

*On Track: Ensuring School Readiness  
for Arizona's Children*



*A Report to the Arizona Department of Education  
from the Kindergarten Developmental Inventory  
Stakeholder Taskforce*

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*November 2013*



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## *Introduction*

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*The need for information about the status of children’s development and learning at the start of formal schooling is clear. However, while there is a growing volume of large-scale kindergarten readiness assessment efforts in states and local communities, few resources have been invested in developing assessment tools that address the full range of domains of early learning and child development, and the multiple purposes of such assessments ... With proper resources and informed leadership, states can implement kindergarten readiness assessments as a key resource in a nationwide effort to support healthy development, early learning, and school success for all young children.*

— Moving Forward with Kindergarten Readiness Assessment Efforts  
*The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)*

There is growing momentum among states to collect student data around the time that children enter kindergarten. Often known as Kindergarten Entry Assessments (KEA) or Kindergarten Readiness Assessments, the interest in such assessments has grown because state-level policymakers recognize the value to teachers, children, and their families of data collected during this pivotal transition period in children’s lives—as children begin their formal education in the K-12 school system. Momentum for Kindergarten Entry Assessments has also grown as the federal Race to the Top–Early Learning Challenge grant incentivizes KEA activities. As a result, more than 40 states either have or are planning KEA data collection systems (Scott-Little, 2012).



In early 2013, Arizona embarked on the process of developing its own KEA, which will be named the Kindergarten Developmental Inventory (KDI). Through the guidance of the KDI partners - the Arizona Department of Education (ADE), the Arizona State Board of Education, First Things First (FTF), and Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust – a Kindergarten Developmental Inventory Stakeholder Taskforce was convened with the goal of providing recommendations to ADE and FTF on the process for developing a KDI in Arizona.

The goal of the stakeholder process was to gather feedback and recommendations on the following questions:

- What are the appropriate and inappropriate uses of a KDI?
- What are the key considerations and expectations related to the assessment tool (validity, psychometrics, administration, etc.)?
- Where are there opportunities for alignment with the early learning system and grades 3-12 assessments?
- What needs to be considered related to the demographics and diversity of the population of kindergarten students in Arizona?
- What guidance is needed around professional development for teachers and school administrators and to ensure the reliability and validity of implementation?
- What messaging and communication are needed for families, educators, and policymakers?

Through three in-person Stakeholder Taskforce meetings, feedback and suggestions were gathered from a diverse group of early childhood experts, K-12 educators and administrators, policymakers, and others (please refer to the appendix for a list of KDI Stakeholder Taskforce members).

This report outlines key considerations for an Arizona KDI planning process, along with suggestions related to KDI implementation. In addition, this report offers background information on Kindergarten Entry Assessments (KEAs) – why they are important and what other states are currently implementing.

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## *Background Information*

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Before moving forward with the development of a KDI in Arizona, it is important to understand the national KEA movement presently taking place, in addition to Arizona's current early childhood assessment process and kindergarten assessment process.

### **KEA BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

KEAs are being implemented because they can provide a number of potential benefits for educational systems, as well as for individual teachers and students. The potential benefits states envision for KEAs include:

- Opportunities to help kindergarten teachers get to know students and their families more quickly at the beginning of the school year.
- Data that teachers can use to better understand individual student strengths and weaknesses so they can plan individualized educational experiences to build on the student's strengths and address specific developmental areas in which the student may need additional support.
- Information that can be used to identify developmental areas in which a cohort of children generally is doing well and areas in which children are not doing as well. This information can be used to provide clues about how well the state's early childhood resources have supported children's development and learning, and inform programs about potential gaps or weaknesses in services provided to children and families before kindergarten entry.
- Data that can be used to identify teachers' professional development needs. For instance, teachers may need additional professional development on how to support student development and learning in the areas where KEA data indicate children are not doing so well.

Across the country, states' KEAs vary in how they collect student data, and in the types of information collected. Some states, such as Colorado and Delaware, use commercially available assessment tools, while other states like California, Connecticut, and Hawaii, have developed their own assessment tool. The KEAs in all states collect student data within a couple of months of starting kindergarten, and a few, such as Maryland and Ohio, will have

KEA systems that collect data more than once over the course of students' kindergarten year or beyond (North Carolina proposes collecting data into third grade). All states rely on the kindergarten teacher to collect at least some of the data included in their KEA, and several states also collect information from families. For instance, Delaware has developed a parent questionnaire and Washington includes a parent interview as part of the KEA process. Some states, such as Maryland and Ohio, are developing computer technology to help teachers collect and use the KEA data (Wat, Bruner, & Hanus, 2012).

States also are planning on using a variety of strategies to support teachers as they implement the KEA. All states provide initial training on the assessment tool and how to administer it with children. Some offer this training at the state level, while others such as Kentucky envision regional training centers. Some offer on-going technical assistance and a few provide or intend to provide coaches to work with teachers as they implement the KEA (Wat, Bruner, & Hanus, 2012). Looking across the country, it is clear that KEAs are increasingly common and, though the way they are implemented varies, states clearly are investing significant resources to design and implement assessment systems to collect data from children at the time they enter kindergarten.

