Child Assessment in the Context of QRIS and the Broader Early Childhood System

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Overview

1. Growing national use of child assessments
2. Best practices in the use of child assessments
3. Child assessment within the context of comprehensive early childhood assessment systems
4. Cautions and practical considerations when selecting and using child assessments
5. Considerations for using child assessments in Quality Rating and Improvements Systems
Discussion

• How are early childhood assessments and/or screeners currently used in your state’s QRIS?

• How are early childhood assessments and/or screeners used in your state’s early childhood system? (For example, early intervention, kindergarten readiness, ECE program evaluation or validation efforts)
1. Growing National Use of Child Assessments
2010 National Perspective: QRIS Compendium

- 11 of 26 QRIS included child assessment standards for centers
- 8 included assessment standards for family child care
- For centers (family child care homes)
  - 4 included developmental screenings (3)
  - 3 required sharing results with parents (4)
  - 3 had a review process for assessments (2)
  - 7 had approved assessment tools for use in QRIS (4)
2011 National Perspective

- State Program Quality Standards about Child Assessment (National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement, 2011)
  - 80% of states (42) had program standards about child assessment
    - Licensing
    - State-funded pre-k
    - QRIS
  - 3 states required child assessments in licensing
  - 33 of 40 states with state-funded pre-k had child assessment requirements
National Perspective (2011 cont.)

- Of the 25 states that had QRIS, 24 had standards about child assessment
  - 12 of these addressed through NAEYC accreditation
  - 12 had state-developed assessment standards
  - 17 required child assessments to “individualize curriculum or target program improvement”
- Of the 23 states with ELDS,
  - 2 required child assessments in QRIS to be aligned with ELDS
2012 National Perspective

- Practices for Promoting Young Children’s Learning in QRIS Standards (2012, National Center for Children in Poverty)
  - Of the 23 states NCCP studied with QRIS
    - 8 use assessments to monitor children’s learning and individualize curriculum
    - 5 reference ELDS

- Early Learning Challenge Grant
  - “Comprehensive Assessment Systems”
  - Assessments must conform to the principles of assessment set forth by the National Research Council (2008)
2013 National Perspective

Though not directly related to QRIS, state investment in assessment systems is growing:

- Of the 37 states that applied for the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge, 35 identified the development of ECE assessment system as a top priority.

- US Department of Education awarded $15.1 million in Enhanced Assessment Grants (EAGs) to the three state education agencies and 18 states that applied for funding to develop or enhance their Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA)
2014 National Perspective

- Coming soon: Online 50 State QRIS Compendium
  - Updated in real time.
  - Comparative matrices can be customized to include only the details that the user specifies.
  - Users can inform the further development of the Compendium by asking questions and making comments directly on the website.
  - Historical information can be stored to allow analysis of trends over time.
Summary

- States include child assessments in various aspects of early childhood system
- States are increasingly including child assessments in QRIS
- Child assessments primarily used for
  - Developmental screening
  - Individualizing instruction/curriculum
2. Best Practices in the Use of Child Assessments
Overview of Best Practices

- Identifying your purpose
- Selecting a valid and reliable assessment
- Providing necessary and sufficient infrastructure support
Best Practice Tip #1: Determine the **purpose** of the child assessment

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)
Five Major Purposes of Early Childhood Assessments

- Improve/support children’s learning
  - “formative assessment”
- Identify special needs
- Evaluate programs
- Monitor trends
- High-stakes accountability

Purpose 1: Support Children’s Learning

- Audience: teachers
- Methods: observation, work samples
- Timing: ongoing
- Closely tied to curriculum
- Assess all children
- “Low stakes”
Purpose 2: Identify Special Needs

- Audience: parent, teachers, specialists
- Methods: standardized, norm-referenced assessments or screening tools
- Two stages of data collection
  - brief screening
  - in-depth assessment
Purpose 2: Identify Special Needs

- Timing: periodically
- Not tied closely to curriculum
- High level of technical adequacy
- Screen all children
Purpose 3: Evaluate Programs

- Audience: policymakers, public
- Methods: mixture
- “Low stakes” -- consequences for programs
  - No decisions about individuals
Purpose 3: Evaluate Programs

