

Pre-Kindergarten Through Grade 2 Assessment Task Force

Summary Report of Process, Outcomes, and Recommendations

The Arkansas Department of Education and the Office of Innovation for Education (OIE) recruited Arkansas Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 2 (PK-2) teachers for the purpose of gathering information on current PK-2 assessments and assessment practices to inform future assessment selection processes for these grade levels. Members were recruited from all regions. Each member of the PK-2 Assessment Task Force had a minimum of 10 years of experience at the PK-2 grade levels. The Task Force met five times throughout the 2014-2015 school year. Each meeting focused on reviewing and discussing salient information to facilitate the work of the Task Force. Members completed the following tasks.

- Reviewed the latest research on developmentally appropriate assessment practices for PK-2;
- Reviewed the technical requirements necessary for assessments to be considered high quality and developmentally appropriate;
- Learned the principles for selection of developmentally appropriate assessments and intended use of the scores from these assessments;
- Discussed the requirements in Arkansas's statutes and rules, as well as local assessment policies that impact student assessment at these grade levels;
- Developed and administered a survey to current PK-2 teachers on their perceptions of the strengths and concerns regarding currently required assessments required; and
- Reviewed results of the 2,187 responses to the survey and compiled the results into reflections and recommendations for the ADE and State Board of Education.

Major Findings of the PK-2 Assessment Task Force

1. PK teachers responding to the survey indicated overall satisfaction with the assessments currently in use in PK programs. A major concern was the vague definition of PK assessment requirements which gives districts and programs a lot of latitude in the choice of PK screeners. This is perceived to result in a lack of standardization in the information used by teachers across locations.
2. Kindergarten and Grades 1 and 2 teachers expressed general dissatisfaction with the assessments currently required for their grade levels (QELI and ITBS, respectively). Teachers responding to the perceptual survey cited the following major concerns.
 - a. Lack of alignment of the assessments with the Common Core standards required for instruction at these grade levels;
 - b. Whether current K-2 assessments were aligned with the most recent research regarding developmentally appropriateness for the purpose of meeting the requirements of ACA-15-404;
 - c. Usefulness (or lack thereof) of the results and information received from the assessments due to the first two concerns, as well as the lack of timeliness in receiving the results. In particular, K-2 teachers expressed a need for valid, reliable, developmentally appropriate screening assessments at the beginning of the school year. The current assessments are viewed by the teachers as not useful for these purposes, particularly given the timing of the assessments and/or the receipt of the results; and
 - d. Teachers expressed strong concerns that developmentally appropriate assessment of students should minimize time away from instruction, and that time used for assessment should include screeners/assessments that provide teachers with rich information that can be used to drive planning for student learning.

Pre-Kindergarten Through Grade 2 Assessment Task Force

3. In general, PK-2 teachers feel the need for more information and professional development regarding developmentally appropriate assessment instruments, how to administer the assessments, and how to use the data to inform instruction.

General Recommendations of the PK-2 Assessment Task Force

The Task Force provides the following recommendations for consideration.

1. Recommend selection of assessments consider the following priorities.
 - a. Usefulness for screening students, informing instruction, and benchmarking growth based on alignment with developmental research and required standards,
 - b. Technical quality (reliability and validity of results (scores) for stated purpose),
 - c. Consideration for time required for administration and timeliness of results.
2. Recommend consideration of an annual three day screening and review period prior to the start of mandatory school attendance for Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten students. This three day period would be used to screen students for readiness to learn using a developmentally appropriate screening tool designed to provide more immediate feedback. Teachers would review student data provided by the screeners and use the information to make more accurate placements of students, and more aligned instructional plans based on students' learning needs.
3. Build on the work of the Task Force. Continue collaboration among ADE leaders, Early Childhood Education leaders, and PK-2 teachers to align expectations, instruction, and assessment across the transition from PK to K-2 with the developmental research and the required standards.
4. Provide professional development for teachers regarding developmentally appropriate assessment, assessment administration, and the use of assessment results. Further, encourage professional development opportunities that include observation of others' assessment and instruction practices in the classroom, as well as networking through professional learning communities (PLCs) to help improve use of data in the classroom.

"As to methods, there may be a million and then some, but principles are few. The man who grasps principles can successfully select his own methods. The man who tries methods, ignoring principles, is sure to have trouble."-- **Ralph Waldo Emerson**