



# Families Know Best

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## Introduction

Assessment practices at kindergarten entry provide an opportunity to *understand the strengths, interests, and needs of individual children* at the time of kindergarten entry in order to inform instruction and development. They also provide an opportunity to *assess the characteristics and needs of kindergartners overall and by subgroups* in order to track progress in ensuring that children start school healthy and prepared for success. Finally, assessment practices offer the opportunity to establish mutually beneficial relationships between schools and families at the very beginning of a child’s formal schooling experience.

“School readiness” includes five domains of learning: physical well-being and motor development; social and emotional development; approaches toward learning; language development; and cognitive development and general learning.<sup>1</sup> Children are assessed in each of them in order to determine their readiness for success in school and what supports they might need in order to thrive.

<sup>1</sup> National Education Goals Panel. (1998). The National Education Goals Report: Building a Nation of Learners, 1998. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

When done well, kindergarten entry assessments (KEAs) set the school foundation for effective family engagement strategies by informing teachers’ understanding of children’s needs and parents’ understanding of how they can support their child’s success in school. This includes drawing upon the information that parents have about their children as well as informing parents of how children are progressing in school. Parents are experts on what their children know and can do – what assets, interests, skills, and features make their child unique and uniquely valued. Some research, particularly from the medical community, has shown that certain information gathered from parents regarding children’s health and functional abilities is more accurate than what practitioners themselves can observe and is necessarily for comprehensive screening and surveillance.<sup>2</sup>

Parents have distinctive insights about their children that are needed to offer a full picture of what children know and can do at the time of kindergarten entry and

<sup>2</sup> The National Survey of Children’s Health, for instance, contains a wide variety of questions with strong validity and reliability regarding children’s health status, based solely on parental reports. Particularly related to functional health (such as ability to engage in activities) and social and emotional development, parental reporting is key to the child health practitioner in assessing young children. Such tools as PEDs and Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) are in common use by health practitioners to aid in screening for developmental, behavioral, and physical concerns, particularly of young children, who are not as able as adolescents to provide information.

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how instruction can best meet their learning styles and needs. As states work toward implementation of new or enhanced kindergarten entry assessment systems, the information that families can provide should be thoughtfully considered and incorporated. This brief discusses the state of the field in incorporating family information into KEA's and the role that such family information can play.

In the past decade, the significance of effective assessment has grown as states have been engaged in important work to enhance the capacity of their state data systems, including in early learning. Since 2005, the State Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) grants have led to significant work to build and implement longitudinal data systems, which serve to enhance the ability of states to make data-driven decisions about education policy and services. Many states are also working specifically to link early childhood data to the overall SLDS, and inclusion of data at kindergarten entry is central to these efforts.

More recently, the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grants program has generated momentum in states to further develop and implement KEAs, driving state leaders to create common, statewide approaches for determining the status of children at kindergarten entry. As part of this work, states have an opportunity to think about a system for gathering information from families in a way that leverages what families know about their child, and engages them in supporting their child's future development. At the local level, there is a significant amount of work already being done to gather information from families, and a careful look at what and how information is collected at the local level can be useful in guiding states' approaches to family engagement in the implementation of KEAs.

This brief proposes a framework for conceptualizing family involvement in the KEA process, examines the kinds of data that may be useful to collect at both the local and state levels, and highlights promising practices representing a range of approaches for getting information from and sharing information with families in the KEA process, with a specific attention

to this work in RTT-ELC grantee states.<sup>3</sup> The brief was conceived because state leaders identified the need for better integrating family knowledge at a child's entry into kindergarten. It concludes with a set of recommendations developed with the input of state leaders to move forward on an agenda to better gather and use information from families in the KEA process.

