

North Carolina's Kindergarten Entry Assessment (NC KEA)

The Vision

The NC Kindergarten Entry Assessment (NC KEA) will occur during the first sixty days of enrollment and will be the first implementation of a broader K-3 formative assessment process. North Carolina's vision for a state-wide K-3 formative assessment process is to provide resources and an electronic platform that will help teachers gain a better understanding of the whole child and students' progress towards standards. North Carolina understands and is committed to helping teachers address five domains of learning and development* because they are linked and therefore all important to children's success in school and life. When teachers are able to make early determinations about where individual children are in relation to their learning and development and act upon the information gathered, it impacts children's success with academic experiences throughout the early elementary years (K-3). The NC KEA is aligned with North Carolina's Foundations for Early Learning and Development and the NC Standard Course of Study (NC SCOS, which includes the Common Core State Standards and NC's Essential Standards).

Guidelines from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's Office of Early Learning regarding the NC KEA process:

- Addresses five domains of learning and development
- Is accessible and appropriate for the greatest number of children
- Is formative in nature
- Is embedded in and a part of daily instruction
- Guides teaching and learning
- Collects data in multiple ways
- Is *not* used to make high-stakes accountability decisions for children, teachers or programs
- Align with early learning guidelines and the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NC Essential Standards and Common Core State Standards)

Components of the NC KEA

The NC KEA is designed to help teachers use the observational and authentic evidence of learning that they gather during daily instruction in order to help identify where children are on construct progressions* of learning and development within the five domains. It also provides general situations* as examples of daily instructional experiences as well as specific situations* for teachers to use to elicit evidences of where children are with respect to their learning and development on the construct progressions. The NC KEA situations are intended to provide children with opportunities to express themselves as individual learners. When engaging in NC KEA situations, children *make, do, say, or write* something that will generate evidence of their learning and development. In addition, the NC KEA includes tasks* that teachers can use with individual children to help collect additional evidence if needed. As teachers collect evidence they make determinations regarding where children currently are on a construct progression of learning and development (or "best fit"*). This evidence is then evaluated and

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used to inform instructional planning for individuals and groups of students. This formative process can be used throughout the year by consistently integrating opportunities to gather evidence of learning into the daily instructional process and then using that evidence to inform instructional changes.

As kindergarten teachers work to establish routines and procedures and build a community of learners, it is important to consider a daily structure that will allow for students to make choices and work collaboratively and independently throughout the day (please see North Carolina's *Power of K Position Statement*). By providing these opportunities for our early learners, the teacher can balance the shifts from being the provider of information to the facilitator of learning.

*see the *Glossary of Terms* section

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Glossary of Terms

“Best Fit”: Teachers decide what skill on a construct progression best describes what they determine is the student's overall performance based on the evidence they have gathered.

Claim:

Claims are broad learning goals for each of 5 domains of learning and development that have been identified as most critical for student success. The claims provide the foundation for the North Carolina Kindergarten Entry Assessment.

Construct:

A construct refers to what the assessment has been designed to measure within a specified claim. The constructs for the NC KEA are: engagement in self-selected activities, emotional literacy, fine motor development, following directions, object counting.

Construct Progression:

A carefully sequenced set of understandings and skills for a particular concept or subject matter that traces the development of learning over time from a rudimentary form through more sophisticated states. Construct progressions are not standards, pacing guides, or curriculum scope and sequences. Rather, construct progressions lay out increasingly more complex understandings of core concepts, principles or skill development, providing a picture of what it means to develop in an area of learning (Heritage, 2008).

Construct progressions help teachers identify learning goals to answer where is the learner going, provide an interpretive framework to make inferences from evidence gathered to identify where the learner is now, and point the way to what the student needs next. Progressions are aligned to the NC Standards for Early Learning and Development and the NC Standard Course of Study (Common Core State Standards and NC Essential Standards).

Construct progressions are comprised of 3 parts: understandings, skills, and performance descriptors.

- **Understandings:** Identify the major concepts within a particular construct
- **Skills:** Identify the competencies within each “understanding,” ranging from simple to more complex levels
- **Performance Descriptors:** Paint a picture of what a child may say, do, make or write to demonstrate his/her understanding or skill at each stage of the progression. Performance descriptors help teachers make inferences from evidence gathered to identify where the learners’ best fit is along the progression.