## **BACKGROUND ON ARIZONA'S CURRENT EARLY CHILDHOOD AND K-3 ASSESSMENT**

### **Arizona's current early childhood assessment process**

Currently, screening and monitoring are taking place in various ways within Arizona's early learning community, with the goal of providing information about children that can be beneficial to providers and families. Preschoolers, particularly those receiving special education services in public school programs or in Head Start, are assessed using Teaching Strategies Gold, the tool that the Arizona State Board of Education has adopted for universal use within its preschool programs. The information that is gathered can help to inform instruction and give teachers the information they need to support child learning and aid in facilitating early intervention that may be necessary.

FTF also supports early childhood assessment through its Quality First program. The goal of Quality First, Arizona's Quality Improvement and Rating System for Early Care and Education Programs, is to improve the early care and education in Arizona so young children can begin school safe, healthy, and ready to succeed. FTF does not currently mandate the use of a specific tool within its Quality First sites, but it does require that all of its four-and five-star Quality First sites (five star being the highest quality site) conduct an assessment that aligns with the Arizona Infant Toddler Developmental Guidelines and the Arizona Early Learning Standards.

## Spotlight: Mindy Zapata



Mindy Zapata was a member of the KDI Stakeholder Taskforce and is Southwest Human Development's Early Head Start and Head Start Director. She oversees and manages both programs that work in partnership with families to ensure children are ready for school success. Mindy has more than 1,000 children in her programs, which are based in five metro Phoenix school districts.

Mindy believes that a KDI can help children, families, and teachers with the transition to kindergarten. "What a KDI would offer to the Head Start community is an opportunity to deepen those transition activities that occur already." These transition activities include classroom visits prior to the start of the school year and parent preparation around Common Core. A KDI would allow kindergarten teachers and preschool teachers to work closely with families, and children to align practices."

In addition to informing kindergarten teachers, Mindy believes that a KDI would be useful for preschool teachers. "The early childhood field is deepening its knowledge about some of the global capacities that preschoolers need as they enter the classroom," she says. "We aren't as strong in math and science literacy. And so KDI data flowing back to the preschool side could inform the curriculum that is done with the students. A KDI would identify where there are curricular gaps in early childhood. And then in a developmentally appropriate manner, we could strengthen the instructional practices happening in preschool. Students would then be better academically rounded when they enter kindergarten."

Finally, Mindy feels that a KDI would help to bring together the early childhood community with the K-12 community. "The other exciting byproduct of a KDI is that it would create an atmosphere of common ground with our public-school partners. With assessments, it is high stakes, and sometimes that is not a unifying factor; it becomes a segregating factor in education. A KDI would allow for an important union with early childhood and primary educators to see the developmental continuum. There are significant changes that happen as children move into kindergarten. The KDI offers the opportunity for practitioners, families, and communities to build a system that starts them on the path for positive school success from the very beginning."

While FTF has not yet selected a universal tool for use in its Quality First programs, it anticipates selecting a tool that will align with an Arizona KDI, and also align with any first- and second-grade assessments that are developed, and the third-grade assessment that is aligned to college and careers readiness standards that will be used beginning in the 2014-15 school year. This alignment is important because the information generated from early childhood and K-3 assessments offers early learning providers and the K-12 system an opportunity to collaborate more closely. This collaboration can help build partnerships that will support student success across the learning continuum, and offer a unique opportunity for early learning professionals and kindergarten teachers to work together to ensure a smooth transition as children and their families enter the K-12 system.

While the primary purpose of a KDI in Arizona is to provide teachers with information for instructional purposes, a secondary purpose is to provide aggregate data that can be used to monitor trends across cohorts of students, thus providing information that can be very helpful to the early childhood community. A KDI can serve as a “marker” of students’ early learning, and since it will encompass all five domains (physical and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language development and cognitive development), a holistic picture of the student can be created. With the data captured as students enter kindergarten, early childhood instructional practices can be strengthened and tailored, and any gaps in services that may exist can be filled.

### **Arizona’s current kindergarten assessment process**

Arizona has a number of initiatives underway to support teachers and promote children’s success in the early elementary grades. For example, a state-level school readiness committee is developing a definition of kindergarten readiness to guide the early childhood community and the K-12 education system’s efforts to promote smooth and effective transitions to kindergarten. The definition stipulates that children’s general knowledge as well as their ability to regulate their behavior and emotions, and to demonstrate positive approaches toward learning are all important for their future success in school.

*Arizona’s young children will demonstrate school readiness through the essential domains of language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge (including early mathematics and early scientific development), approaches toward learning (curiosity, initiative, persistence, creativity, problem-solving and confidence), physical well-being and motor development, and self-regulation of attention and emotion. Intentional development of skills and knowledge in these domains establishes a critical foundation for children to engage in and benefit from opportunities to learn.*

– Arizona School Readiness Committee

Please note that this definition is a draft, and has not yet been vetted by the community. It is subject to change even before vetting begins.