## Framework for Family Involvement in KEA Process

- The purpose of a KEA is to obtain a comprehensive assessment of a child's development upon school entry. Efforts to involve families as part of a KEA can have several important benefits. They can:
1. Provide teachers and school leaders with a more complete picture of incoming students and their prior experiences, strengths, and backgrounds;
  2. Connect teachers, families, and children in two-way communication that builds a foundation for strong relationships, home/school connections and school success;
  3. Provide state leaders with robust data on which to base decisions on services and supports children and families need in the years before kindergarten;
  4. Engage families as key partners in using the information to effectively support children's development and link to and effectiveness of needed services.

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Families have important information to contribute to the teaching and learning process, and through the KEA, can be engaged as meaningful partners at the start of their children's schooling experience. Parents can add value to the information that teachers might collect, since children often exhibit different behaviors and skills in different contexts. For example, as the teaching guide emphasizes, “A teacher may observe that a child's use of language in the classroom is limited, but a parent may observe that the child has an extensive vocabulary and uses language

<sup>3</sup> At the time of this paper, the US Department of Education has made 14 grant awards under RTT-ELC to: CA, CO, DE, IL, MD, MA, MN, NC, NM, OH, OR, RI, WA state, and WI.

in sophisticated ways in his interactions with siblings and neighborhood friends. With this information, the teacher knows that the child is capable of using language in play and can then plan ways to encourage language use within the classroom.”<sup>4</sup> This is likely to be particularly true when the home culture or language is different from the classroom culture or language.

Families also serve as key informants on contextual factors that impact children’s learning and development. Efforts to gather information from families about health, prior early care and education experiences, and the child’s personality, routines, and preferences can assist teachers with the transition to school.

<sup>4</sup> Excerpt from the ELORS Teacher’s Guide by Margaret Gillis, Ph.D., Tracey West, Ph.D., and Mary Ruth Coleman, Ph.D. <http://www.getreadytoread.org/screening-tools/supportive-materials-for-elors/assessment-in-early-childhood>

As states plan for how to leverage the expertise of families in the design of KEAs systems, it is helpful to move beyond the focus on a single KEA instrument itself toward conceptualizing a broader vision for incorporating family input into the KEA process. This work involves thinking along a continuum that moves from no input or communication between the teacher and families to one-way communication or input (parents providing family information to teachers or teachers reporting back on the child assessment to parents), to, at the most sophisticated end, a bi-directional process that involves families as key informants and participants in their children’s kindergarten experience and teachers as learners and communicators to families about the children they teach (*Figure 1 below*).

GOOD



CHILD ASSESSMENT KEA

**KEA is administered** by the teacher with the child to assess kindergarten readiness

BETTER



FAMILY INFORMATION



CHILD ASSESSMENT KEA

**One directional communication** (either family information to teacher or teacher providing assessment results to family)



ASSESSMENT RESULTS

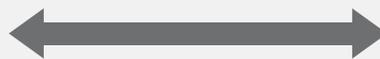


CHILD ASSESSMENT KEA

BEST



FAMILY ENGAGEMENT



**Bi-directional communication** and shared decision making on behalf of the child



CHILD ASSESSMENT KEA

*As states move towards more robust systems for assessing children’s readiness upon kindergarten entry, this framework might serve as a conceptual model for how best practices are emerging in states that are taking the lead in this work.*



From a state policy perspective, aggregating information from families can help states make decisions to inform policy and resource allocation. For example, data on participation in preschool or other forms of early care and education arrangements can help states identify the demand for and reach of state-funded preschool. In some instances, this can help to identify barriers to participation in existing early childhood programs. This information can help states determine how well their state-funded preschool programs are reaching children with different family backgrounds and take necessary actions to target resources and engage in additional outreach efforts. In addition, data on home language and special needs can help inform professional development. Data on physical and social emotional development can help inform decisions about other health and family support resources for children and families.

