Early Learning Standards: Variation Across States and Issues to Consider

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In this presentation

- Variation in Early Learning Standards
  - Content
  - Implementation
- Issues to consider

IA. State Variation in Content and Format of ELS/ELG

Status of Early Learning Standards

- All 50 states have early learning standards for preschool-age children
  - Many have revised their documents at least once
- Approximately half of the states have early learning guidelines for infants and toddlers
  - Some of these have revised/are revising their documents

Content Analyses

- Infant-toddler ELG
  - 21 state ELG documents published as of July 2007
- Preschool ELS
  - 46 state ELS documents published as of January 2005

- Scott-Little, Kagan, Frelow, & Reid (2008)
- Scott-Little, Kagan, & Frelow (2006)

Coding Framework

- Five domains
  - Physical Development and Motor Skills
  - Social and Emotional Development
  - Approaches Toward Learning
  - Language and Communication Development
  - Cognitive Development and General Knowledge
- Elements related to specific aspects of learning and development within each domain

Basic Content Analysis Process

- Read documents
- Record features of the document such as the age levels addressed
- Code what element of development and learning each ELG/ELS addresses
- Calculate percentage of ELG/ELS that addressed each indicator on the framework

Summary of Results:

There is considerable variation in states' early learning standards

SUMMARY OF INFANT-TODDLER ELG ANALYSES

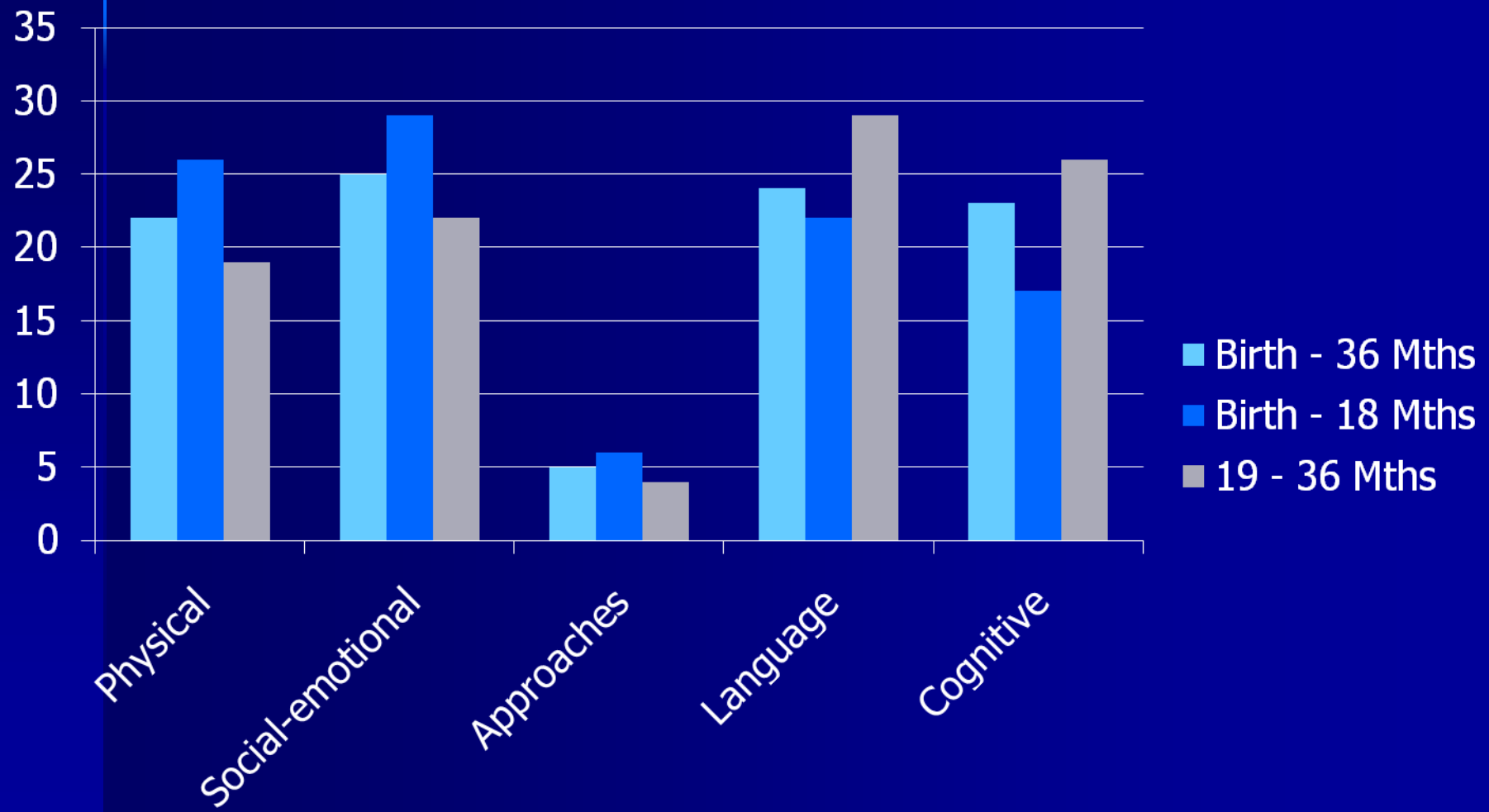
Organization of Infant-toddler ELGs

- Age levels used
  - Birth to 36 months: 8 states
  - Birth to 18 and 18 to 36 months: 3 states
  - 3 age levels: 5 states
  - 4 ages levels: 2 states
  - More than 4 age levels: 3 states

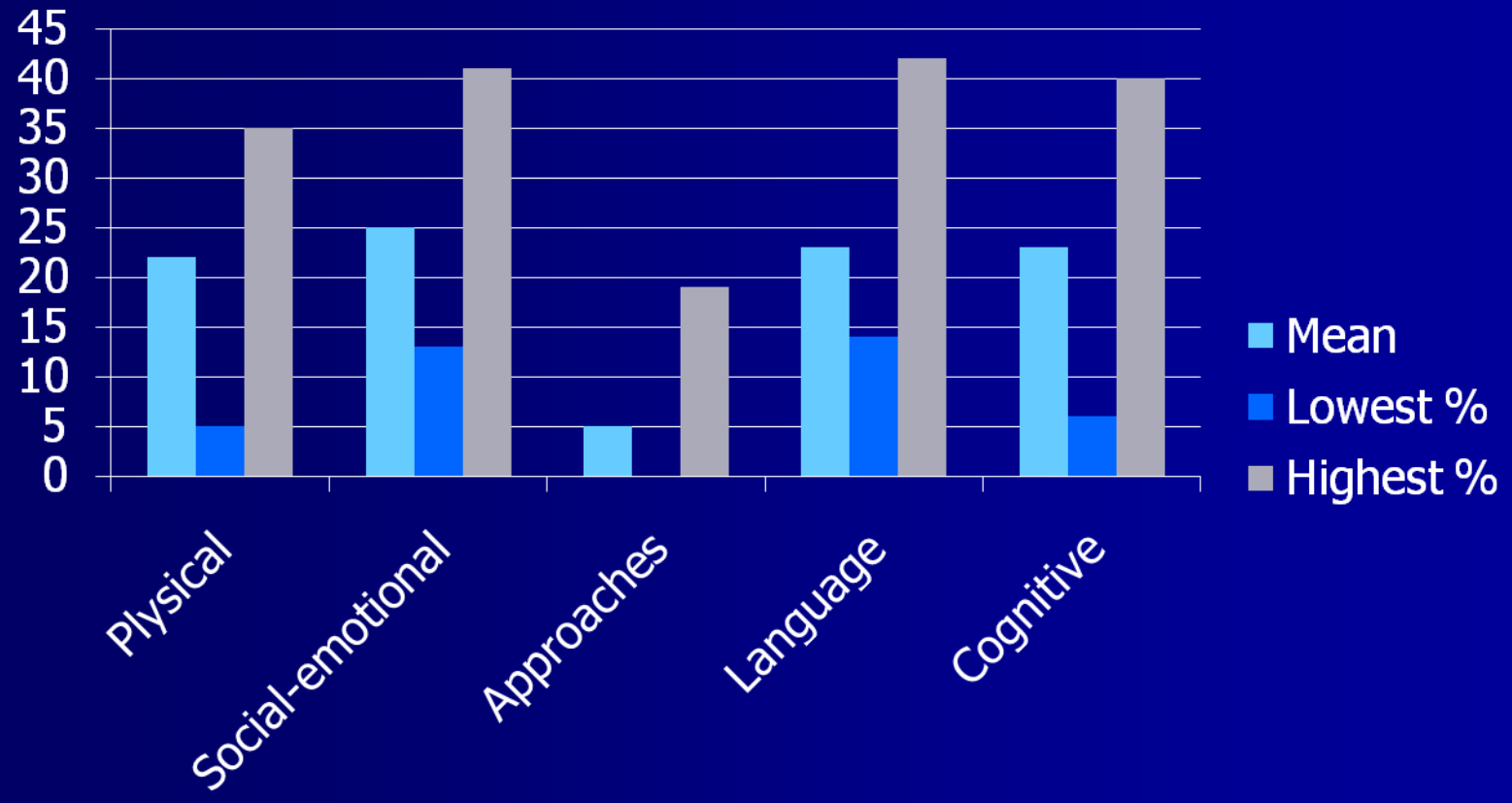
Number of I/T ELGs—Variation Across States

