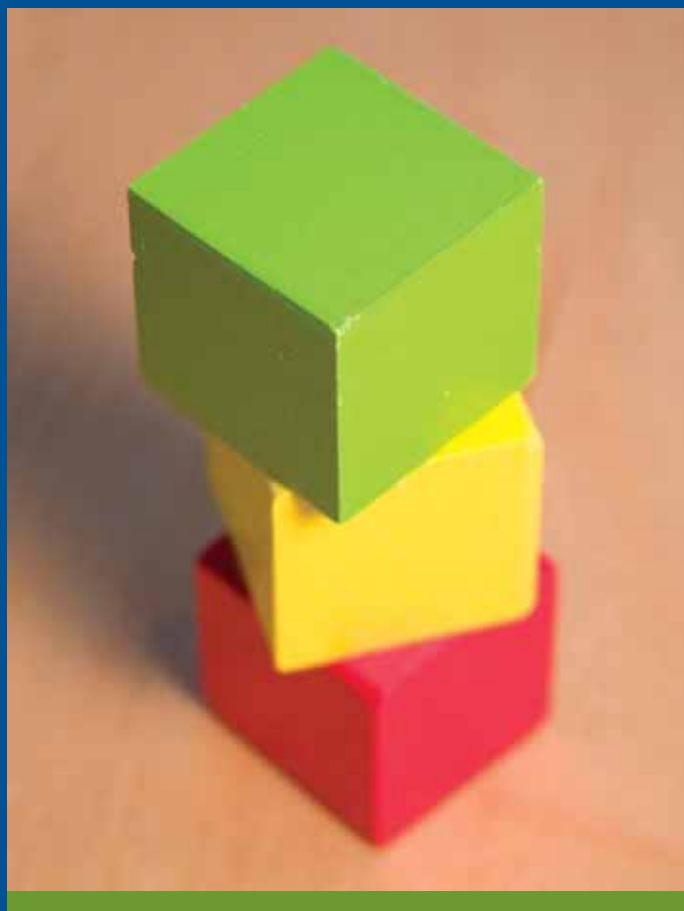


Taking Stock: Assessing and Improving Early Childhood Learning and Program Quality



THE REPORT OF THE NATIONAL EARLY
CHILDHOOD ACCOUNTABILITY TASK FORCE

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The Task Force was created through the generous support of The Pew Charitable Trusts, the Foundation for Child Development and the Joyce Foundation. The positions and views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the funders.

Executive Summary



Unprecedented attention to young children has ushered in a new era for early childhood education. Parents are more concerned than ever before about their children's learning, development, and readiness for school. Early childhood teachers are taking on the challenges of serving all children equitably and well. And policymakers are looking carefully at the outcomes reported for children participating in publicly funded early education programs. Motivated by these concerns and by the growing emphasis on accountability, parents, teachers and policymakers all want more information as they make decisions on how to foster children's early learning and development.

These demands for information come at a time when early childhood educators are uneasy about the effect that increased performance demands may have on young children's development and early childhood practice. At the same time, early educators are aware of the potential of well-designed assessment and evaluation efforts to enhance the credibility of early childhood programs, and support investments in program improvement and expansion. But accountability requires great care. Poorly conceived accountability initiatives can generate misleading feedback, impose onerous burdens, and lead to misguided decisions. And accountability should not stand alone. Linking accountability efforts to program improvement efforts and resources is essential to warrant the effort needed to gather assessment data. Clearly, issues surrounding early childhood accountability and improvement are important, challenging and controversial.

Task Force Charge and Process

Given the importance and timeliness of the issue, the intensity of early educators' concerns, and the imperative for action, the National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force was created to build a comprehensive vision for future accountability efforts. In April 2005, The Pew Charitable Trusts, the Foundation for Child Development, and the Joyce Foundation charged the Task Force to

Develop recommendations for a state accountability system for early education programs for prekindergarten children and for linking such efforts to standards-based assessment efforts in kindergarten and the primary grades.

The charge called upon the Task Force to review current state and federal initiatives, to provide guidance on tough issues and controversial questions, and to be forthright in recommending steps that states should and should not take as they embark on accountability and program improvement efforts.

