



MASSACHUSETTS KINDERGARTEN ENTRY ASSESSMENT (MKEA) FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Vision Questions:

- The number of initiatives currently being implemented can feel overwhelming to teachers, schools, and districts. How does MKEA fit into existing initiatives and/or connect to current initiatives? (WIDA, RETELL, DDMs, Educator Evaluation, etc.)

The MKEA is a comprehensive formative assessment initiative that is intended to provide kindergarten teachers with data across all developmental domains that can be used to inform instruction as well as the supports that schools provide for young children. As a result, these data should be used to inform initiatives involving all students (e.g., Response to Intervention (RTI) and Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)), as well as initiatives specifically supporting English language learners (e.g., RETELL and WIDA), and children with disabilities (by informing the IEP process). By having data that not only addresses cognitive domains but also physical and social-emotional development, teachers and school/district administrators will have a more comprehensive profile of a child's developmental and learning competencies that can inform the approaches and strategies used to further their development and learning.

In addition, we believe that the data collected through MKEA assessment tools can inform educator evaluation systems, particularly in the area of professional development plans. Given that the data collected from the MKEA assessment tools are based on observation, the initiative provides a framework for thinking about professional development related to observation skills and competencies as well as educators' ability to use observational data to inform instruction as well as engage with families.

- What is the state's vision for high-quality kindergarten education and how is the formative assessment work is part of this vision?
The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education views high quality kindergarten experiences as a critical link between the learning opportunities children have in their first five years of life and their K-12 educational journey. As kindergarten is often the first experience students have with public schools, high quality programs can provide children with the opportunities to continue to build on important developmental and learning skills that will be necessary in their future academic success.

Developmentally, the early elementary years are a time to focus on children's academic abilities (language, literacy, mathematics, science, etc.) as well as their developmental abilities (physical development, social-emotional development, approaches towards play and learning) as both are intricately linked to a child's ability to learn. MKEA is a formative assessment initiative that provides an opportunity to link development and learning through observation to collect data that provides a comprehensive profile on what a child knows and is able to do. The data can be used to inform instruction, engage with families, guide professional development and address program quality, which are all important elements in a school's ability to support children in making effective progress in developmental and learning outcomes.

NOTE: EEC's original Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge Grant (RTTT-ELCG) application included a commitment to assessing all kindergarten children across all developmental domains. Based on feedback from Cohorts 1 and 2, along with concerns from those districts entering MKEA in Cohort 3, EEC has requested some accommodations from the US Department of Education (USDOE) and the Administration of Children and Families (ACF) to alleviate the concerns about implementation. Some of those requests are referenced throughout the Q&A. These accommodations have not yet been approved by the Federal Government. The state anticipates receiving a response to this request in June, 2014.

Questions Related to the Requirement to Participate

- Is participation in MKEA required for all districts?
Participation in MKEA is required for all districts receiving the Quality Full-Day Kindergarten Grant (Fund Code 701).
- Do all classrooms within the district receiving Full-Day Kindergarten Grant Funds need to participate in MKEA?
Pending Federal approval of EEC's accommodation requests, only Full-Day classrooms within that district need to participate in MKEA.
- What is the purpose of formative assessment?
There are multiple reasons to conduct formative assessment:
 - ✓ ***To observe and document children's development and learning over time;***
 - ✓ ***To support, guide and inform planning and instruction;***
 - ✓ ***To report and communicate with family members and others; and***
 - ✓ ***To recognize children who might benefit from additional help or further evaluation.***
- Who should be involved in MKEA at the District level? Outside of Kindergarten teachers, who else needs to be engaged and/or involved in set up and operation of MKEA?
Any personnel who regularly have contact with the children, including but not limited to teachers, paraprofessionals, principals, and early childhood coordinators should attend the 2-day training on Teaching Strategies GOLD (GOLD). Administrators are also welcome to attend the training to support implementation and use of data to inform classroom, school and district needs.
- Will Cohort 1 and 2 Districts need to transition to GOLD if they are currently using the Work Sampling System (WSS)?
No, Cohort 1 and 2 Districts that are currently using WSS will not be required to switch to GOLD, but are invited (but not required) to pilot GOLD in some classrooms or transition to GOLD should the district see this tool as better meeting assessment needs.
- How do I balance my time between GOLD/WSS and teaching?
Observation should be seen as part of early childhood teaching as opposed to a different and disconnected instructional strategy. WSS and GOLD are designed to help teachers be more responsive in their teaching. With practice, ongoing, authentic, observational assessment should become a regular part of your teaching practice, using the information about your students, to inform and improve your instruction to support all students.

