Key Considerations for Examining Child Outcomes within Quality Rating and Improvement Systems

Tamara Halle, Ph.D.

Child Trends

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Overview

- Best practices in the use of child assessments

- Cautions and practical considerations when using child outcome data for assessing ECE programs and systems

- Recommendations for using child outcome data responsibly within systems-level initiatives such as Quality Improvement/QRIS

Best Practices for Use of Child Assessments

- **First determine for what *purpose* the child assessment will be used**
- The purpose should guide all assessment decisions:
  - Domains to be measured
  - Tool(s) to be used
  - Who will be assessed
  - How the information will be collected, analyzed, interpreted and reported
  - Who will use the information

National Research Council (2008)

Best Practices for Use of Child Assessments

- Select an assessment tool with acceptable reliability and validity *for the specific purpose and population(s) of interest*

- Infrastructure and resources should be available to carry out the assessments and to respond to assessment findings
  - Provide training and technical support to those collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and reporting assessment results
  - When the purpose is for program evaluation, a clear plan for program improvement should be part of the follow-up steps

National Research Council (2008)

Understanding and Choosing Assessments and Developmental Screeners for Young Children Ages 3-5: Profiles of Selected Measures

OPRE Report # 2011-23

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/hs/dev_screeners/reports/screeners_final.pdf

http://www.childtrends.org/files/
earlychildhoodmeasuresprofiles.pdf

EARLY CHILDHOOD MEASURES PROFILES

Prepared by Child Trends
4301 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 100
Washington, DC 20008
www.childtrends.org

Project Coordinators

Daniel J. Berry
Lisa J. Bridges
Martha J. Zaslow

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Authors of Early Childhood Measures Profiles: Lisa J. Bridges, Daniel J. Berry, Rosalind Johnson, Julia Calkins, Nancy Geyelin Margie, Stephanie W. Cochran, Thomson J. Ling, & Martha J. Zaslow; Child Trends.

Authors of Early Head Start Measures section: Allison Sidle Fuligni and Christy Brady-Smith. Center for Children and Families, Teachers College, Columbia University.

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Compendium of Student, Teacher, and Classroom Measures Used in NCEE Evaluations of Educational Interventions

Volume II: Technical Details, Measure Profiles, and Glossary (Appendices A-G)

April 7, 2010

Lizabeth M. Malone
Charlotte Cabili
Jamila Henderson
Andrea Mraz Esposito
Mathematica Policy Research

Kathleen Coolahan
Gryphon LLC

Juliette Henke
Subuhi Asheer
Meghan O'Toole
Sally Atkins-Burnett
Kimberly Boller
Mathematica Policy Research

ies NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION EVALUATION AND REGIONAL ASSISTANCE
Institute of Education Sciences

http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20104012/pdf/20104013.pdf

Cautions and Considerations

- Not all child assessments or screeners are appropriate for use with all children or for all purposes. Tools vary by:
  - Domains of development assessed
  - Age appropriateness
  - Reliability and validity for children with special needs
  - Reliability and validity for children whose home language is not English

Cautions and Considerations

- Burden to programs, costs of assessments, and challenges of implementing standardized assessments with young children result in pressure/decisions to use assessments for multiple purposes

  - Use of Kindergarten Readiness Assessments (KRAs) for "looking back" to inform early care and education systems as well as a "baseline" for following children's developmental trajectories in K-12 education

  - Use of KRAs as part of QRIS validation

Practical Considerations for Use of KRAs for "Looking Back" at ECE (or for QRIS Validation)

- KRAs are often gathered at one time point at the beginning of kindergarten
- There may not be total alignment between the assessments/domains used with pre-school children and the assessments/domains used in KRAs
- Challenges of tracking dosage/children's exposure to:
  - particular settings (enrollment vs. attendance)
  - different settings (children could be in multiple settings simultaneously or sequentially over the 0 – 5 age range)
  - the quality of those settings (not all settings participate in QRIS)

Caution: It is Inappropriate to Use Assessment Data in Isolation to Make Decisions about ECE Programs and Systems

It is important to:

- Measure child progress rather than end-of-year status
- Collect direct indicators of program quality
- Collect information on risk status of families and children
- Collect information on program resources (e.g., funding, administrative support, professional development)
- Have a clear plan for program improvement

National Research Council (2008)

Caution: Associations between Quality Indicators and Child Outcomes are Modest

- ECE quality is modestly but significantly related to social, language, and academic development.

- Effect sizes were small, even in high-quality classrooms.

- When ECE quality is associated with outcomes, quality often accounts for a very small amount of the variance in outcomes.

Burchinal et al. (2000)
Burchinal et al. (2009)

Burchinal, Kainz, & Cai (2011)

Burchinal, Vandergrift, Pianta, & Mashburn (2010)
NICHD Early Child Care Research Network (2000)

Some Domain-Specific Associations between Quality Indicators and Child Outcomes

- Domain-specific associations between quality and outcomes are stronger than associations between global measures of quality and domain-specific child outcomes.

- Studies looking at structural quality of care as mediated through process quality often found the strongest results.

Zaslow, Anderson, Redd, Wessel, Tarullo, & Burchinal (2010)

Elicker, Anderson, Lewsader, Ruprecht, & Langill (2012)

Implications for QRIS Validation Studies

- QRIS is a system-wide early childhood initiative. As such, a single outcome measure linked to the long-term goal of improved child outcomes is not sufficient to evaluate the system's effectiveness.

- There are other, short-term or medium-term outcomes that may be useful to monitor or to help validate the system:
  - Workforce outcomes (e.g., Professional Development)
  - Family outcomes (e.g., Child Care Decision-making)
  - System outcomes (e.g., Infrastructure Development)

Summary: Ensuring the Responsible Use of Child Outcome Data within QRIS Validation

- Clearly define the purpose for which you are collecting and using child outcome data within Quality Improvement/QRIS or other ECE systems evaluations

- Ensure that valid and reliable assessment tools are selected for the populations and settings included in data collection

- Consider collecting data at multiple time points and analyzing progress over time rather than single-point-in-time assessments (e.g., KRAs)

- Consider alignment issues: Be aware that domain-specific child outcome data may not be closely aligned with global quality measures (or structural measures of quality)

- Consider the importance of tracking children's exposure to different ECE settings & their background characteristics

- Use child assessments within a broader system of assessment, not as the only measure of system functioning

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For More Information

Please contact:

Tamara Halle

Co-Director, Early Childhood Research

Child Trends

thalle@childtrends.org

202-572-6034