From a teaching and learning perspective, collecting information from families on children's particular interests, skills, and personalities can help teachers to better connect with children, understand their behaviors in the classroom, and build on their interests and strengths. Collecting information from families on children's home language and customs can help teachers better respond to both children and their families. Getting assessments from families about the skills their children have acquired can serve as a further perspective on children's development and may uncover skills that children have and that the teacher otherwise might not recognize. This is particularly true for those children who are shy or for whom kindergarten is an unfamiliar cultural or language setting. Approaches to collecting information from families include the administration of surveys at meetings with the child's teacher at the beginning of school, and parent/teacher conferences during the school year. Involving teachers closely in collecting information from families not only helps teachers better understand the child; it also helps build relationships between families and schools and provides for a smoother transition for the child into the school system. Collecting information from, and sharing information with, families should be ongoing and, as described, can take many forms.

## Planning for Family Engagement in KEAs<sup>5</sup>

In planning for implementation of a statewide KEA that includes family engagement, states must decide what data are important to collect, how the data should be collected, and what data should be collected from different sources (children, teachers, families, schools, etc.). In order to decide what family information is relevant at the state and local levels, states should investigate:

- What information families can provide that could inform state policies for young children.
- How information from families can help analysis and use of other data through a new lens.
- What information families can provide that can inform teachers and schools in supporting their children's learning and development.

States also need to determine how staff conducting assessments need to be prepared and supported to engage families effectively in the assessment process.

“Collecting information from families can help teachers to better connect with children, understand their behaviors in the classroom, and build on their interests and strengths.”

<sup>5</sup> The data for this brief was collected via phone interviews or email responses with state leaders or designated representatives in RTT-ELC states using a protocol designed to help the BUILD team understand the current work locally and at the state level.

The kindergarten registration process offers a particular time at which to collect information from families and to gather some common information from all families that can be used at the state as well as the district, school, and classroom level. While there have been substantial efforts to develop common, valid and reliable state kindergarten entry assessments of children conducted by kindergarten teachers around the time of school entry (either direct or observational assessments), there has been much more limited development of common tools for gathering information from parents across a state, let alone testing for their validity and reliability. Most of the family surveys or questionnaires used to collect information from families to date have been developed at the district or school level.

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To better understand the content of surveys used with families at kindergarten entry, an exploratory review was conducted of fourteen family surveys currently in use at the school and district level. These surveys were selected because they went well beyond gathering basic demographic and contextual information – often asking a range of questions about the child’s development and unique interests and needs. The surveys tended to be at least two to four pages in length, often with open-ended questions about a child’s special likes or dislikes or interests. It is important to note that these surveys were designed at the school or district level, and none of these surveys are currently being administered statewide. Equally important to note, among all the surveys reviewed, not a single data element was common to all surveys reviewed.

The family surveys varied greatly in content, and each covered a broad range of topics. None of the surveys included all of the topics described below – but collectively they provide an expansive set of questions that show the potential opportunities for gathering information from families. While reviewing a greater number of surveys might identify additional questions and even additional content areas, this review should be reasonably complete and representative of the types of family questions currently being employed at the school level to support school instruction. The following is a content analysis of the fourteen family surveys reviewed:

- **Basic information:** Thirteen forms requested basic information, such as the child’s name, date of birth, sex and age.
- **Additional basic information:** Seven of the surveys asked additional basic information, such as the parents’ names, address, and phone number. In addition, several of the surveys asked the name of the person completing the survey, and that person’s relationship to the child. A number of surveys asked for the child’s preferred name.
- **Home language:** Of the fourteen surveys reviewed, ten asked about the child’s first language. Additionally, some asked about the parent’s first language and the language most commonly spoken at home. One survey requested information about the English language proficiency of every family member living in the household, including extended family.
- **Previous experiences:** The majority of surveys requested information about the child’s previous experiences in child care or preschool. Questions regarding this topic included the length of time in preschool/daycare, age at which child started preschool/child care, and days per week attended. Two of the surveys asked parents to share any input received from the preschool teacher. One survey asked for permission to contact the child’s preschool/ child care.
- **Family Composition:** Most of the surveys requested information about family composition. Nine of the fourteen surveys asked about other children and adults living in the home, or the most important people in the child’s life. Most



surveys asked about the number of people living in the home, and some requested the name and age of any siblings the child had. Four surveys asked about the marital status of the child's parents. One survey asked whether the child lived in a two-parent, single parent, or blended (step) family household. One survey also asked if there had been changes in the family in the last year or if any big changes are anticipated in the coming year, and how the child reacts to change.