For districts using the GOLD tool, we suggest that each teacher create a system that works for them. Some have created checklists to make sure they are observing children in all of the objectives. Some prefer to focus on a few objectives or a few children each day. The important thing to remember is that for most pieces of quality documentation, a teacher can collect evidence for multiple objectives and dimensions.

- As a result of participation in the MKEA initiative, is it possible for Quality Full-Day Kindergarten Grantees (Fund Code 701) to receive a waiver in FY15 from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) for the grant requirement to pursue NAEYC accreditation (or an approved alternative to accreditation)?

Yes, in order for districts to be able to focus efforts on implementing the Massachusetts Kindergarten Entry Assessment (MKEA), ESE will approve Fund Code 701 grantee requests for FY15 waivers from the pursuit of the National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation (or the district's approved alternative to accreditation). A request form and full details will be included in the FY15 Quality Full-Day Kindergarten Grant, which will be posted late spring to early summer. Questions may be emailed to achievement@doe.mass.edu.

Please note that this waiver is only applicable to the requirement as described in the Quality Full-Day Kindergarten grant, and does not change timelines that are stipulated through the NAEYC accreditation process (candidacy due dates, site visit dates, etc) or the alternative to accreditation options. Before requesting a waiver, ESE recommends that the district reach out to NAEYC (or the organization tied to the district's approved alternative to accreditation) to understand the implications, both financially and with regards to timelines as put forward by the accrediting organization.

Professional Development Questions:

- How much training is involved in terms of time out of the classroom?
There is an initial two-day training (6 hours of instruction each day for a total of 12 hours). These professional development days do not need to be consecutive. There are also free twelve 1-hour online modules available to users of TS GOLD that teachers may choose to view to support implementation.
- When should districts expect to schedule their professional development?
A survey has been sent out from the Department of Early Education and Care's (EEC) Assessment Grantee, the Collaborative for Educational Services (CES), to assess districts professional development needs and possible training dates. CES will do its best to accommodate district preferences and scheduling needs.

Tool Questions:

- Who pays for the training on the tool and the licenses?
For FY15 and FY16, EEC will pay for the required professional development on GOLD and will purchase the licenses for the online tool, which includes access to the online data system and free professional development modules.
- Will there be technical support for programs with online use since these systems are web-based?

Training will be provided on the online tool at the initial TS GOLD training. Additionally, there is technical support available through TS GOLD, CES and the Readiness Centers. TS GOLD has technical support both by phone and online.

TS GOLD Phone Support: 866-736-5913

TS GOLD Email: MAGold@teachingstrategies.com

CES: <http://www.collaborative.org/programs/early-childhood/assessment-responsive-teaching>

Readiness Centers: Individual contact information available on EEC's MKEA webpage at <http://www.mass.gov/edu/birth-grade-12/early-education-and-care/mkea/#readiness>

- Do the MKEA assessment systems align with the new Common Core Standards?
The assessment tools are aligned to many of the standards contained in our Frameworks. Pearson and Teaching Strategies have made efforts to align their assessments with our state standards, particularly with the adoption of the Common Core standards.

The Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) contracted with two researchers, Sharon Lynn Kagan and Catherine Scott-Little, to conduct the Massachusetts Alignment Study to understand the alignment between our preschool and kindergarten standards and the two tools: Teaching Strategies GOLD and the Work Sampling System. Dr. Kagan and Dr. Scott-Little's report(s) that maps the alignment between our early learning standards (infant-toddler through kindergarten), as well as the alignment between these assessment tools with the Mass. Curriculum Framework for Kindergarten, which incorporates the Common Core Standards, is available in the "Resources" section of the MKEA website at <http://www.mass.gov/edu/birth-grade-12/early-education-and-care/mkea/#resources>.