ADE has also taken steps to provide guidance to teachers on what students should learn and what teachers can do to improve instruction in the early grades. The Arizona K-12 Academic Standards define what students should know and be able to do in subject areas such as science, social studies, and physical education, and include the Common Core Standards in Mathematics and English Language Arts. One goal for these standards is to ensure that children develop skills and knowledge that will prepare them for success in the

21<sup>st</sup> century. Arizona has also recognized the importance of children's early reading skills and has implemented a series of early reading initiatives known collectively as Move on When Reading. Legislative statutes require that schools provide effective reading instruction that is informed by diagnostic screenings and ongoing measures of students' progress in learning to read. Schools must develop and implement a comprehensive plan for how they will provide effective K-3 literacy instruction, and beginning in the 2013-14 school year, are required to retain third-graders who score a "falls far below" on the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) assessment.

Along with these efforts to define what students should learn and to promote effective instruction in the early grades, Arizona has recognized the need for assessments to provide information on children's knowledge and skills at all grade levels. Good assessments that are aligned with the standards that define what children should know and be able to do are key components of effective instruction. The Arizona State Board of Education is committed to a process that will look closely at several college and career ready (CCR) assessments to find one that best fits with Arizona's requirements, and provides useful information for teachers working with children in third grade and beyond. The KDI planning process extends this investment in assessments that can inform instruction down into kindergarten.

The current emphasis on providing better support for students in kindergarten through third grade is a high priority and is a response to the need for better assessments. In the absence of a statewide assessment to guide kindergarten teachers as they make instructional decisions about students, many districts have implemented their own assessments. There is great variability across the state in how students are assessed and how the information from the assessments is used. Therefore, the KDI partners believe there is a need for a statewide assessment to be used in kindergarten to:

- Provide a state-level picture of how Arizona's children are doing when they enter kindergarten
- Inform intentional instruction in a more consistent way across the state, so teachers can meet individual student needs more effectively
- Provide families with information on children's skills and knowledge
- Guide professional development for teachers
- Support more effective partnerships between early childhood programs and kindergarten programs by providing data that teachers and administrators from both educational communities can use.

## Spotlight: Michelle Novelli



Michelle Novelli, a member of the KDI Stakeholder Taskforce, is a kindergarten teacher at Killip Elementary School in the Flagstaff Unified School District. She has taught at Killip for fourteen years, and has been a kindergarten teacher at Killip for nine years. Michelle is a strong supporter of a KDI for a number of reasons. First and foremost, she feels that collecting a broad spectrum of data can be very useful to kindergarten teachers at the start of the school year, especially if it goes beyond just math and literacy assessment.

“I would like to see something that goes beyond academics and includes the social-emotional piece. I really like having the five domains included in the KDI,” she says.

In addition, Michelle’s school has a high transiency rate. Roughly 30% of the students who start the school year in her classroom will be gone by the end of the year. For this reason, she feels that a universal KDI, conducted in all schools across Arizona, would be very useful. “Being a Title I school, Killip Elementary has a high transiency rate. So students we start with may be at a different school within a few months. Having something statewide would be very useful. That consistency would be very helpful for teachers.”

When asked how she would make use of the information generated from a KDI, Michelle says that there are myriad ways that it could impact teachers, students, and parents.

“There are so many ways to use KDI information. When you get that initial information on a student, it is so important to be positive about what each child knows and focus on strengths, not deficits. If I have solid information that someone is lacking in knowledge, then I know that we have a lot of preschool building to do before we do other work like kindergarten Common Core. When we know where they are at, we can honor and respect that, and work from that foundation. We don’t have to work from improper information and we won’t get so frustrated with the student. It’s a win-win. It helps with intervention, enrichment, and day-to-day classroom work. The more we know, the better we can do for our students.”

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## *Setting the Stage for the KDI*

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### **PURPOSE OF THE ARIZONA KDI**

In the fall of 2011, Arizona applied for the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge – a federal grant jointly issued by the U.S. departments of Education and Health and Human Services. The Governor’s Office, Arizona Department of Education, First Things First, and Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust jointly agreed to advance a plan that would begin phasing in a KEA by school year 2014-15. Included in that plan was \$3 million in development funds from Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust.

Though Arizona was not a successful applicant, the application prompted additional conversations among a set of core partners – ADE, the Arizona State Board of Education, FTF, and Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust – about the state’s implementation of a KDI. All parties agreed that given the implementation of Arizona’s Common Core Standards and Move on When Reading, and the essential learning that occurs in kindergarten, it is important that kindergarten teachers have an assessment tool that guides instructional strategy. In addition, with First Things First implementing Quality First – a statewide quality improvement and rating system – now more than ever, alignment between preschool and early elementary grades is essential.

The small group of core partners that met regularly agreed on several items. First, in Arizona the KEA would be referred to as the Kindergarten Developmental Inventory (KDI). Second, a common purpose statement would be developed and adopted, and on August 17, 2012, the KDI Purpose Statement was written. It reads as follows:

To provide a kindergarten developmental inventory tool that allows parents, teachers and administrators to understand the extent of a child’s learning and development at the beginning of kindergarten to provide instruction that will lead to the child’s academic success. The tool that is developed or adopted will align with the *Arizona Early Learning Standards* and *Arizona’s Common Core Standards* for kindergarten, cover all essential domains of school readiness (physical and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language development, and cognitive development) and will be reliable and valid for its intended use.

