

Legislative Report Early Childhood Assessment



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State of Iowa
Department of Education
Grimes State Office Building
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Des Moines, IA 50319-0146

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INTRODUCTION

Iowa Code section 279.60: Assessments - access to data - reports

The 2014 General Assembly passed legislation requiring local school districts to complete the following:

- Administer Teaching Strategies GOLD early childhood assessment to every resident prekindergarten or four-year-old child whose parent or guardian enrolls the child in the district;
- Administer a valid and reliable universal screening instrument as prescribed by the Iowa Department of Education (Department) to every kindergarten student enrolled in the district (Iowa Code section 270.60);
- Collect from each parent guardian or legal custodian of a kindergarten student enrolled in the district, information including, but not limited to, preschool attendance and demographic factors;
- Report the results of assessments and preschool information to the Department no later than January 1 of that school year; and

Submit findings and recommendations annually in a report to the governor, the general assembly, the Early Childhood Iowa State Board, and the Early Childhood Iowa area boards.

REPORT OF PRESCHOOL PARTICIPATION

Districts reported the number of students who had attended preschool at any time twelve months prior to registering for kindergarten. Districts gathered the information through parent reports or district records. Preschool participation has been defined to include attending any district or non-district preschool program including Head Start, local private preschools, and preschools funded by Early Childhood Iowa scholarships. Data analysis should consider variations in program design due to differing program requirements and/or local expectations. In 2019-20, districts data reported indicated 86 percent of students entering kindergarten for the first time attended a preschool program in the prior year.*

Data Source: Student Reporting in Iowa, fall 2019 files

*Data should be interpreted cautiously. Due to SRI data collection vendor and validation process changes in 2019-2020, there were more than 8,900 first time kindergarteners missing information for preschool attendance.

PRESCHOOL—ASSESSMENT TOOL USED

Iowa Code section 279.60 requires preschool programs under the authority of the Department of Education to administer Teaching Strategies GOLD™ (GOLD). This is an online, ongoing, portfolio-based assessment system for children from birth to grade three. GOLD blends portfolio-based assessment for all areas of development and learning with performance tasks to predict school success across developmental areas. Specifically, the developmental domains on GOLD are: social-emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy, mathematics, social studies, science and technology, and the arts. Documentation for each child is also collected on an ongoing basis across areas of development and examined regularly to assist teachers in completing progress checkpoints. Up to three times a year, teachers complete a progress checkpoint for each child across the required developmental domains based on analysis of portfolio evidence. Levels used to indicate how a child is doing at a checkpoint are based on widely held expectations for child development.

KINDERGARTEN—ASSESSMENT TOOL USED

The Department aligned the kindergarten assessment requirements of Iowa Code section 279.60 with Iowa Code section 279.68, the statutory requirements for ensuring that all students are at benchmark in reading by the end of third grade. This law requires each school district assess all students enrolled in kindergarten at the beginning of the school year for their level of reading or reading readiness on a locally determined or statewide assessment. Locally determined assessments that districts select must meet minimum standards for reliability and validity established by the Department. In order to support districts in the implementation of Iowa Codes section 279.68, the Department reviewed early literacy assessments for universal screening and progress monitoring to determine valid and reliable instruments.

Table 1 depicts the various kindergarten literacy assessment instruments used in school districts. Each of these assessment tools measures early literacy concepts including print, letter names, and sounds and beginning sounds (phonemic awareness) in young children. One assessment tool commonly used by districts is the Formative Assessment System for Teachers (FAST).

Table 1. Percent of Iowa School Districts and Kindergarten Assessment Tool Administered in Fall 2019

Kindergarten Assessment	# Districts Used as Default Assessment in Fall 2018	% Districts Used as Default Assessment in Fall 2018
FAST Kindergarten Composite	325	99.4%
NWEA MAP Growth	1	0.3%
STAR Early Literacy	1	0.3%
TOTAL	327	100.0%

Data Source: IDOE Default Assessment Survey File, fall 2019

PRESCHOOL—ASSESSMENT RESULTS

In the GOLD Comparative Report, children were compared to a readiness benchmark reflecting objectives and performance typical of students at entry to kindergarten. The objectives and readiness benchmarks for specific domains were established by the Teaching Strategies research team. Data shown in Table 2 represents preschool children who met the GOLD kindergarten readiness benchmark in various developmental domains in spring 2019. This includes data from all preschool programs in GOLD under the Iowa Department of Education Statewide License with Teaching Strategies (although some programs are not under DE authority).