- Number of ELG indicators
  - State with fewest: 34
  - State with most: 688
  - Mean number of indicators: 218.2

Domains Addressed in I/T ELGs—Variation Across Age Levels



Domains Addressed in I/T ELGs—Variation Across States

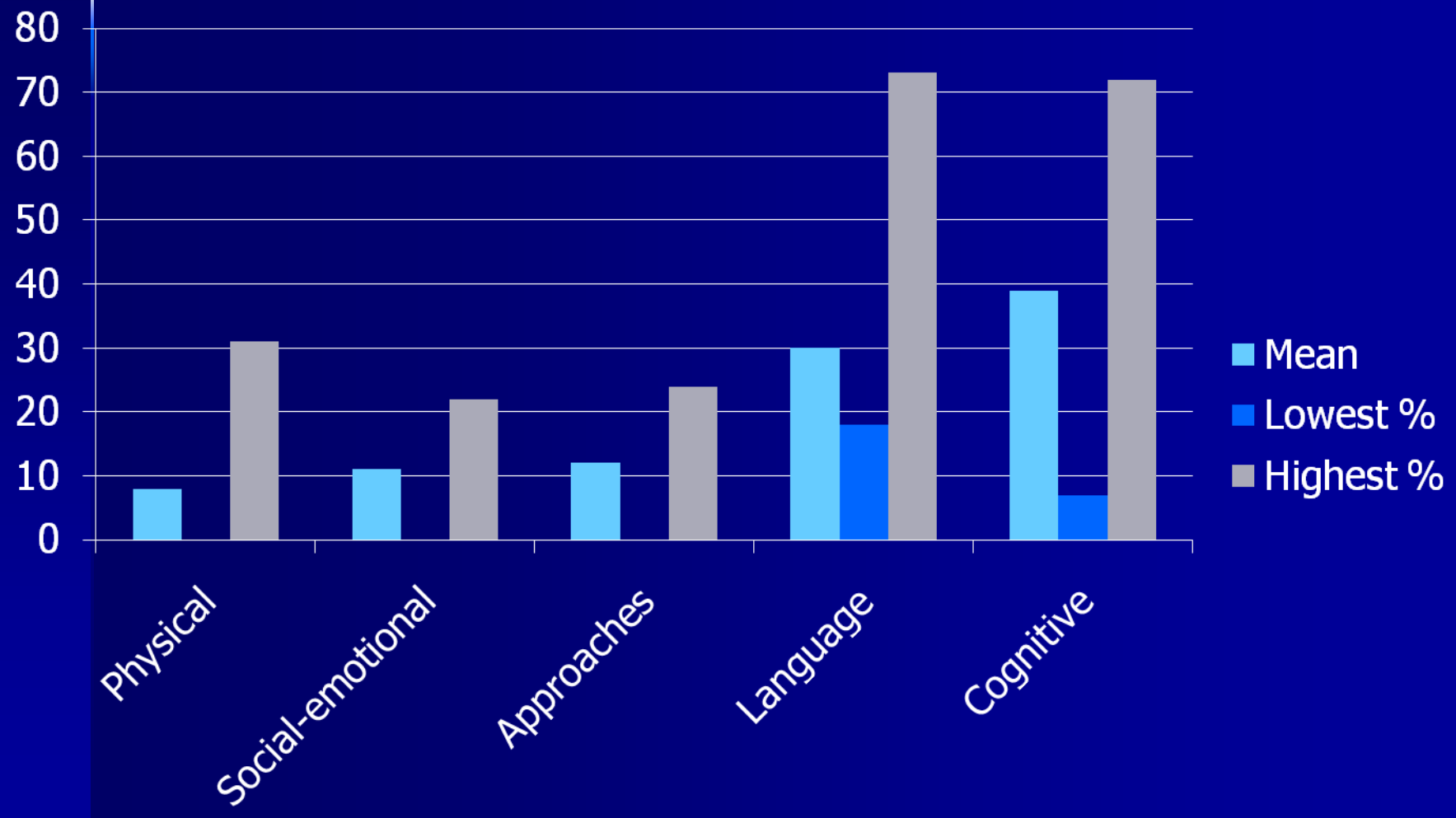


SUMMARY OF PRESCHOOL ELS ANALYSES

Number of Preschool ELS—Variation Across States

- Number of Indicators
  - State with fewest: 42
  - State with most: 434
  - Mean across states: 154.3

Domains Addressed in Preschool ELS—Variation Across States



Limitations to Keep in Mind

- Data are dated
- Limitations within the coding system
  - Unevenness across the indicators and domains
  - Difficult to capture "nuances"
- Other challenges
  - Important characteristics of development are interrelated and are foundational
  - Unevenness in research literature

IB. State Variation in Implementation of ELG/ELS

Purposes for ELG/ELS

- Improve quality of program/curriculum
- Improve professional development
- Educate parents
- Guide decisions regarding assessments

- Use as part of an accountability system or program evaluation

  - Scott-Little, Lesko, Martella & Milburn (2007)

Programs Required to Use ELS/ELG

- Pre-kindergarten programs most commonly required to use ELS
  - 23 required by law or regulation
  - 16 voluntary
- States are encouraging other programs to use them
  - Child care