To accomplish this task, the Task Force assembled a team of well-respected individuals, including leading experts on early childhood assessment, program evaluation, early childhood pedagogy and practice, and advocacy. We focused on designing the best possible approaches to using assessments to strengthen the early childhood field. Our report offers an across-the-board, thoughtful, long-term vision. We hope that our recommendations will combat the tendency for assessment and accountability mandates to proliferate in haphazard, uncoordinated, and potentially counterproductive ways.



The Challenges

Before presenting the recommendations of the Task Force, it is important to offer a clear definition of an early childhood accountability system and acknowledge the specific challenges the recommendations seek to address.

The Task Force defined a State Early Childhood Accountability and Improvement System as

A system of standards-based assessments of (a) children's development and learning and (b) program quality, designed to inform state policy decisions, investments, and improvement efforts for early education programs for three- and four-year-old children, linked to a continuum of kindergarten through third grade standards, curriculum, assessments, and program improvement efforts.

Establishing such a system is daunting in light of the challenges that face American early childhood education. In particular, our report highlights four clusters of challenges:

- **Structural challenges** related to the fragmented “non-system” of programs for preschool-aged children and disjointed early childhood and public education policies.
- **Conceptual challenges** related to long-standing approaches to early childhood assessment, program evaluation, and program management.
- **Technical challenges** related to the need for tools and methods appropriate for assessing increasingly diverse populations of young children and varied types of programs.
- **Resource challenges** related to limitations and inequities in funding for early childhood programs and infrastructure efforts.

Framing the Work

To fulfill our charge and address these challenges, the Task Force agreed on five framing recommendations:

1. States should develop a unified system of early childhood education that includes a single, coherent system of standards, assessments, data, and professional development efforts across all categorical programs and funding streams.
2. States should align high-quality and comprehensive standards, curriculum, and assessments as a continuum from prekindergarten through grade 3.
3. States should assure that all child and program assessments are valid and reliable, meet high psychometric standards, and are well suited for their intended purpose. Data analysis and reporting methods should incorporate state-of-the-art methods to accurately and fairly document the performance of programs, including, where feasible, information from assessments of children and program quality together:
 - Data from assessments of children should not be reported without data on the programs that serve them.
 - Reporting on program quality should highlight attributes of classroom quality, instructional practices, and teacher-child interactions that are most highly correlated with enhancing children’s progress in learning and development.
 - Reporting on child assessments should highlight children’s progress over time (or the “value-added” contributions of programs) as well as their end-of-program status.

4. States should support the full inclusion of all children in accountability and improvement efforts, with appropriate accommodation of assessments to fully document their progress and status:
 - Young English Language Learners should be evaluated in both their primary language and the language(s) of instruction.
 - Adaptations in child assessment tools and procedures should be made to allow children with disabilities to participate in the same assessments as their peers and to allow a valid assessment of their knowledge and abilities.
5. States should provide adequate resources to enable programs to meet performance standards, and to support accurate, credible, and useful assessments and effective program improvement efforts.



Recommended System

Based on these framing recommendations, the Task Force designed an Early Childhood Accountability and Improvement System that is powerful and flexible enough to allow any state to adapt it to meet its priorities and needs. The overall design comprises three primary building blocks:

- **System Infrastructure.** The design begins with the vital supports needed to ensure high-quality assessments, timely, accurate reporting, and appropriate understanding and use of assessment data.
- **Assessment/Program Improvement Approaches.** Recognizing the vast diversity among the states, the plan provides multiple approaches for assessing and improving early childhood programs. Each approach is designed to meet different state needs, so that states can select or combine approaches as they deem appropriate.
- **Steps toward Coherent PreK-Grade 3 Accountability Efforts.** Finally, the design proposes that states work to align and integrate standards and curricula from prekindergarten through grade 3, thereby fostering the continuity of instruction, assessment, and program improvement efforts throughout children's early years.

