for the group's collaborative efforts is early literacy in preschool through sixth grade.