  - Head Start
  - IDEA
  - Even Start

Implementation of ELG/ELS

- In-service professional development
- Teacher professional competencies
- Higher education/teacher preparation programs
- Alignment with curricula and assessments
- Other elements of QRIS and quality improvement efforts

II. Issues and Considerations

Purpose and Target Audience

- Characteristics of the target audience and purposes of ELS document must be considered
  - Format of the document
  - Number and wording of ELS

“Useability” of the ELS

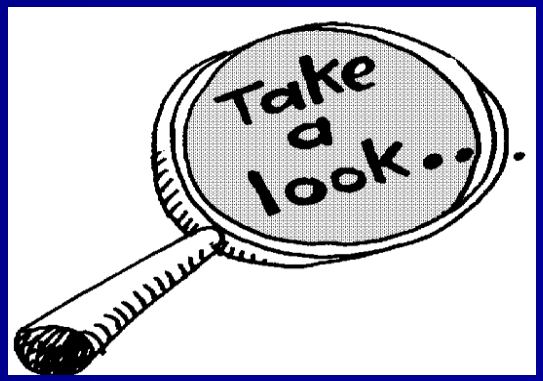
- Age range and age groupings
- “Structure” or “levels”
- Observable
- Parsimonious

Inclusiveness of ELGs

- Address all domains
- Cultural and linguistic diversity
- Ability-level diversity/children with disabilities

Review and Validation

- Expert review
- Content analysis
- Age-appropriateness evaluation
  - Research validation process
  - Age validation study



Alignment

- Alignment between standards, assessments and curricula is
  - the foundation upon which we build a coherent and cohesive pedagogy for young children
  - essential for success in the pre-Kindergarten through third grade movement
- Both horizontal and vertical alignment are important

Analyzing Alignment

- One way to look at alignment is to create a matrix to look at the extent to which content from one document "matches" that of another

