

A review of methods and instruments used in state and local school readiness evaluations



Institute of Education Sciences

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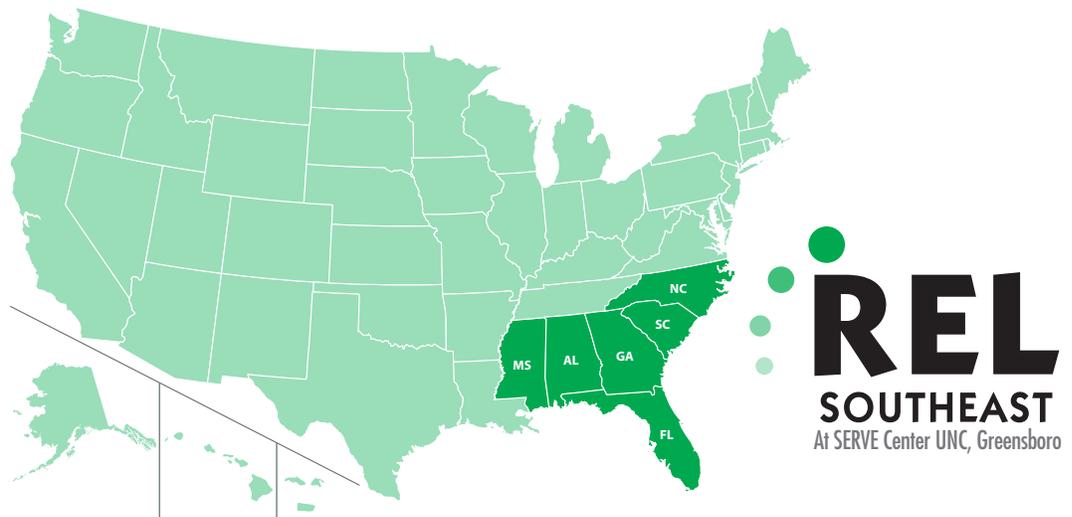
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Summary

A review of methods and instruments used in state and local school readiness evaluations

The report provides detailed information about the methods and instruments used to evaluate school readiness initiatives, discusses important considerations in selecting instruments, and provides resources and recommendations that may be helpful to those who are designing and implementing school readiness evaluations.

This review of evaluations of the effectiveness of publicly funded state and local school readiness initiatives describes the instruments used to measure child outcomes and features of the instruments themselves. The report is organized around three questions:

1. How did evaluations of state- and locally funded school readiness programs collect data on child outcomes? (What types of evaluations were conducted? When were data collected? What domains of children's school readiness were measured—cognitive, social, behavioral adjustment?)
2. What instruments or measures were used to collect child outcome data in evaluations of state-funded school readiness initiatives?
3. What are the key features of these instruments (developer, administration, purpose, age group, psychometric properties)?

The results indicate that state and local evaluators have used a variety of instruments to collect child outcome data, some that are well known and others that are not. In general, many of the well known instruments demonstrate adequate psychometric properties (reliability and validity, which ensure that the instruments consistently measure what they were intended to measure), but a number of issues, such as the appropriateness of the measure to the study's purpose and sample, appear to present substantial challenges in evaluations of state- and locally funded school readiness programs.

Several recommendations based on the data collected from this sample of school readiness evaluations are provided to help school readiness programs and evaluators as they select instruments for assessing school readiness programs and implementing the evaluations:

- Carefully select outcomes for assessment that match the goals of the program and that address the components of children's learning and development that are linked with later success in school.
- Clearly define the purpose for which the assessment data will be collected, and select instruments that have been designed and validated for that purpose.

- Select instruments that have a proven track record (adequate reliability and validity) and that have been tested with children similar to those served by the program to be assessed.
- Select instruments that are culturally and linguistically appropriate for the children who will be assessed.
- Consider whether outside observers or people who work directly with the children are the best collectors of data.
- Plan carefully for how the assessments will be administered, provide adequate training for data collectors, and carry out reliability studies to determine whether the data are being collected reliably and accurately.
- Collect data on the children's home context, the nature of the school readiness program in which the children are enrolled, and (if collecting data once children enter school) on the school in which the children are enrolled.

Selecting and implementing instruments for evaluating school readiness programs are not easy. The findings of this report highlight the challenges that evaluators face in ensuring that data are collected in a manner that yields credible, trustworthy, and meaningful information about child outcomes. The report lists a number of useful resources that can assist evaluators in making decisions about child assessments: resources to guide decisions about how to assess child outcomes, reviews of measures, and web sites with technical information related to measures used in large federal studies.

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