- Timing: beginning and end of program (usually)
- High standards of technical accuracy
- Assess sample of children
- Child data just one part of evaluation
Purpose 4: Monitor Trends

- Audience: policymakers, public
- Timing: snapshot, repeated every few years
- Methods: mixture
- High standards of technical accuracy
- Assess sample of children
- Accountability in the large sense
  - How well is a state doing?
Purpose 5: High Stakes Accountability

- Audience: policymakers, public
- Data collection: standardized assessments
- “High stakes”—consequences for individuals (children, teachers)
- Assess all children, usually
Purpose 5: High Stakes Accountability

“Before age 8, standardized achievement measures are not sufficiently accurate to be used for high-stakes decisions about individual children and schools.”

Purpose 5: High Stakes Accountability

- Accountability ≠ Testing
  - Require monitoring
  - Require an intervention plan
Best Practices Tip #2: Select a **Reliable** and **Valid** Assessment Tool

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

  National Research Council (2008)

- **Reliability**: Is the tool producing consistent information across different circumstances?

- **Validity**: Is the tool assessing what it is supposed to assess?

  Halle, Zaslow, Wessel, Moodie, and Darling-Churchill (2011)
Some Helpful Resources

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

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENING: A COMPENDIUM OF MEASURES FOR CHILDREN AGES BIRTH TO FIVE

OPRE REPORT # 2014-13
FEBRUARY 2014
Helpful Resources, cont’d
Best Practices Tip #3: Provide Implementation Support

• 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)
Summary

- Identify the purpose of assessment
- Select a valid and reliable assessment
- Provide necessary and sufficient infrastructure support for assessment implementation and use
3. Child Assessment within the Context of Comprehensive Early Childhood Assessment Systems
Components of Assessment Systems

- **Standards for children’s learning** that serve as the source of constructs focused on in assessments and performance levels considered acceptable
- **Program quality standards** that are aligned with standards for children’s learning
- **Attention to inclusiveness**, respecting variation in children’s culture and developmental challenges.
- **Assessments both** of program quality and children’s development
Assessment as Part of a Comprehensive Assessment System

- **Professional development** on using and understanding the assessments and assessment reports
- **Data base** that provides for integrity of data and provides basis for reports to varied audiences according to purpose
- **Resources** to provide timely useful, high-quality assessment data
- **Monitoring and evaluation** of the system, including alignment of elements, monitoring of the effectiveness of the reporting system, monitoring effects of the system, and burden on teachers, children and administrators.
Issue: Lack of Alignment of Components of System

- Poor coordination in focus of
  - Early learning standards and program standards
  - Early learning standards and child assessments
  - Program standards and quality measures
- Lack of joint consideration of program quality and child assessments in providing input into program improvement
4. Cautions and Practical Considerations when Selecting and Using Child Assessments
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

• There is often pressure/decision to use the same assessment for multiple purposes due to:
  • Burden to programs,
  • costs of assessments, and/or
  • challenges of implementing standardized assessments with young children

• Remember Best Practices Tip #1: The purpose should guide all assessment decisions
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)
5. Considerations for Using Child Assessments in Quality Rating and Improvements Systems
Considerations Related to Assessment Requirements within QRIS

- Establishing the requirements
- Supporting implementation
- Monitoring implementation
- Taking a systems-level approach
Taking Stock

- Assess the strengths and weaknesses of your ECE system related to child assessments
  - Programs already assessing children?
  - What assessments are conducted in other systems?
  - What professional development is in place to support implementation of child assessments?

- Decide on your systems-level purpose(s) for establishing requirements for child assessment within the QRIS
  - Improve services for specific groups of children?
  - Strengthen instruction for all children?
Principles to Guide Decisions Related to Child Assessments

- Assessments should bring about benefits for children (and programs/service providers)
  - NEGP, 1998
Establishing Requirements

- Types of child assessments required (screening and/or formative assessments)
- Specific instruments (required vs. recommended)
- Types of professional development required
- Timeframe and documentation of implementation of the assessments (either by the program or by other service providers)
- Specifications for actions program personnel will take based on the results of the assessments, including sharing results with parents/families
Principles Related to Assessment Instruments