The partners also agreed that the key next step in the process was to convene a larger group of stakeholders to serve in a core advisory capacity as the partners moved forward. Thus, the KDI Stakeholder Taskforce was created in January 2013.

## KDI STAKEHOLDER TASKFORCE

In early 2013, the KDI partner group identified 24 KDI stakeholders and invited them to participate as members of the KDI Stakeholder Taskforce. The stakeholders were a diverse group, including early childhood experts, K-12 administrators and teachers, policymakers, program directors, professors from Arizona's higher-education institutions, and nonprofit executives. In addition, a diverse geographic composition of stakeholders represented communities across Arizona including Chandler, Coolidge, Flagstaff, Glendale, Mesa, Mohave Valley, Phoenix, Surprise, Tempe, Tucson, Window Rock, and Yuma.

Three in-person Stakeholder Taskforce meetings were held between March and July 2013. Each five-hour meeting was held at the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust offices in Phoenix. The meetings began with the presentation of background information and progressed to a facilitated discussion. The goal of each meeting was to gather feedback and suggestions around one of the three key issues related to a KDI – the inventory or tool, professional development (PD), and communication. Reaching consensus around these issues was not the goal of the meetings. Rather, the primary purpose was to document stakeholder feedback and ideas related to these three key issues. The meeting topics were as follows:

### *KDI Stakeholder Taskforce Meeting #1 – March 28, 2013*

- Overview: What is a KDI and why is a KDI important?
- Overview: What are other states doing around KEAs? What is happening nationally?
- Facilitated Discussion: What are your initial thoughts about the KDI planning and design process? What are your ideas related to KDI instrumentation considerations? What are your thoughts related to the KDI implementation process?

### *KDI Stakeholder Taskforce Meeting #2 – May 23, 2013*

- Overview: What is an inventory?
- Overview: What does professional development currently look like in Arizona?
- Facilitated Discussion: What issues need to be considered when selecting an inventory? What does a comprehensive KDI professional development plan look like?

### *KDI Stakeholder Taskforce Meeting #3 – July 1, 2013*

- Overview: Washington State's Kindergarten Entry Assessment (WaKIDs) communication strategies and lessons learned
- Facilitated Discussion: With whom are we communicating about a KDI? What issues need to be considered with a KDI communications plan? What strategies should be used to communicate about a KDI?



As mentioned previously, the stakeholders discussed three key areas of KDI development – the inventory, professional development, and communications. A summary of each conversation is below, including the stakeholders’ key considerations and recommendations on each of the three topics.

### **THE DEVELOPMENTAL INVENTORY**

During the discussion around the potential KDI inventory, participants provided input on the following aspects of an inventory tool: types of information to be gathered from an inventory, potential users of the information, usefulness of the information for the intended users, appropriateness for Arizona’s population, types of assessments, administration of the inventory, feasibility issues, and psychometric properties. The discussion yielded seven major recommendations.

*1. Stay focused on the purpose statement to ensure that the KDI will assess all developmental domains and yield information that teachers can use for differentiated instruction.*

- While most districts currently conduct some form of assessment prior to the start of kindergarten, or soon after the school year begins, most of the assessments are academic, and do not cover multiple domains. The stakeholder group was interested in gathering information outside of what is typically gathered, in an effort to create a holistic picture of each child’s strengths coming into kindergarten.

*2. Users of the KDI should include teachers, parents, administrators, Response to Intervention (RTI) specialists, Individual Education Plan (IEP) teams, and researchers; they need to ensure that the results are useful to them.*

- The stakeholders placed repeated emphasis on the importance of parent involvement in the KDI process. “The KDI assessment is an opportunity to help parents not view this assessment as a gatekeeper – what’s wrong with my child and what am I doing wrong? – but it’s an opportunity to identify their expectations, thoughts, and strengths around their child. And that can engage the school in conversations to move forward on the child’s behalf.” – KDI stakeholder
- It was strongly recommended that school administrators and others who closely interact with the child be included in the KDI process.

3. *The KDI needs to provide a learning profile for each child that is immediately available. Consider offering results on a tablet or other type of technology.*

- The stakeholders were in agreement that time is of the essence when it comes to the processing of assessment data. Teachers, parents, administrators, and others cannot wait weeks for data to be processed. Sophisticated technology is needed to ensure that results are quickly available to everyone making use of the information. “Scoring needs to be electronic, so data immediately gets sent off and information is received in a timely fashion. Then it becomes a useful tool. We need a user-friendly technology format with immediate feedback. If teachers have to wait weeks for data, you won’t get much buy-in from them.” – KDI stakeholder
- According to one kindergarten teacher, “The kindergarten classroom is a crazy, overwhelming, and chaotic environment, and it’s my job to figure out where the children are all at. The academics will fit in eventually, but the bigger question is how ready are they to be there – to listen to stories, to get along with the kids next to them, to be separated from their parents or caregivers. It’s important to have that quick understanding of what the child knows. If we are just walking around with question marks, it’s hard to get busy working in the classroom. There’s not much time with 180 days. We can’t waste it by not knowing where kids are academically and developmentally.” – KDI stakeholder
- In addition, a KDI stakeholder suggested that, “Good teaching comes from data. Data-based instruction as well as intervention and enrichment makes for good teaching. With data, we will know our students, their strengths and what we can do to support them as learners. If we get quality data early on, then no time is wasted getting kids college and career ready. The more we know, the better we can do for our students.” – KDI stakeholder