In addition, the tools provide data in domains, such as Physical Development, Social-Emotional Development and Approaches towards Play and Learning that reflect children's skills and competencies in critical domains of learning that go beyond our current state standards. EEC and ESE are working together to propose a more robust set of standards in these domains.

- How many Developmental and Learning Areas are there in TS GOLD?
There are 10 areas; 4 Developmental, 5 Content and 1 English Language Learner.
 - **4 Developmental Areas: Social-Emotional, Physical, Language and Cognitive.**
 - **5 Content Areas: Literacy, Mathematics, Social Studies, The Arts, and Science & Technology.**
 - **1 English Language Learner, includes receptive and expressive areas.**
- We are a Cohort 2 district using Work Sampling System (WSS) but we would like to switch to TS GOLD. Is that possible?
Yes, Cohort 1 and 2 districts using Work Sampling System (WSS) that would prefer to switch to TS GOLD will be added to the Cohort 3 list and will receive the TS GOLD professional development, online licenses and implementation support/technical assistance. Districts wishing to switch should notify EEC by April 11, 2014.

- Will the state continue to pay for WSS licenses for districts in Cohorts 1 & 2 that have chosen to use WSS?
EEC will pay for WSS licenses for the 2014-2015 school year and hopes to continue paying for licenses for districts in Cohorts 1 & 2 using WSS through the 2015-2016 school year.
- What types of supports will be available to districts in Cohorts 1 & 2 that continue to use WSS?
EEC will provide technical assistance through the Assessment Grantee, the Collaborative for Educational Services (CES) and the Readiness Centers. Districts that need additional professional development on WSS as a result of staff turnover may contact the publisher directly and pay for it using local funds and/or the Quality Full-Day Kindergarten Grant.

Implementation Questions:

- Our district works closely on many initiatives with a neighboring district and would like to partner together on MKEA. Is this possible?
EEC and ESE encourage districts that currently have or are able to create working relationships to partner together during professional development and implementation to provide staff with peer-based support. TS GOLD, EEC, ESE, and the Readiness Centers are available for technical assistance, as well.
- How many developmental areas must be assessed in 2014-2015?
Pending Federal Approval of EEC's requested accommodation, we are anticipating that all Cohorts will need to assess at least two developmental areas, Social-Emotional and Approaches to Play and Learning (the entirety of TS GOLD Cognitive area and the Personal and Social Development section in WSS) in the 2014-2015 school year with a move towards full assessment in all developmental areas in the 2015-2016 school year.
- What are checkpoints?
A checkpoint is a time to reflect and report on the assessment process. Checkpoints provide teachers with an opportunity to simply finalize a decision on levels for each item based on the information that a teacher has been observing and collecting during that time period.
- Where can we find information on the checkpoint dates?
Checkpoint date information can be found on the MKEA webpage at <http://www.mass.gov/edu/birth-grade-12/early-education-and-care/mkea/>

Checkpoint/Documentation Questions:

- What are the checkpoint dates for 2014-2015?
Fall Checkpoint Date: November 7, 2014
Spring Checkpoint Date: June 5, 2015
Note: As a reminder, observation and documentation of children should be an ongoing process throughout the school year.
- Can data be finalized before the checkpoint due date?
Yes, it can be finalized at any point prior to the due date or customized based on the needs of the districts (progress report cards, parent meetings, etc.).
- How many pieces of evidence/documentation are needed per item?

We recommend that you have enough evidence to pinpoint the child's knowledge, skills and abilities, so you as a teacher can feel confident in placing the student at a particular level.

- Could you explain the difference between General Documentation, Assessment Opportunity Cards, On-the-Spot, and Performance Task Cards?

General Documentation describes most of what you would typically upload to a child's portfolio on GOLD. This includes notes, photographs, audio clips, and video clips that you consider to be evidence to support that the child has demonstrated particular behaviors related to the objectives.

Assessment Opportunity Cards™ are an optional resource that explain how to structure opportunities for children to demonstrate what they know and can do in relation to particular literacy and mathematics objectives. Because these activities are not removed from the children's general classroom experience, they are authentic. It is important to scaffold children's learning during these activities, not simply to observe without interacting as necessary.