Five Domains of Learning and Development:

1. **Approaches to Learning** addresses how children learn and includes children’s attitudes toward and interest in learning. It reflects behaviors and skills such as curiosity, planning, flexibility, motivation, focus, problem-solving, and persistence. Children show these characteristics in the way they learn in all the domains and curriculum areas.
2. **Cognitive Development** focuses on children’s ability to acquire, organize, and use information in increasingly complex ways. In their search for understanding and meaning, children play an active role in their own cognitive development. They begin to explain, organize, construct, and predict skills that lay the cognitive foundation needed to explore and understand increasingly

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sophisticated concepts and the world in which they live. They learn to apply prior knowledge to new experiences, and then use this information to refine their understanding of concepts as well as form new understanding.

3. **Emotional and Social Development** includes children's feelings about themselves and also addresses their ability to relate to others. Learning to manage and express emotions is also a part of this domain. Children's development in this domain affects their development in every other domain. For instance, children who develop a positive sense of self are more likely to try new things and work toward reaching goals. They tend to accept new challenges and feel more confident about their ability to handle problems or difficulties that may arise.
4. **Health and Physical Development** focuses on physical growth and motor development, sound nutritional choices, self-care, and health/safety practices. This domain is the foundation for the future health and well-being of all children. Good physical health and motor development supports children's learning and plays a part in their ability to be successful in almost any type of activity.
5. **Language Development and Communication** focuses on the foundational skills that children acquire and use in early elementary school and which continue to develop throughout their schooling. These skills include speaking, listening, reading, and writing. This domain encompasses nonverbal and verbal language skills used in understanding language and speaking effectively with others as well as important emergent literacy skills in early reading and writing. This domain provides an integrated approach for understanding and supporting language and literacy development in children.

Formative Assessment:

Formative assessment is a process that provides insight into a student's learning and assists the teacher and student in deciding how to make adjustments in teaching and learning so the student's learning continues. The primary purpose of the formative assessment process is to provide evidence that is used by teachers and students to inform instruction and learning during the teaching/learning process. Formative assessment is the link between today's and tomorrow's instruction (FAST SCASS, 2008, p.3).

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction has adopted the following definition of formative assessment:

"Formative assessment is a process used by teachers and students during instruction that provides feedback to adjust ongoing teaching and learning to improve intended instructional outcomes." (CCSSO FAST SCASS, 2006).

Observation: A process used by educators to watch, listen to, and record what students say, do, write and create during the course of daily activities. "Observation provides information teachers can use to understand what and how a child is thinking, feeling, and learning and plan ways to support and enhance the child's development of skills in all domains" (NAEYC, 2014).

Probes: Questions or statements that allow a teacher to search into, question closely, and investigate thoroughly what a student understands without leading or guiding the student toward a conclusion or answer.

Situations: Intentionally planned instructional activities designed to give teachers guidance on or examples for how to set up a learning situation to learn about students through observation and probing. There are two types of situations: general and specific.

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- **General Situations:** Highlight potential opportunities in daily experiences while providing a brief illustration of one such opportunity.
- **Specific Situations:** Describe a specific example of an activity or opportunity, illustrating what a teacher may say, do and observe during the situation.

Tasks: Individually administered activities designed to collect evidence that addresses the breadth of an entire progression. Depending on the instructional need, tasks can be administered in sections at different times, administered multiple times, or parts of a task can be selected in an effort to pinpoint a particular portion of the progression.

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Kindergarten Entry Assessment vs. Developmental Screening

In the field of early childhood education many terms and definitions are used interchangeably, often causing confusion. The terms developmental screener and kindergarten entry assessment are two of these terms that are frequently confused. However, it is important to distinguish between the two, as the purpose for each is different.

Developmental screeners are instruments used for early identification of children at risk for cognitive, motor, communication, social or emotional delays that may interfere with expected growth, learning and development and warrant further diagnosis, assessment and evaluation. The *primary purpose* of a developmental screener is to detect a delay in a child's typical development so that early intervention may occur. As children make the transition into kindergarten, many school districts administer a developmental screener with incoming students. Some school districts use a locally created assessment while others rely on a commercially produced developmental screen. A few examples include: Brigance, Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning 4 (DIAL 4), and the Early Screening Inventory-Revised (ESI-R).

A Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA), as defined by the BUILD Initiative (2014), is an organized way to learn what children know and are able to do, including their disposition toward learning, when they enter kindergarten and/or at other times. The *primary purpose* of a kindergarten entry assessment is to provide a snapshot of a child's development. The teacher then uses the information from the KEA as a starting point for planning individualized instruction for each child. The North Carolina KEA is designed to be an authentic, observational assessment across all five areas of development and learning with observations, intentional situations, probes, and tasks for a select number of constructs in each of the developmental domains. Unlike a developmental screener, a kindergarten entry assessment is not a diagnostic tool or a test to determine developmental delays.

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