4. *Administration of the KDI cannot take too much time for teachers who are already overloaded with responsibilities.*

- The KDI should fit within assessments that teachers are already doing. “The KDI must be relatively quick to administer, with fast results, but thorough enough to give a snapshot of the child entering the classroom. And whatever is created or used must fit in with other assessment already going on in the classroom.” – KDI stakeholder
- The KDI should not require teachers to do extensive analysis on their own; that must be done by a computer program or other means.

5. *All learners must be included, especially children with special needs and students who are English-language learners.*

- Stakeholders felt that validity in languages other than English is very important to the success of a KDI. “In Indian communities, it’s important in the KDI that the questions are worded in a way to validate the cultural knowledge being instilled by parents. I would caution, if you want buy-in with the Native American community, you have to be sensitive. There has to be some way to capture their cultural background – do they know

## Spotlight: Jacquelyn Power



Jacquelyn Power was a member of the KDI Stakeholder Taskforce and is the superintendent and principal for the Blackwater Community School on the Gila River Indian Reservation. The school has roughly 410 students, preschool through fifth grade. Since the school includes a preschool, some of the students entering kindergarten each school year have previously attended Blackwater's preschool. This makes for a unique situation when it comes to a KDI – not only can a KDI inform Blackwater's kindergarten teachers, but Jacquelyn also believes that

it can provide data that can be useful in preschool curriculum development. “How does our preschool line up with state norms, and how do we need to adjust our preschool? Data trumps everything. It's neutral and tells us what direction we need to go. And any information that would be uniform across the board would be helpful to establish an instructional plan for each child.”

Jacquelyn believes strongly in the importance of parent involvement, and she sees the KDI as a means for engaging parents in their child's education. “This is a critical tool for involving parents in being an active part of their child's education. The more you engage parents in an open dialogue with the information, the more they will want to be involved. Any time you can give parents more information about what they have done well, and what they can expect in kindergarten, you are miles ahead in building the relationship between parents and the school.”

Jacquelyn feels that a KDI needs to be cost-effective, and results need to be generated quickly. Teachers and parents need immediate feedback. They can't wait weeks to receive information to inform instruction that has already begun. “There has to be an eye on the cost for the school, so it's within the range of similar assessments. And the scoring needs to be electronic, so data immediately gets sent off, and information is received right away.”

Finally, Jacquelyn has stressed that a KDI needs to be culturally sensitive. “In Native American communities, it is important that KDI questions are worded in a way to validate the cultural knowledge being instilled that parents are working on with their kids.

With Native American communities working hard to revitalize their language in their communities, the assessment needs to respect that. Perhaps the assessment could be translated into those languages. Otherwise, it just becomes another test that everyone has to take. It won't capture the gifts that they bring to the classroom.”



their native alphabet? With Indian communities working hard to revitalize their languages in their communities, the assessment needs to respect that. Perhaps the assessment could be translated into those languages? Otherwise, it just becomes another test that everyone has to take. It won't capture the gifts that each child brings to the classroom."– KDI stakeholder

*6. The KDI should have a strong observational component, but also include some one-on-one direct assessments, rating scales, and parent reports.*

- The stakeholder group had different opinions on how best to structure the assessment. Some felt that one-on-one assessment typically works best, and others felt that would be asking too much of teachers.
- Parent involvement was also supported, although recommendations on how best to include parents differed. "This is a single point in time, a starting point, and who better to give up-front information than the parent or guardian – this could include baseline information related to kindergarten readiness, and that would be given to the child's teacher."– KDI stakeholder.

*7. Make strong psychometric properties a high priority in selecting an inventory.*

- All stakeholders were in agreement that selecting or creating an inventory that is reliable and valid for its intended use is extremely important. Having the right people at the table during the inventory selection or development process will help to ensure that the inventory is valid and reliable.

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (PD)**

Following the inventory conversation, the Stakeholder Taskforce offered suggestions and recommendations regarding professional development that would be needed to successfully implement a KDI. The overarching question posed to stakeholders was, "What do we need to do to create a comprehensive KDI professional development system in Arizona?" Specific questions included: "What types of professional development would be needed?," "How should professional development be implemented?," "What challenges should be expected in the development and implementation of a professional development plan?" The discussion around professional development yielded nine major recommendations.