The On-the-Spot Observation Recording Tool is an optional checklist that enables you to collect information quickly, either for one child or a group of children. It is designed to streamline the overall process of recording information about physical development, literacy, and mathematics.

Performance Task Cards are an optional tool to enable you to structure additional learning opportunities so students can demonstrate what they know and can do in relation to some standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics.

- Can On-the-Spot levels be entered directly into the Checkpoint Tab?
Yes, you can choose to enter information gathered using the On-the-Spot Observation Recording Tool either into the Documentation Tab, or enter that information directly into your Checkpoint Tab. If you bypass entering into the Documentation Tab, you may want to consider saving the paper copy for reference.
- Where do you find the 2 page document that lists all the objectives for quick review?
You can find the "Objectives for Development and Learning" Handout under Resources (on the right hand side of the screen) when in the Documentation Tab or Checkpoint Tab. It can also be found in the Help Library under Printable Resources.

Technology Questions:

- What are the implications for our technology departments?
Schools need to have internet access, as TS GOLD is a web-based system. Teaching Strategies GOLD online works on any PC (Windows XP SP2 or later) or Mac (OS X 10.6 or later) with a high-speed Internet connection (see Bandwidth Requirements below for details). The system works with the following web browsers:
 - ***Apple Safari 6.0 or newer***
 - ***Google Chrome 26.0 or newer***
 - ***Microsoft Internet Explorer 8 or newer***
 - ***Mozilla Firefox 18.0 or newer***

Full requirements may be viewed on the TS GOLD website at
<http://teachingstrategies.com/content/pageDocs/GOLD-System-Requirements-7-3-13.pdf>

- Will the district need to install programs on each teacher's computer?
No, teachers can access the tool by going online to the TS GOLD website.
- Are there technology items that would make data collection easier?
Yes, TS GOLD currently has free "apps" to download available for IOS operating systems (Android based operating system apps are scheduled to be released this coming summer) that enable teachers to quickly upload documentation directly to TS GOLD.

Funding:

- Will the online license be "attached" to a child or a classroom of children?; What happens in classrooms that have an increase in children during the fall?
A license will be needed for each individual child. EEC will fund all licenses required to complete the assessment on children, even if the classroom size increases year-to-year or schools add children after the beginning of the year.
- Is there funding for substitutes and/or stipends for teachers who need to be out of their classroom to take required professional development and/or complete the work of MKEA?
EEC will provide some funding to districts for substitutes and/or stipends. EEC will release a list of substitute/stipend funding amounts to districts in the Spring. We encourage school districts to utilize their FY15 Quality Full-Day Kindergarten Grant funds to support any costs related to the MKEA that are not supported by RTTT/ELCG.
- After the end of RTTT-ELCG funding, can a program keep the EEC-negotiated purchase price in future years?
School districts are currently organized under EEC's license at a price per child portfolio negotiated by the state. If a district or school continues to stay in the EEC license after the end of RTTT-ELCG funding, which allows EEC to continue to access aggregate data, programs can continue to pay the reduced negotiated price (currently set at \$9.95 per child as of April 2014).

Data Questions:

- How will the state be collecting data?
Data collection will be done through the online component of the assessment tools.
- What is the purpose of the data collection?
At the teacher/classroom level, individual child and classroom data should be used to inform instruction and practice. At the district level, data may be used to inform district needs. At the state level, aggregate data will be used to fulfill reporting requirements necessary for the RTTT-ELCG, but the overall the goal is for data to be used to assist the state in better understanding the skills and competencies that children have when they enter kindergarten.

Information and Communication Questions:

- Where can I find up to date information on the MKEA?

There is an MKEA webpage that can be accessed at <http://www.mass.gov/edu/birth-grade-12/early-education-and-care/mkea/> that has information on the project, tools, timelines, Readiness Center s Cohort contacts, conferences, meetings and resources.

- I'm a coordinator and I'm not sure my district is receiving all of the required communication on MKEA from EEC and/or ESE.
To ensure that all personnel participating in MKEA is receiving all emails, there is a section on the MKEA webpage entitled "Communication." All emails sent to districts will be posted in that section.

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