- **Routines and preferences:** Several surveys asked whether the child had a routine he/she followed at home. Questions asked that revolved around this topic included: what time the child goes to sleep, what time the child wakes up, whether the child still naps, whether the child plays with children that are not siblings, what the child's favorite food is, and whether the child enjoys playing with younger children.
- **Personality:** Some questions in the surveys asked about the child's personality. Seven surveys asked about any interests, talents, or hobbies that the child might have. A few surveys asked about any fears the child might have, and what kind of responses brought comfort to the child when upset. One survey asked how the child expressed anger, frustration or fear. In addition, two surveys asked the parent to share something special about the child.
- **Developmental skills:** Nine of the surveys asked about the child's developmental skills. Questions on this topic often asked about the child's physical health and motor development, social and emotional development, language and literacy development, general cognition, and approaches to learning – often making use of questions from an existing observational assessment tool (e.g., Work Sampling) or a subset of questions from the tool.
- **Health:** Six of the fourteen surveys asked about the child's health. Some surveys asked about any allergies or dietary restrictions the child had, while others asked about family history of hearing and vision problems. Two surveys asked about any major health concerns, including long-term health problems (defined as an issue



that lasted more than six months). Three surveys requested information about any special needs the child had. One survey asked the family how they know when the child is getting sick, and what the best way to comfort the child is when s/he is sick.

- **Parent goals and expectations:** Six surveys asked about any hopes, expectations, or aspirations the parent had for the child in the kindergarten year. Ten of the surveys provided additional space and encouraged parents to share any additional information about the child that they considered important. One survey had extended questions on the interest of parents in being further involved in the child's school.

These surveys covered a wide range of topics and issues – generally on issues that parents would be uniquely equipped to respond. From a face validity perspective, they helped to present a much more complete picture of the child and the child's background than could be obtained from teacher-administered KEA instruments alone. They show a great deal of potential, if put to good use, both of providing teachers with a more complete view of the child and the child's strengths and of engaging families with teachers and the schools in the overall educational process. Clearly, more work needs to be done to test their validity and reliability as sources of accurate and actionable information, and more work needs to be done in identifying how such information, once gathered, can be most effectively used at the state, district, school, classroom, parent, and child levels.

Some of the RTT-ELC grantee state leaders also have begun to think systemically about how their state is collecting information from families. Both

Massachusetts and Delaware have conducted surveys of school districts regarding the information being gathered from families. Massachusetts found that almost all districts (98%) gathered some information from families and the information had varied purposes, from class placement to instruction to need for further evaluation, although the majority was designed simply to gather critical contact information. Moving a step beyond formal surveys, the Watertown District has implemented a process that engages parents with face-to-face interactions and provides real opportunities for them to inform their child's assessment. Kindergarten teachers have access to children's preschool portfolios for review with families, and on the first day of school, 20-minute meetings are arranged in small group settings with two-three families and the teacher. Parents are able to share much of the information that is usually collected in hand-written surveys, such as fears, concerns and information such as who will pick the child up after school. Additionally, parents meet twice a year with their child's teacher after they have been assessed using Teaching Strategies GOLD comprehensive assessment tool. At these times, families are able to provide additional information for the teacher to include as part of the child's portfolio. Final progress reports, including family comments, are sent home after the parent conferences take place.

