



The Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment System (EC-CAS) **A Partnership to Promote School Readiness by the Maryland and Ohio Departments of Education**

Background

On December 16, 2011, Maryland and Ohio were awarded **Race To The Top-Early Learning Challenge** grants in the amount of \$50.0 and \$69.9 million, respectively, over four years. These funds will support an innovative partnership to revise and enhance Maryland's and Ohio's kindergarten entry assessment, develop Pre-K and Kindergarten formative assessments and conduct a rigorous review of existing screening tools for young children. These efforts will culminate in a new **comprehensive early childhood assessment system**, supported by a statewide **technology infrastructure**, and a **professional development system**.

A number of partners will play a vital role in executing Maryland and Ohio's shared vision for improving kindergarten readiness and early childhood assessments, including Johns Hopkins University - Center for Technology in Education (CTE), WestEd, State Advisory Boards in each state, and a national Technical Advisory Committee, advising both states, facilitated by the Council of Chief State School Officers.

Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment System Components

MSDE and ODE are committed to developing the Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment System (EC-CAS) for all children from birth through age six and to statewide implementation of the system in 2014-15. The EC-CAS will include a kindergarten entry assessment, formative assessments (36-72 months), and recommended screening instruments. The three components of EC-CAS will be developed on the basis of the following principles:

- aligned to both states' guidelines and standards for young children, birth through age 6, including the Common Core State Standards;
- designed to assess children in seven developmental domains including social-emotional development, physical/motor development, language and literacy, mathematical thinking, scientific thinking, social studies, and the arts;
- linked to state longitudinal data systems to allow for consistent and meaningful reporting at the student, class, school, district, and state levels;
- designed to be accessible to young children with a wide range of background experiences and developmental needs;
- allow for the measurement of growth over time;
- systematically developed within a framework grounded in theory, research, and best practice to ensure its validity and reliability; and
- field-tested and reviewed by a national Technical Advisory Council comprised of developmental psychologists, early childhood experts, and test design professionals.

Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA): KEA will be the cornerstone of the new assessment system. KEA will put into action school readiness indicators within each developmental domain and provide information about what children are able to do as they transition into kindergarten. The results will also show what supports children will

need to be successful in kindergarten. KEA data will be used to inform stakeholders, guide decision-making about professional development needs, and help teachers meet each student's individual needs.

Formative Assessments: Formative tools will be developed to monitor children's progress along a continuum of typical development within each developmental domain. The tools will be based on research-supported learning paths, which define the knowledge and skills that are typical for children ages 36 months through 72 months. These formative assessments will equip caregivers and teachers to track individual children's learning trajectories, individualize learning opportunities and plan for intervention, engage in real-time curriculum planning, and ensure that children are on the path for kindergarten readiness.

Screening: A panel of reviewers will assess the quality of existing developmental screening instruments designed to identify and refer children from birth to age five who have disabilities, health or other special needs. Measurement specialists will train the reviewers on how to consistently apply a set of rigorous criteria to the various screening instruments.

Professional Development System

The professional development of early childhood educators is the key to success of the EC-CAS, as the quality of assessment data depends on how well teachers and caregivers implement the assessments. Professional development activities will be organized around three stages of assessment, including pre-administration, administration of assessments, and post-assessment analysis and use of data. Providing professional development at each of these stages will ensure that users understand the purpose of various assessment tools and how to administer assessments to various populations, interpret assessment scores, communicate results to families, and use data to make instructional decisions and individualize instruction.

Professional development activities will include a train-the-trainer model, online resources and options for blended online and face-to-face approaches to provide support for professionals with varying levels of experience using assessments. Early childhood educators will have opportunities to engage in web-based training, coaching, and technical assistance, online learning communities and to utilize simulation technology, a procedural facilitator, and a web-based portal.

Technology Infrastructure

The EC-CAS will capitalize on technology to blend observational practices with direct performance assessment; increase standardization of data collection; provide immediate feedback of assessment data; and enable measurement over time. CTE will lead the development of the technology infrastructure which will support administration and scoring of the KEA and formative assessments, sharing of data in each state, reporting for decision making and readiness monitoring, and delivery of professional development. CTE will collaborate with the assessment and professional development teams to ensure that the technology design supports the project.

For Further Information

The EC-CAS leadership team is committed to sharing updates on the progress and lessons of the EC-CAS initiative. The ultimate goal of this partnership is to develop a system of assessment tools, professional development resources and a technology platform that can be used by other states and communities.

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