1. *Examine best practices and what other states are and are not doing around PD.*

- A few states have already implemented KEAs, or are in the process of implementing them, and they have learned lessons that Arizona can benefit from. Researching existing KEAs and spending time learning about their professional development plans can help Arizona develop and launch a comprehensive plan that will be well received by teachers, administrators, and others. Stakeholders suggested, “Look at the evidence for what is effective PD. Take a walk through the good and vigorous PD to see what works, what are the best practices. Just going to a workshop or looking at something online is not necessarily going to work with a KDI.” – KDI stakeholder

2. *Make clear why and how this assessment will be beneficial for teachers.*

- Teacher support for a KDI is obviously a very important component of its success. Helping them to see how the information collected from a KDI can be useful to them is a vital step in the training for and implementation of a KDI.

3. *Get teacher buy-in.*

- Ask teachers what types of PD would be most useful to them.
- Include teachers in the selection or development of the inventory, so they can sell it to their colleagues.
- Select enthusiastic teachers for the pilot group, as they will bring other teachers on board.
- Be cognizant of when training is offered to teachers, given the timelines that work best for them.

4. *Provide PD to school administrators and others who might be involved in the administration of the KDI.*

- “Administrators are the ones who make sure that the PD is taking place. They are the accountability factor in all of this. They make sure this is being administered.” – KDI stakeholder
- Administering the inventory does not involve just kindergarten teachers. Many individuals will be involved, and they need to understand the inventory and their roles and responsibilities around its administration. These individuals include Instructional Technology (IT) staff who will be supporting the KDI’s data processing, curriculum specialists who work with teachers, administrators who will support teachers as they administer the KDI, etc. All of these individuals need PD on the KDI so that they can support teachers as they implement the assessment.

5. *Build on the technology, tools, and other PD strategies that are already available and being used – webinars, Q&A, mentoring, etc.*

- “Accessibility (maybe through webinars) will be important for PD. Asking teachers to leave their classrooms for PD might be a stretch, especially in the smaller districts. Teachers don’t always have the luxury of leaving the classroom.” – KDI stakeholder

## Spotlight: Whitney Crow



Whitney Crow was a member of the KDI Stakeholder Taskforce and is the superintendent of the Mohave Valley Elementary School District, a small rural district located in Northwestern Arizona. Whitney feels strongly that the early foundation of preschool and kindergarten pays huge dividends as children get older and move forward on the K-8 continuum, and any data that can be generated early on can be very important to the education process. “Assessing the full spectrum of kindergarteners will help to bring to light different things for our kindergarten teachers and for parents, too. A KDI will begin to open up data that we have never had, but bigger districts have had in the past. Developing a system to provide information and the necessary PD will be a huge addition to any information that we have ever had, especially in our little rural area.”

Whitney says that a KDI is important for two primary reasons. A KDI will help to guide birth-to-5 programs and what is done to prepare young children for kindergarten. And it will provide kindergarten teachers with useful data that will allow them to tweak instruction to meet the needs of each individual child. “At the beginning of the school year, solid, accurate data for little kids is hard to come by. We spend a long time teaching teachers how to read data, but there isn’t a lot of it for the kindergarten teachers other than DIBELS (the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills), which is reading only. A KDI would be the full spectrum of developmental areas for little ones. Access to that data can make our kindergarten teachers more efficient and effective in teaching.”

Whitney feels that the greatest challenge of implementing a KDI will be professional development for teachers or others implementing the KDI. “I think we are going to have to do some professional development with our early childhood teams so they understand what the assessment is and how we can make use of the data. The more we know, the better we can prepare kids as they move through kindergarten. If we can start kids on the right path or get them there as quickly as possible, it’s much easier than trying to play catch-up.”

- “I think ADE did a fantastic job around PD with Common Core. They came to us. The presenters were very strong. They knew their stuff and could field questions. I don’t know anyone who attended the training with me who didn’t think that it was a great training.”– KDI stakeholder
- “Offer multiple ways to access PD.”– KDI stakeholder

6. Consider doing PD on “targeted domains” with which teachers are less familiar or comfortable.

- Many teachers have received a significant amount of PD related to some of the areas that will be covered in the KDI, such as early literacy and mathematics. The KDI may also include domains that teachers are less comfortable with because they have not had as many opportunities for PD in these areas (e.g., social, emotional, and physical development). It might be beneficial to target more KDI PD toward domains that have received less attention.

7. Emphasize how the KDI will align with Common Core.

- Remind teachers that this is not an add-on to their work. Rather, this is a part of their prior and current work. “We aren’t giving you more things to do. What we are trying to do is help you to see that when you do this, it will help you with the implementation of the Common Core.”– KDI stakeholder

8. Pilot the KDI, selecting different school settings with different populations, and testing different PD models to determine what works best.

- There must be a clear path for piloting and implementation, so there are no questions about next steps.

## COMMUNICATIONS

At the final Stakeholder Taskforce meeting, stakeholders were asked to provide feedback on two key areas of a KDI communications strategy: With whom do we need to be communicating? And how do we communicate – what are effective communication strategies for a KDI in Arizona? Findings from the stakeholder group included the following:

*With whom are we communicating?*

There was a feeling among the stakeholders that a core set of messages needs to be developed for EVERYONE. The core messaging should answer the following questions:

- What is the purpose of a KDI and what is it meant to do?
- For what purposes are the generated data going to be used?
- Who will have access to the information that is generated?