Infrastructure

The proposed system begins with an Infrastructure comprising four interconnected parts. These parts work together to support successful assessments, accurate reporting, and effective program improvement efforts:

- **Early Learning and Program Quality Standards.** Comprehensive, well-articulated standards for children’s learning and program quality should be aligned with curricula and assessments. These standards provide a context for understanding assessment information and guiding program improvement efforts.
- **Program Rating and Improvement System.** An inclusive Program Rating and Improvement System is needed to assess, document and improve the quality of all forms of early education programs. A Program Rating and Improvement System would guide on-site monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning opportunities and document local programs’ adherence to program quality standards. The system would provide information to parents and consumers, offer resources to improve quality, and could provide incentives to reward higher levels of quality.
- **Professional Development System.** The aim of a Professional Development System is to create a consistent, accessible approach to professional development for everyone in a state who works with young children. In particular, the Professional Development System would help teachers and program managers administer assessments, interpret data, and use child and program assessment data for program improvement.
- **Data Management and Reporting System.** A coherent accountability and improvement system hinges on a well-maintained, integrated, user-friendly database on children’s characteristics, staff and program characteristics, and assessment information. A Data Management and Reporting System would provide for quality assurance and integrity of data and generate reports suited to varied audiences and purposes. It would make it possible for leaders and planners to look at data at many levels, including statewide, for different state early education programs, for local communities and for individual local agencies. A unified system of child identification numbers would allow tracking of children’s program experiences and progress in learning and development across the preK-grade 3 years.

The Approaches

Every state in the nation is faced with the challenge of designing an approach to early childhood accountability and improvement. Their approaches to accountability, like the services they offer, differ markedly. States vary in terms of what they want to know, how they plan to use the information, and in the human and fiscal resources they can allocate to the development of an accountability and improvement system. The Task Force therefore developed several approaches that respond to the diverse circumstances, needs and interests of states. In the full report, each approach is described in depth, including specific policy questions it addresses, what data are to be collected, designs for data collection, how assessment information can be used to improve programs, and, most importantly, key challenges, concerns and safeguards regarding potential misuse of assessment information. The Task Force recognizes that several of these approaches may be difficult to implement immediately and would require careful planning, as well as new state investments, in order to work as intended.

- **Child Population.** What is the status of all children in the state? Based on assessing representative samples of children, this approach provides information on the developmental status and demographic characteristics of *all young children* in a state, regardless of whether they participate in early childhood services. This information can pinpoint areas where children are in need of supports, and therefore can guide overall systems planning; these data can also inform decision-making on state investments and inform public/private and interagency initiatives. It also can provide baseline information for public education planning efforts. It is important to note that the Child Population Approach does not report data on individual children.
- **Program Population.** What is the quality of all early education programs? This approach provides information on the quality of *all forms of early education services* in a state as well as data on the early childhood workforce. As with the Child Population Approach, this information can guide planning for overall systems of services for all young children, inform decision-making on state investments, and inform public/private and interagency initiatives. It also can provide baseline information for public education planning efforts.
- **State Program Evaluation.** What is the quality of and how well are children progressing in specific state early childhood programs? This approach would apply rigorous evaluation methods to report on program quality and child assessments for a *specific type of state program* (e.g., a state prekindergarten program). Information from these evaluations can guide efforts to strengthen state programs or refine program policies. Results can inform state decisions about funding

different types of programs. For many, this is the preferred approach because it combines data on children and on programs.

- **Local Agency Quality.** What is the quality of services in local agencies? This approach provides information on program quality at the level of *individual local agencies*, whether states elect to fund school districts, local governmental units, for-profit, nonprofit, or faith-based agencies. This information can guide decisions about targeting technical assistance to strengthen quality at specific sites, awarding incentives to recognize program improvement, and funding decisions by state agencies.

The Task Force also discussed at length an additional approach that would examine both program quality and children’s learning and development in local agencies, but we reached no consensus on its feasibility or desirability. Deliberations focused on the question of whether child assessment data should be used for local agency accountability. Among the serious concerns raised are high costs, the lack of appropriate assessment tools, and, most seriously, the potential misuse of data.