Table 2. Spring 2019 Assessment of Kindergarten Readiness for Preschool

Teaching Strategies GOLD Area of Development	Number of 4 Year Old Children	Percent at or Above Benchmark
Social-Emotional	24,368	88.1%
Physical	24,306	93.2%
Language	24,287	85.0%
Cognitive	24,346	86.7%
Literacy	24,283	83.6%
Mathematics	24,395	76.4%

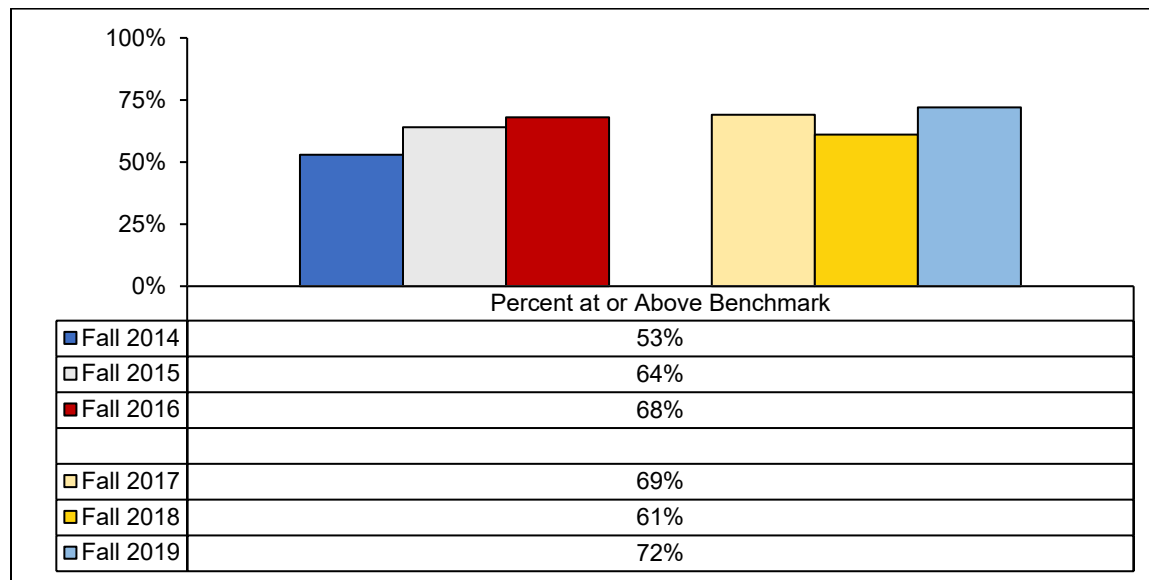
Data Source: Teaching Strategies GOLD Online Assessment System, spring 2019

Note-Values may fluctuate as some programs may have elected to not report spring checkpoint data.