Delaware also conducted a content analysis of the family surveys currently in use throughout the state, with responses from almost all the districts (45 in all). As with Massachusetts, Delaware's statewide study of kindergarten entry surveys found that a wide range of

information was being collected, but there were only four common data elements across all districts:

- child's name
- child's birth date
- child's home phone number
- parent/guardian's name

Based on its analysis, the Delaware commission recommended a common set of background information that should be collected from all families in all schools upon kindergarten entry—a standard minimum:

- **Child characteristics:**
  - home language;
  - race/ethnicity;
  - prior experience in early childhood settings;
  - foster care status;
  - special learning or developmental needs;
  - place of birth.
- **Family characteristics:**
  - parent/guardian contact information;
  - parent/guardian marital status;
  - parent/guardian race/ethnicity;
  - parent/guardian home language;
  - parent/guardian employment status;
  - parent/guardian education level;
  - parent/guardian concern about child's development or learning
- **Household characteristics:**
  - home or cell phone number;
  - language spoken at home;
  - time at current residence/mobility history;
  - household income, from a range of possible income levels;
  - number of adults and children in the home

Clearly, this is simply one iteration of possible background information to collect from all families of children entering kindergarten within a state. Importantly, however, such information can be incorporated into a statewide longitudinal data system and provides a wealth of such background information that can be used for a variety of further analyses to inform policy. As described earlier, such background information is only one type of information which





## Promising Practices for Involving Families in the Overall Assessment Process

In addition to these efforts to collect background family information at a statewide level, states also are engaging families in the overall development and use of KEAs. They are seeking to develop a KEA that goes beyond teacher assessments both in gathering information from families, communicating with families about the KEAs that are conducted, and involving families in the development of KEAs themselves:

- Illinois is working on a pilot assessment (Kindergarten Individual Development Survey or KIDS) that provides an opportunity for families to assist in the collection of evidence about where children are developmentally across multiple domains. The information is then shared at parent-teacher conferences. Teachers and administrators receive professional development on soliciting this information from families. Early reports from the pilot suggest that teachers need more time for family engagement in order to get meaningful input from families.
- Washington state has implemented Family Connection, a component of its Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS) program, which connects teachers with parents of incoming kindergartners by having them meet in a mutually agreeable location for a 30 to 60 minute discussion. This meeting captures much of the same information as many of the kindergarten surveys examined, such as parental marital status and living situation, culture, home language, siblings, etc., but also establishes a personal connection. Teachers reported finding the process to be very useful but lacked adequate time to realize the potential. Legislation is pending in Washington's legislature that would give teachers up to five days at the beginning of a school year to engage families. The meetings would give teachers a clearer sense of new students' strengths and weaknesses, information

parents can provide, however, a number of states now are considering how to incorporate additional family information in their KEA systems to complement data gathered by teachers.

- In Minnesota, the developmental screening program administered upon kindergarten entry includes both a parent report of the child's history in skill development, emotional status, and behavior status and a direct parental observation of child's functioning using standardized developmental screening instruments approved by the Minnesota Department of Education for the Early Childhood Screening.
- Some districts in Ohio have started using electronic means to survey families and are experiencing higher participation rates. The Preschool Experience Survey was designed by the Southwest Early Learning Leaders (SWELL) collaborative and is distributed to families of kindergartners in the first two months of each school year.

Delaware will phase in statewide family questionnaires in small pilots beginning in early 2014, based upon the Commission's recommendations.

“ A number of states now are considering how to incorporate additional family information in their KEA systems to complement data gathered by teachers.”

they could use to tailor their teaching to a new class. The law would exempt state-funded full day kindergarten classrooms from the 180 required days of school to allow up to five days at the beginning of each academic year to implement Family Connections.

- In addition to the statewide family questionnaire, Delaware is also seeking to establish a feedback loop with families where the results of KEAs are shared and teachers receive professional development to talk with families about the developmental progression of their child. Delaware is also planning to involve parents in an advisory capacity to inform this work. The state is instituting a two-part process for family engagement:
  - Resources to families. A questionnaire will be sent home to families prior to the start of the school year or within the first week to learn more about families and begin to build relationships. The state will develop resources and strategies that are inviting to families, such as “getting to know you books” that allow for participation from students and families to assess children’s cognitive skills (i.e. this is who I live with, this is who is important, this is how often we read together, these are our favorite books, etc.).
  - Joint review of teacher assessments. Teachers and families will meet together to review initial KEA assessment results and develop goals for children in a collaborative manner.