Creating Coherent PreK-Grade 3 Accountability Efforts

To conclude our proposed design, we offer recommendations to enhance continuity in accountability and improvement efforts from the preschool years through grade 3. Our proposal is intended to better align high-quality, comprehensive standards and support efforts to study the progress of children and the quality of learning opportunities across the preK-grade 3 years. State leadership can set the stage to enable early childhood and elementary school educators to work together in reviewing assessment data and using the findings to strengthen teaching, learning, and professional development efforts.



What are the Benefits?

The Task Force recommendations, taken together, provide a durable, adaptable framework that any state can use to create an effective accountability and improvement system tailored to its needs and priorities. The energies and investments required to accomplish this are substantial, but the anticipated benefits are even greater. The benefits include

- More relevant and credible data to guide state investments in services for young children;
- More targeted efforts to strengthen equity, informed by richer and more accurate evidence on the extent to which early childhood programs are providing quality services and helping subgroups of children progress;
- Enhanced credibility for the early childhood profession based on expanded public awareness of how early childhood services contribute to the public welfare;
- Stronger partnerships between early childhood programs and public schools to build a preK-grade 3 continuum of enriched learning opportunities;
- Higher quality learning experiences for children, as states support well resourced, evidence-based program improvement and professional development efforts;
- Improved outcomes for all children as accountability and program improvement efforts help states build overall systems of high-quality early education services.

A Call to Action

A task force can recommend, but realizing its vision requires leadership, collaboration, and investment. To create strong early childhood accountability and improvement systems, people and organizations need to engage in new ways of working across categorical programs, invest in quality assessment and program improvement efforts, and advance their own learning about issues of assessment tools, data, and analysis.

- **Governors and state legislators** should invest in high-quality early childhood programs and a strong accountability and improvement system. We recommend allocating from 2 to 5 percent of all program funding to support our recommended infrastructure of standards, program rating, professional development and data management efforts and to implement varied assessment and program improvement approaches.

- **State agencies** should develop and implement a strategic plan for a coherent early childhood accountability and program improvement system; support local preK-grade 3 partnerships; and work toward a robust, positive, and rigorous culture for early childhood accountability efforts.
- **Federal government agencies** should carry out a data harmonization initiative to allow information systems for child care, Head Start, and early childhood special education services to mesh with each other and with data generated from state early education programs. They should also invest in research and development efforts to support more coherent and effective state accountability and program improvement systems.
- **Local early childhood agencies** should create opportunities for teachers and managers to study and discuss child and program assessments, and to use the data to enrich opportunities for children's learning and development. In addition, they should initiate dialogue with local school districts around child assessment spanning preK to grade 3, and they should share data on demographic trends and learning opportunities.

A Compelling Need

People and organizations across the nation are already hard at work creating systems of high-quality and accountable early learning opportunities for America's young children. But all too often, their work is hampered by organizational fragmentation, infrastructure gaps, and inadequate tools and methods. The National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force has sought to help move our nation toward more coherent and effective early childhood accountability and improvement systems.

We know that readers may not agree with every approach or every recommendation. Indeed, Task Force members did not agree with every detail of the approaches presented. We also know that some readers approach accountability efforts in the realm of early childhood education with deep misgivings. While we understand these concerns, members of the Task Force concur that when accountability efforts are of high quality, when they safeguard children, and when they are used in the service of program improvement, they can contribute powerfully to make America's early education fair, just, and equitable, and among the best in the world. Our work is aimed toward that end, and it is dedicated to those who have worked, and continue to work, toward realizing that vision.

Differing Viewpoints on Using Child Assessment Data for Local Agency Accountability



In Chapter Three, we presented a comprehensive and adaptable design for an early childhood accountability and improvement system. The design includes three tiers of recommendations: (1) a recommended infrastructure to support accountability and improvement efforts as well as emerging early childhood systems; (2) four distinctive yet complementary approaches for collecting and using assessment data; and (3) recommendations on how to link and integrate early childhood and elementary education standards, assessments, curricula and professional development efforts.

Many members of the task force support these recommendations, and, in particular, the four assessment/program improvement approaches, as a complete response to the challenge of early childhood accountability. Other members argued that the needs of policymakers, program administrators, and the public are not fully addressed by the proposed plan. They suggested that, particularly as publicly funded programs expand, states will want to answer the question of how children are learning and developing in individual local agencies. Accordingly they recommended an additional assessment/program improvement approach for states to consider: to examine both program quality and children's learning and development in local agencies. Consideration of this approach led the Task Force to extensive deliberations around the question of whether child assessment data should be used in local agency accountability efforts.