- Assessments should be tailored to a specific purpose and should be reliable, valid, and fair for that purpose.
- Assessment policies should be designed recognizing that reliability and validity of assessments increase with children’s age.
- Assessments should be age-appropriate in both content and the method of data collection.
- Assessments should be linguistically appropriate, recognizing that to some extent all assessments are measures of language.
- Parents should be a valued source of assessment information, as well as an audience for assessment results.
  - NEGP, 1998
Establishing Requirements (Continued)

- Examples of criteria for screenings
  - Purpose
  - Age continuum
  - Addresses multiple domains
  - Technical properties
    - Reliability
    - Validity (including predictive validity)
    - Norms
    - Sensitivity
    - Specificity
  - Appropriate for Dural Language Learners and children from diverse cultural backgrounds
  - Practical for different settings and modes of administration
  - Mechanism for parental input and report to parents
  - Support available

- Examples of criteria for formative assessments
  - Purpose
  - Age continuum
  - Reliability and validity
  - Alignment with Early Learning Standards
  - Multiple sources of information
  - Inclusion of children with diverse languages/backgrounds/abilities
  - Family involvement
  - Useful data for planning
  - User-friendly
  - Support available

- Scott-Little & Niemeyer (2001)
Process for Selecting/Recommending Assessments

- Be clear on purpose
- Develop clearly articulated criteria
- Design a review process that includes input from stakeholders who will use the assessment as well as persons with technical expertise in the type of assessment being reviewed
- Include steps to ensure that reviews are completed with reliability between reviewers and across assessments that are reviewed
Supporting Implementation: Professional Development

- Programs/ECE Educators who will implement assessments
  - General skills that support assessment (observation, building rapport with children, documentation)
  - Knowledge of the specific instruments and how to administer them
  - Documenting, interpreting and using results
  - Communicating with parents/families
  - Community resources and referral processes

- QRIS/other personnel
  - Specific requirements of the QRIS
  - Familiarity with the instruments and how they are implemented
  - Documentation of results and how personnel can use the results
Supporting Implementation: Quality Control

- Encourage/require initial certification/demonstration of proficiency
- Require refresher training/professional development
- Provide on-going coaching/support
- Include some process for quality assurance/monitoring
QRIS Monitoring Implementation

- Administration of the instrument
  - Documentation of professional development
  - Documentation of completed child records
- Utilization of the results
  - Shared with parents/families
  - Referrals for screenings
  - Used in lesson planning for individual and small groups of children
National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force Recommendation

• States should develop a unified system of early childhood education that includes a single, coherent system of standards, assessments, data, and professional development efforts across all categorical programs and funding streams.
  • NECATF, 2007
GOAL: Comprehensive Assessment System

- A coordinated and comprehensive system of multiple assessments, each of which is valid and reliable for its specified purpose and for the population with which it will be used, that organizes information about the process and context of young children’s learning and development in order to help Early Childhood Educators make informed instructional and programmatic decisions and that conforms to the recommendations of the National Research Council reports on early childhood.

A Comprehensive Assessment System includes, at a minimum--

(a) Screening Measures;
(b) Formative Assessments;
(c) Measures of Environmental Quality; and
(d) Measures of the Quality of Adult-Child Interactions.

• US DOE, Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Application (2011), Page 14
Examples of Systems-level Thinking: QRIS Requirements

- For screenings, who else within your state already conducts screenings and how can the QRIS requirements promote connections with the other efforts rather than require programs to conduct the assessments?
- Are specific instruments required in programs within your state? If so, can you adopt the same instruments as part of your QRIS requirements (and/or establish a joint process for reviewing and selecting instruments)?
Examples of Systems-level Thinking: Support for and Monitoring of Child Assessments

- Who else provides professional development on child assessment and what can be included in QRIS requirements to encourage programs to utilize the PD resources in your state?
- What resources are available to help programs interpret results of the assessments?
- Can professional development/TA providers with expertise in child assessment assist with monitoring and supporting programs?
Discussion Questions

1. What are the benefits and challenges of addressing child assessments within a QRIS?

2. Have there been any unintended negative consequences of requiring child assessments as part of QRIS?

3. What challenges would you anticipate related to a systems-level approach to addressing child assessments? How would you address these challenges?

4. What lessons learned would you like to share?
Resources & References
Compendia of Child Assessments & Screeners


Compendia of Child Assessments & Screeners


References

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For More Information

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