In California, the state is working on creating a parent report component of the statewide assessment system, Desired Results Developmental Profile-School Readiness (CRDP-SR). The report will focus on the five domains of school readiness identified by the National Goals Panel, and will add specific objectives for dual language learners where applicable. The report will provide parents with a measure of their child’s development on a continuum as it relates specifically to each domain. (see box on page 1).

## Recommendations

As states move forward in developing KEA’s, they should think beyond kindergarten entry assessments conducted by teachers (either direct or observational) and develop strategies for involving families and family information in the process. States should:

*Consider how diverse families can be involved systematically to provide input into the selection and development of formal KEA tools.*

Decision makers should identify opportunities for launching a more comprehensive and streamlined protocol for engaging families in the assessment development process. In the RTT-ELC applications, many states indicated they would align the assessment with information from families, to help support learning across domains.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, states articulated plans to use assessment information to engage families. These efforts appear to be in nascent stages, but there is a clear desire among most states interviewed to consider, in the design of new tools or the modification of existing ones, how family input can be included as a critical data collection point.

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<sup>6</sup> Wat, A, Bruner, C, Hanus, A, Scott-Little, C., Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA) Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Fund Information. BUILD Initiative, 2012.



*Determine what family information, particularly background and contextual information, should be collected to incorporate into statewide longitudinal databases or other state early childhood data systems.*

More comprehensive background information can be extremely helpful to states in identifying areas of need and opportunity – and where additional outreach or resources can be focused. There are significant policy questions about the reach and impact of early childhood programs that policy makers ask, and many of these can be better answered when there is family, in addition to school-level, information in statewide databases.

*Consider potential integration of information from family surveys and standardized tools and questionnaires into the KEA process.*

As part of an early childhood comprehensive assessment system, states should consider how tools and instruments such as the surveys and questionnaires examined might be streamlined and used as a complement to other teacher-administered KEA instruments. Teachers' conclusions about children's learning and development could be informed by the information that parents provide on surveys and questionnaires. Teachers' approaches to engaging and supporting individual children and engaging their families can be strengthened by such information.

*Use Kindergarten entry surveys to engage families in ways that encourage their continued involvement.*

Getting and using information from families is a developing field. Surveys, questionnaires, and other processes need to be evaluated and improved by focusing on more asset-based and welcoming questions. For example, in the local parent surveys which were examined, the way questions were framed often were quite different, e.g.:

“How does your child respond when he is angry or scared?” versus

“Does your child have any behavior issues?”

The first question is more likely to elicit useful and non-defensive responses. The latter may produce defensive responses or narrow parental thinking to mental health

concerns. Many of the kindergarten entry surveys and questionnaires reviewed for this report could be re-written to exhibit more parent-friendly language. Again, one parent survey asked the question:

“How does your child react to new people or places?”

Another survey asked a similar question, but in a less user-friendly manner:

“How does your child deal with transitions?”

Survey questions also should be examined from the perspective of cultural and linguistic appropriateness and accessibility. Families from some cultures may not feel comfortable even to responding to written surveys, and questions themselves may be phrased in ways that have different meanings and implications for different cultures.. A diverse group of families might serve as reviewers to ensure clarity of language and concepts.

The fourteen surveys examined as part of this preliminary review all were developed locally, and likely in response to the absence of readily-available existing tools. In fact, there is a limited amount of current comprehensive testing of such tools for their validity and reliability and to ensure that the most accurate and useful information is gathered. This clearly is an area where collective efforts across states and communities would be beneficial.