Amongst knowledgeable individuals, differences in perspective on the future course of early childhood assessment and accountability are understandable. Accordingly, we felt it honest and wise to include a full analysis of these differing views as a prelude to outlining an approach to assessing and improving local agency quality and child outcomes. It is important to note that no consensus was reached on these issues: this chapter is a report of deliberations, rather than a set of recommendations.



Perspectives on Using Child Assessment Data for Local Agency Accountability

There are two major perspectives on the central issue: those who strongly oppose using child assessment data for local agency accountability and those who favor it. Each position will be discussed in turn.

Highly controversial for decades, the use of formal assessments of young children has been strongly criticized for reasons noted in earlier chapters. When states contemplate public reporting of child assessment results for individual local agencies and use of this data in accountability efforts, the level of concern soars dramatically. There are multiple reasons for this heightened level of concern: issues related to the adequacy of the instruments, the challenges of large-scale data collection, and most importantly, the risks of misuse of data. As an example of the scale of these challenges, Task Force members cited the multiple problems in Head Start's heavily criticized and projected to be suspended effort to administer a common child assessment in all local programs, the Head Start National Reporting System.³⁵

More specifically, those who recommend against using local agency-level child assessment data for accountability purposes cite four major reasons:

- First, there are concerns about the adequacy of child assessment tools. Outside of the context of a scientifically designed program evaluations, currently available child assessment tools are largely inadequate. They do not cover all domains of development and cannot capture normal fluctuations in children's development. They do not recognize that young children are unreliable test takers because they often have not been trained to understand the verbal cues or adapt to the situational conditions associated with formal testing.
- Second, there are concerns about implementing large-scale child assessment efforts, including threats to the integrity of data, and challenges in data analysis and reporting. Gathering child assessment information for all local agencies in a state would require a massive effort to train assessors. Establishing and maintaining consistency in assessment procedures and recording data would also be a significant challenge. It would be particularly difficult to ensure the quality and credibility of assessments if local agency staff are the assessors and if the data are used for high stakes decisions. For example, if the data were used to impose sanctions on programs for poor performance, inadvertent coaching of children on assessment items in an effort to show more positive outcomes could result. There

are also challenges associated with data analysis and reporting. There is a concern that child assessment reports for agencies serving small numbers of children may exhibit substantial year-to-year fluctuations in outcomes due to changes in the characteristics of a very few children. This may unduly bias perceptions of how well these agencies are performing.

- Third, there are concerns about the high costs of developing and implementing a local agency-level child assessment system. It is argued that more benefits would come from investing to remedy inequities and deficiencies in program quality, staff training, and compensation, rather than using resources for an expensive and expansive child assessment effort.
- Fourth and most important, there are strong concerns that using child assessment data for high-stakes decisions will lead to serious negative consequences for children. There is the risk that programs, wanting to show good performance, would narrow their curriculum and “teach to the test” in ways that limit and misdirect the quality of children’s learning opportunities. These risks would be particularly acute if the assessment tool addresses only a limited segment of a state’s learning and developmental goals for children. In addition, there are concerns that programs may shift recruitment practices to enroll more children from advantaged backgrounds to increase their chances of showing higher levels of outcomes or better rates of progress. Moreover, children could be harmed if states apply sanctions or reduce funding for agencies based on child assessment data, even if the programs were given sufficient time, resources, or assistance to implement improvements in their staffing, curriculum and learning opportunities.

For all these reasons, advocates of this position strongly opposed any state or federal initiative to collect, report, or use child assessment data at the level of individual local agencies.