In addition, the KDI stakeholder group developed a list of specific groups of constituents with whom KDI messaging would need to be focused.

1. Families and Parents

- “We need to help parents understand that this is their data. We need to convey it in a way so that parents are empowered.”– KDI stakeholder

- “We have trained parents to be scared of the data that is generated in the education system. But when we go to the pediatrician, we want more information, and we aren’t scared of that. We need to structure the KDI in the same way, so parents are not intimidated by the information.”– KDI stakeholder

## 2. *Early Childhood Providers*

- “Early childhood teachers need to know that they are appreciated and we value their role in this process.”– KDI stakeholder
- “We need to communicate with the early childhood community to be sure they understand about the learning continuum, so they can explain it to parents.”  
– KDI stakeholder

## 3. *Kindergarten Teachers*

- Kindergarten teachers need to understand that a KDI can provide useful data and information that can inform them about each of their students, and help drive individualized instruction. “With a KDI, teachers can get a map of what types of individualized teaching can be helpful for each student.”– KDI stakeholder

## 4. *Higher Education*

- “Intentional engagement and articulation with higher education are critical for them to understand the purpose of a KDI, and how they train the college students who might ultimately be implementing this.”– KDI stakeholder
- “I think that higher education needs to be more a part of the day-in and day-out work that happens in school districts so that they (higher education) are better informed. If this tool is introduced, the higher-education community needs to be brought on board.”  
– KDI stakeholder

## 5. *Tribal Leaders*

- “We need to do some soul searching about how a KDI will impact the tribal communities of Arizona before it is developed and implemented.”– KDI stakeholder
- “The conversation goes beyond just communication strategies with the tribal communities. There needs to be more thought put into looking at strengths that can come from cultural heritage, and how those can be incorporated into the KDI.”  
– KDI stakeholder

Other groups that were mentioned by the stakeholders included school staff, policymakers, and potential funders.

Stakeholders were also asked to make recommendations on how to communicate about a KDI and what effective communication strategies are for a KDI in Arizona. The following responses were documented:

1. *Start by developing a communications plan to serve as an overarching road map.*
2. *Develop core messaging that can then be targeted for individual groups.*
3. *Plug into existing avenues for communicating the message:*

- Affinity groups • Barcode for additional information • Billboards • Doctors’ offices
- Summer camps • WIC offices • Public forums and public information systems
- Children and youth nonprofit organization such as Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCAs, museums, libraries, etc.



## **SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

While the additional considerations listed below have been mentioned previously in the report, it is important to note the emphasis that the stakeholders placed on these particular considerations. These issues were themes that the stakeholders discussed across the three meetings that seemed to be particularly important in the group's discussions.

- Include parents as part of the KDI assessment process.
- Include higher education in KDI development and implementation.
- Develop a culturally appropriate KDI for the diverse populations of Arizona.
- Use a strengths-based approach in a KDI assessment.
- Emphasize cost-effectiveness for school districts with purchasing and implementing a KDI.
- Emphasize quick/immediate turnaround time with data, so teachers and parents do not have to wait for results.
- Align and integrate the KDI with Common Core.

## Spotlight: Dawn Craft



Dawn Craft is the state affiliate board president for the Arizona Association for the Education of Young Children (AzAEYC) and she is the early childhood education coordinator at Paradise Valley Community College. Dawn feels strongly that parents need to be included in their child's education as much as possible. "Parents are a wonderful resource to the system. They are experts around their child, and they are the ones who want to help their child succeed in school. The KDI is a great opportunity to have parents better understand

their child. Information will be generated that will help engage a parent in understanding how the system works. This is an opportunity to help them learn about how things currently work – an education opportunity for parents, and a marketing opportunity for the school system to engage parents in a positive way."

Dawn always hopes to see the early childhood community work more closely with the public education K-12 system, and she sees the KDI as a means for drawing together the two groups. "What I see as a potential great thing about a KDI is that it would engage the work with 3- to 5-year-olds with the public education world. The early childhood community and K-12 system would work together for the good of kids and families."

In addition, Dawn feels that higher education needs to be more thoughtfully included in the K-12 education process, including the development and implementation of a KDI. "Higher education is training the next crop of teachers and educators. They need to be involved in the KDI development process, so that future teachers are well trained on the importance of a KDI, how to implement a KDI, how to use the data and information collected from a KDI, and how to communicate the information to parents."

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## *Related Activities*

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ADE recognizes that potential development and implementation of a KDI requires many steps. The completion of the KDI Stakeholder Taskforce process, including this report, provides a foundation for moving forward. Currently, other related activities outside of the KDI Stakeholder Taskforce process are underway or are being planned. The related activities are described below.

### **ADE REQUEST FOR INFORMATION**

Simultaneous with the KDI Stakeholder Taskforce planning process, ADE issued a Request for Information (RFI) in May 2013 to solicit information and data from vendors of kindergarten developmental assessments that met the following purpose:

To provide a kindergarten developmental inventory tool that allows parents, teachers, and administrators to understand the extent of a child's learning and development as they enter kindergarten and throughout the ensuing school year to provide instruction that will lead to the child's academic success. The tool that is developed or adopted will align with the Arizona Early Learning Standards and Arizona's Common Core Standards for kindergarten, cover all essential domains of school readiness (physical and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language development, and cognitive development) and will be reliable and valid for its intended use.