KINDERGARTEN—ASSESSMENT RESULTS

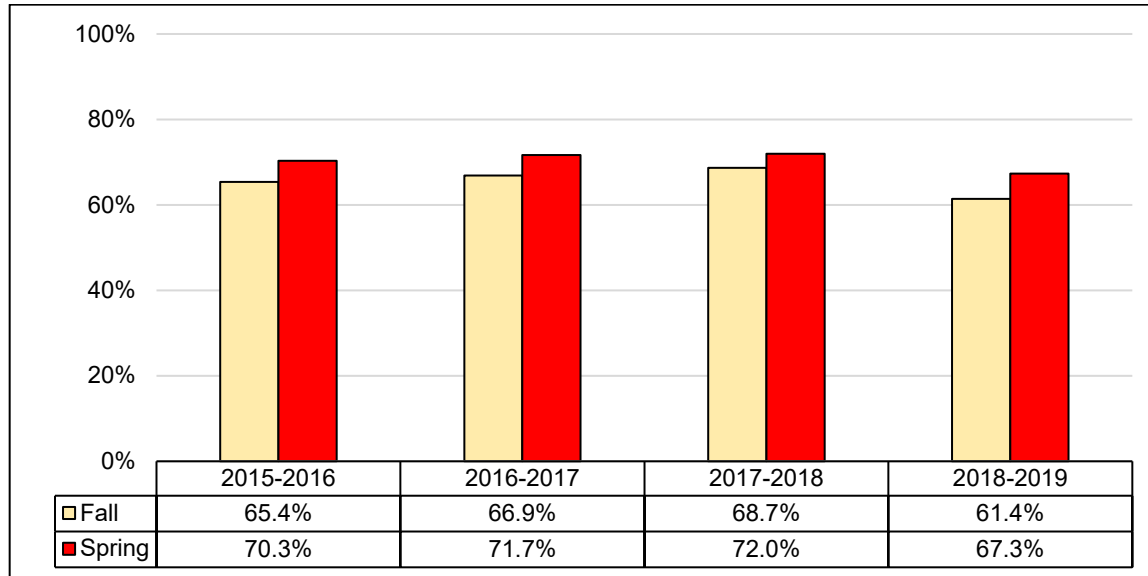
To determine kindergarten performance, students are compared based on a criterion or benchmark aligned with relevant outcomes. A composite or total score is calculated based on assessment subtests. The composite score is reported to determine the percent of children at benchmark meeting expectations in regard to early reading skills at the beginning of kindergarten. In fall 2019, 38,562 kindergarten students were assessed using the Formative Assessment System for Teachers (FAST); data indicate 27,683 students (72 percent) of those assessed were at or above the benchmark for kindergarten (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Percent of Students in Kindergarten At or Above Benchmark in Beginning Reading Skills Using an Approved Early Literacy Screening Assessment Measure, 2014-2019



Data Source: Iowa TIER Data System, 2014-2016 data; FastBridge Learning Data System, 2017-2019 data; 2014-2016 data include all approved screeners; 2017-2019 data only include FAST screeners

Figure 2. State Screening Data Trends for the Percent of Students in Kindergarten At or Above Benchmark in Beginning Reading Skills, 2015-2019



Data Source: Iowa TIER Data System, 2014-2016 data; FastBridge Learning Data System, 2017-2019 data; 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 data include all approved literacy assessments, 2017-2019 data only include FAST screeners; school self-selected default assessment data represented using 2015-2016 benchmark cuts; represents district and participating non-public schools

The year-by-year trend results (Figure 2) since 2015 illustrate an overall increasing trend statewide in the number of children at or above benchmark. By the end of kindergarten, children have grown in their development of early literacy skills.

SUMMARY

Results suggest statewide efforts to increase proficiency of literacy skills are positively impacting student learning in kindergarten. In preschool, statewide efforts have included implementation of the Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards, the National Association for the Education of Young Children Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria, the Head Start Program Performance Standards, and early literacy instructional strategies. Ongoing efforts in the alignment of assessment, curriculum, and instruction to assist in closing the achievement gap for young children are needed. Recommendations supportive of such efforts include the following:

- Continue state funding supporting the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of quality preschool programming.
- Support quality preschool programs through maintaining program standards and implementation of Iowa Early Learning Standards (IELS) in order to prepare children for success in kindergarten.
- Support quality professional development that addresses the Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards, Iowa Early Learning Standards, and the alignment of IELS with the kindergarten standards of the Iowa academic and recommended standards (Iowa Core).
- Provide technical assistance through area education agency (AEA) early childhood consultants.

- Continue work focused on preschool with Collaborating for Iowa's Kids (C4K), a partnership between the Department, AEAs, and local education agencies. The intent of the C4K collaborative is to effectively and efficiently work as a comprehensive educational system to accomplish agreed-upon high-impact priorities in joint efforts in preschool through grade twelve.