On the other hand, Task Force members who favor the use of child assessment data for local agency accountability hold the view that child assessment data can be a significant additional resource in state efforts to understand and improve local agency performance. In their view, questions about how children in specific agencies are progressing are legitimate to ask and appropriate to answer. They see benefits in using child assessment data as an additional factor in targeting resources for more intensive program improvement efforts. They contend that the data from a state-initiated child assessment effort could have positive influences on instructional practices and learning opportunities. This could occur by heightening awareness among teachers and local agency leaders of the needs of groups of children who are not progressing at expected rates, and by marshalling stronger support for more intentional teaching strategies. These Task Force

members are also concerned that accountability strategies that are limited to assessing only the program quality of local agencies may not be sufficiently powerful or sensitive to improve learning outcomes for all children.

Advocates of this perspective acknowledge the substantial technical, logistical, and financial challenges that must be overcome in building an accountability approach that incorporates local agency child assessment information. However, their view is that these obstacles can be addressed through state leadership, investment, and careful planning and management. They share the deep concerns of their colleagues regarding the risks of potential misuse of agency-level child assessment information, but they are persuaded that diligent use of safeguards can minimize such risks. Moreover, they contend that understanding these risks thoroughly is the best means to overcome them.



A Possible Local Agency and Child Outcomes Approach: What is the Quality of and How are Children Progressing in Local Agencies?

Although there are highly divergent views on the viability of using child assessment data for local agency accountability, we felt it important to share how such an approach might be developed if it were desired. To that end, we discuss what such an approach might entail, what might be done to accomplish it and key safeguards that are strongly recommended for any state considering such an approach.

What Questions Can a Local Agency Quality and Child Outcomes Approach Address?

In addition to those questions listed for the Local Agency Quality Approach, the inclusion of child data would also enable the following questions to be addressed:

- What are the patterns of children’s learning progress and end-of-program accomplishments in local agencies? How do these assessment results compare to state early learning and development standards for young children?
- What is the range and variability in children’s performance across local agencies?
- Can we identify local agencies with consistently high or low rates of progress or levels of end-of-program-year performance by children?
- Are there relationships between program quality measures, levels of public investment and local agency-level child assessment data?

Assuming that this approach would operate on an ongoing basis, states could also review trends on each of the above questions.

How Would a Local Agency Quality and Child Outcomes Approach Work?

Data on the quality of local agencies should include structural characteristics of the setting (class size, ratios) and dynamic characteristics that examine how teachers and children interact with one another, the nature of the curriculum and how it is implemented.

Additionally, information should be collected on the teachers (experience, training) and on the families served by the agency.

Information on the children should include data on their prior out-of-home program experiences, primary language, and any identified special needs. To complement these data, states would design a child assessment effort to document the status and progress of children's knowledge, skills, and behaviors. To do so, the state would develop or select a child assessment tool or tools aligned to its early learning guidelines, covering the full range of domains of learning and development. States should consider the approaches of observational, direct, and adaptive direct forms of child assessment as discussed in Appendix B.

Some task force members recommend the use of adaptive direct assessments, based on Item Response Theory (IRT), that describe levels or patterns of children's growth, ability or developmental achievement. Used as individually administered assessments, they can provide information on a child's relative position on a developmental path. Moreover, such assessments can be administered without teaching to the test because different items that assess the same construct can be used with different children. Adaptive assessment strategies that reduce stress on children and assessors could be used; these often involve a two-stage design wherein children take a brief routing assessment that helps determine their general level of performance and routes them on to more detailed and appropriate assessments.

In addition, there are different designs to the overall data collection strategy. States would use data on local agency quality and program characteristics from their Program Rating and Improvement System. In terms of child assessments, it is critical to collect child data at more than one point in time, so child assessment information could be collected at the beginning, end, and, if feasible and affordable, mid-point in the year. Assessing all children is likely to be far too costly to do annually, so representative samples of children should be considered. Moreover, "staggered" strategies could be employed wherein data could be collected in selected geographic regions or on specific populations of children on a regular, rotating basis.

How are Local Agency Quality and Child Outcomes Data Used to Improve Programs?

This approach would follow the strategies for reporting and using data outlined in both the Local Agency Quality Approach *and* in the Program Rating and Improvement System discussed in Chapter Three. However, both program quality assessments and aggregated data on children's performance and progress would be reported to various audiences and used in program improvement efforts. It is important to note that **no information would be reported on individual children**. Reports about groups of children would help policymakers understand relationships between the quality of local agencies and how groups of children are progressing. Contextual information on the characteristics of children, teachers, and program resources will help to enrich these analyses.