ADE anticipates that the information received through the RFI process will inform the KDI selection or development process in the coming months.

### **FEDERAL KEA - EAG GRANT WITH NORTH CAROLINA CONSORTIUM**

Simultaneous with the KDI Stakeholder Taskforce planning process, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) published a final Notice Inviting Applications (NIA) for the Enhanced Assessment Instruments Grants (EAG) Program – Kindergarten Entry Assessment Competition. A notice of intent to apply was due June 24, 2013, and proposals were due July 8, 2013. North Carolina took the lead in building a K-3 state consortium and gave Arizona an opportunity to participate. Arizona committed to participate in this particular

consortium, and federal funds were recently awarded. Other states participating in the consortium with Arizona include Delaware, Iowa, Maine, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island, and the District of Columbia. South Carolina is a self-funded collaborating partner.

### **Arizona Public Information Sessions**

ADE recognizes that while suggestions and recommendations have been gathered from the KDI Stakeholder Taskforce, additional opportunities are needed to share information with stakeholders. Information sharing activities are planned in the coming months including public information sessions that will be conducted across the state. These sessions will offer ADE an opportunity to talk with educators, parents, and others about the KDI.

### **KDI Pilot Program Application Process**

In the future, ADE also anticipates having an application process for pilot programs. Using pilot sites during the KDI development process will allow ADE the chance to try out a potential inventory and undertake professional-development activities for teachers, administrators, and others who might be involved in a KDI implementation process.

### **Targeted Professional Development**

Finally, ADE anticipates conducting targeted professional development during the 2014-15 school year to strengthen knowledge around early learning standards and the link to Common Core, and on how to use assessment data to pave the way for implementation of a KDI. It is likely that this PD will follow a similar model to the Common Core PD that was well received by teachers and administrators across Arizona.

### **Conclusion**

Across the country, states are acknowledging the importance of understanding children's developmental status as they enter kindergarten to ensure an effective response to their instructional needs. Arizona's KDI partner group is no exception, as they have recognized the importance of the development of a KDI in Arizona. In addition, they understand that the development and implementation of a KDI will be a significant effort within the state. The KDI Stakeholder Taskforce was convened early in the planning process to provide stakeholder input on three key issues: the KDI tool, PD, and communications. This stakeholder input is invaluable as the state moves forward with next steps related to the development of a KDI that will benefit the early childhood community, the K-12 education system, and all children and families across Arizona.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to the KDI Stakeholder Taskforce members for the time and expertise that they contributed to the process. Their candor and willingness to share their thoughts and recommendations throughout the past nine months is greatly appreciated. In addition, a special thank you goes to the KDI Stakeholder Taskforce partners for their leadership during the Taskforce process. The KDI stakeholder group would not exist without the commitment of these partners – the Arizona Department of Education, the Arizona State Board of Education, First Things First, and Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust. Special thanks to the leadership of those organizations:

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Thank you to the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust for their conceptual visions and financial support of the KDI Stakeholder Taskforce. Finally, the expertise of the Taskforce's two national consultants and one local consultant was pivotal to the success of the stakeholder group. Many thanks to those consultants, Dr. John M. Love, Chair, FTF National Early Childhood Research and Evaluation Advisory Panel, Dr. Catherine Scott-Little, Associate Professor, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and Susan Perkins Fry, Director, SPF Consulting, LLC.

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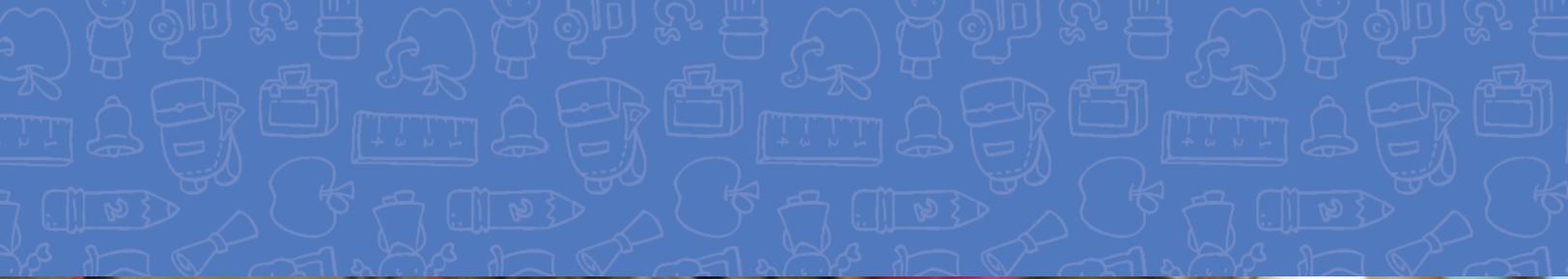
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**First Things First** | [www.azfff.org](http://www.azfff.org)

**Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust** | [www.pipertrust.org](http://www.pipertrust.org)