In addition, schools and states need to create opportunities and effective structures for teachers and families to work through these surveys face-to-face and to create the relationships for ongoing input from parents throughout the kindergarten year and beyond. The purpose of gathering information from families is to use it, not simply to have parents fill in a survey. There should always be a reason for asking a question and guidance to teachers and parents in interpreting the results for positive use.

*Move beyond the one directional process of collecting information from parents and create opportunities for partnership.* States and districts that already have KEA practices in place can move beyond gathering or

“ Teachers' conclusions about children's learning and development could be informed by the information that parents provide on surveys and questionnaires.



To help states move toward these goals, future research in these areas should be conducted:

- Examine the full array of family engagement practices happening at the local level during the transition to kindergarten and at kindergarten entry, and assess current capacity to replicate, scale, formalize, or enhance and improve these processes as part of the KEA.
- Understand the process and entry points for collecting data as well as the uses of data collected from Kindergarten Entry Surveys to ensure data collected is useful and used.
- Learn about ways that teachers are being encouraged to integrate information from survey/questionnaires into the KEA.
- Further develop specific family survey instruments and questions. Conduct validity and reliability analyses on them to build a stronger base of instruments and questions for use in the field.
- Further develop a core list of background information to be incorporated into statewide data and develop guides for its analysis and use to develop additional responses to young children in the critical early childhood years.
- Examine how survey instruments and other ways of collecting information from, and engaging with, families are used in the field and what is required to make effective use of them (e.g. training and staff development for teachers, extended time scheduled for meeting with families, etc.).
- Gather data about what new approaches being developed as part of the KEA that would promote partnership with families in the assessment process.
- Consider what information parents are best able to provide to give teachers better knowledge of the child and inform instruction and inclusion of the child in the school's learning environment.

reporting information and towards creating partnerships with families that include the parents as key informants and contributors to the teaching and learning process of their children. For example, teachers and families can meet together to review KEA assessment results and develop goals for children in a collaborative manner. Discussing the KEA also provides a wonderful platform for starting a conversation with family members about their role in supporting their child's development. Having "what you can do" tools and resources ready for parents at this time will help teachers use the KEA as a parent engagement mechanism. Even if the specific teacher-administered KEA instruments are somewhat different across states, if they generally assess what children know and can do across the five domains of school readiness, there are potentials for developing tools and resources for use with parents and as parent engagement mechanisms that can be in common use.

### *Conduct Further Research*

This brief is the initial phase of a larger effort to compile information and assist states with conceptualization, development, and implementation of family engagement in Kindergarten Entry Assessment systems.

- Determine what information (and how) teachers can share with parents to best support them in their role as first teacher in the context of what the child is learning in the classroom.
- Gather information about how to best support teachers and schools in meaningful family engagement as part of KEAs, looking specifically at how much time is needed and examine teacher and administrator professional development needs.
- Identify whether written materials correspond with, and are appropriate for, the reading levels of the diversity of families.
- Examine whether interactions are sensitive to the diversity of cultures and native languages of families and conduct research to assist in tailoring KEA family engagement to the diverse cultures and languages of families.

“ Kindergarten entry is a critical opportunity to engage family members and draw upon their knowledge about their children in the educational process.”

## Conclusion

Kindergarten entry is a critical opportunity to engage family members and draw upon their knowledge about their children in the educational process. It is also an opportunity to begin mutually enriching family-school relationships that encourage family engagement in the child’s continuing education and development. The current emphasis upon developing statewide KEAs provides a moment in time to consider how families can be honored as experts on their children. A KEA system designed and implemented effectively has the potential to initiate a partnership with families that can be carried throughout their child’s school career.

This brief is an initial step. The lack of commonality and consistency in family surveys even within a state is indicative of the need for more concerted work to develop comprehensive KEAs that incorporate parent knowledge. It is important to collect relevant, useable data in a manner that will build trusting relationships between the schools and families. It is also important not to collect data for data’s sake. State leaders must create a family partnership plan that is not overly burdensome on families and that is sensitive to cultural and language diversity.

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