Managers of local agencies can use the combination of program quality and child assessment data to identify priorities for program improvement and report to parents and local elementary schools. Families could receive aggregated data on all the overall performance of all the children in the agency as well as on the agency's performance on quality assessments. Local agencies would use information from their instructional assessments to inform parents about their own child's performance.

State program managers can use the data to set priorities for improving individual agencies, or create technical assistance support for clusters of providers with similar profiles in terms of quality and child assessments. These efforts could be informed by studying local agencies that demonstrate high levels of program quality and consistent success in fostering children's learning and development.

A final and controversial use of the data is in decisions to defund persistently low-performing local agencies. This possible use of the data is the source of the strongest concerns expressed regarding unintended negative consequences. States with an interest in exploring this use are advised to carefully consider the safeguards presented in the next section.

What Safeguards are Recommended in a Local Agency Quality and Child Outcomes Approach?

As noted above, implementing this approach is highly controversial, with some suggesting that it should never be considered. For others, implementation represents a possibility to be considered, assuming states would incorporate the following six safeguards to minimize the risks of misuse of assessment information:

1. States should use broad-based child assessments rather than assessments limited to a narrow set of learning goals for children.

2. Child assessment reporting should document children's progress as well as status, so as to not unfairly judge agencies serving children from less advantaged families.
3. If states elect to use direct assessments, the suggestions to employ IRT analyses in developing assessment items and adapted direct assessment formats should increase the accuracy of results and reduce the risks of "teaching to the test."
4. Collection and reporting of contextual information on children, teachers and programs should reduce the possibilities of simplistic or erroneous interpretation of child assessment results. Indeed, this overall approach, pairing quality assessments with child assessment data, would preclude making decisions or framing public perceptions of agencies solely on the basis of child assessment results.
5. Child assessment results should never be the sole criterion for determining rewards or sanctions, or for making funding decisions for local agencies.
6. States should consider developing differentiated performance benchmarks and methods of reporting data that take account of the trajectories of development of different sub-groups of children. This approach would help ensure accurate perceptions and fairness in treatment for local agencies in light of the characteristics of children they are serving.



In addition to these safeguards, some Task Force members who support the approach advise states to follow a carefully planned, step-by-step implementation approach. States would begin with "no stakes" uses of agency-level child assessments and move through low and moderate stakes uses before contemplating high stakes uses. This approach could involve stages such as the following:

Development and Validation. States would develop and validate comprehensive and appropriate assessment tools geared to their child and program standards. Procedures and materials for training staff to administer the assessments would be developed. Methods of analyzing and reporting data, based on technically defensible benchmarks, would be planned. Finally, technical assistance strategies and resources would be procured so the state can work to strengthen agencies with different patterns of child and program quality results.

Pilot Studies. States would implement an initial pilot effort to collect and analyze child and program quality data from a limited number of local agencies with varied characteristics. Careful study of this data would include examining the reliability, validity and credibility of the assessments when implemented in real-world conditions.

Using Assessments for Program Improvement. States would implement the assessment efforts statewide, but assessments would not be reported to the public. State agencies would use the results solely for technical assistance and professional development efforts.

Public Reporting of Assessments. Given concerns about how child assessment information in particular can influence public and parental perceptions, public reporting of results would be delayed until the state and early childhood leaders and practitioners have confidence in the accuracy and credibility of reports.

Using Assessments to Determine Incentives and Funding. Only after incorporating the safeguards outlined above and after considerable experience in using this information for program improvement would states use child assessment information as an additional factor in funding decisions for local agencies.

A Complex Issue, Multiple Views

Our goal in presenting this detailed discussion of the issues and a possible approach regarding the use of child data at the local agency level has been two fold. First, we wanted the reader to understand the tenacity and the complexity of the issues. That the Task Force grappled with this issue over the course of two years of deliberations and came to no consensus is telling. Clearly, controversy remains high. Second, we wanted the reader to understand how some individuals are thinking about inventive ways to collect and use child data as an additional resource along with program quality data in efforts to strengthen local early education agencies.