"Low complexity" analysis

Limitations of the Low Complexity Alignment Analyses

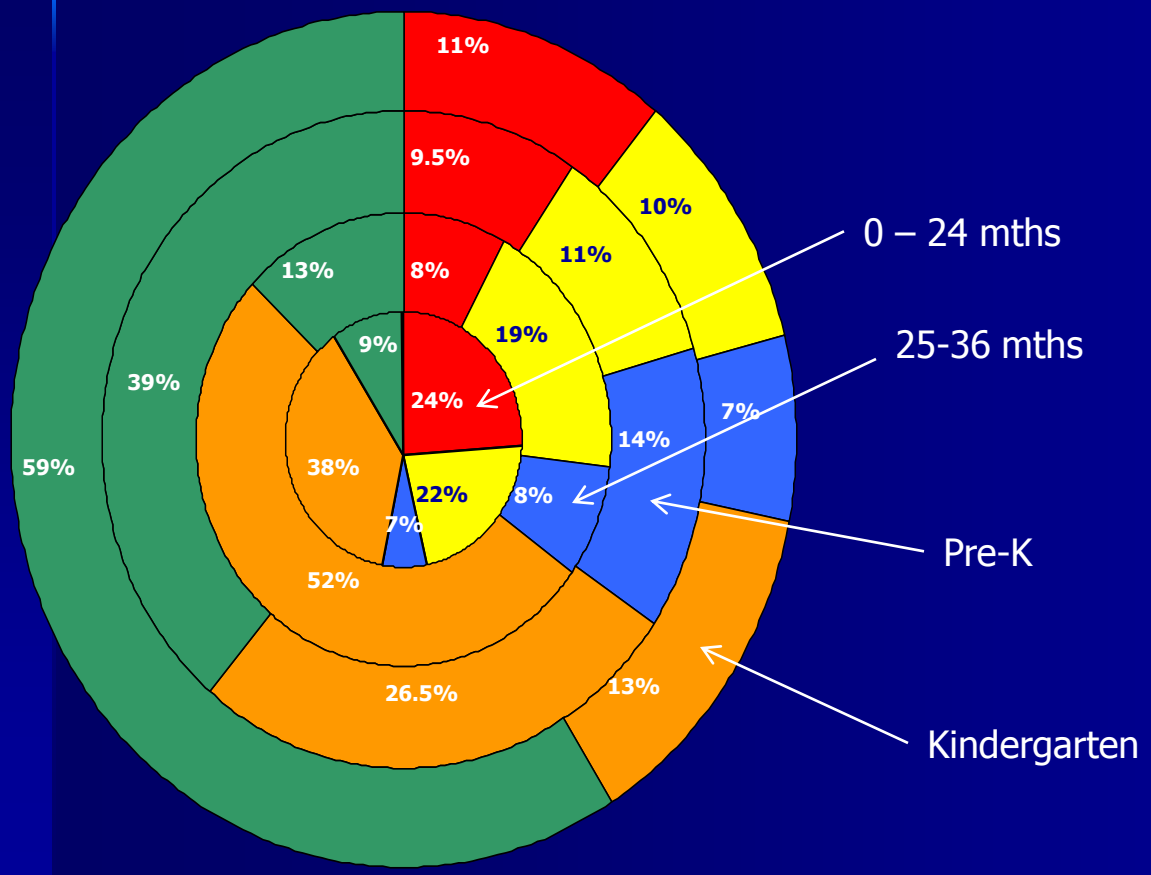
- Documents may address the same content, but may be mis-aligned in their
  - "Balance" in areas of learning that are emphasized
  - Cognitive complexity or age level
  - Theoretical or philosophical orientation
  - Overall quality

- Even if the content "match" is good, the documents may still not support high quality instruction

High Complexity Alignment Analyses

- Developed a construct template used to code
  - Standards and assessments
  - Birth through third grade
- Developed an analysis protocol to analyze the data according to four parameters:
  - ***Balance***
  - ***Coverage***
  - ***Depth***
  - ***Difficulty***

Example of Balance Findings—Birth through Kindergarten



Physical Development and Motor Skills

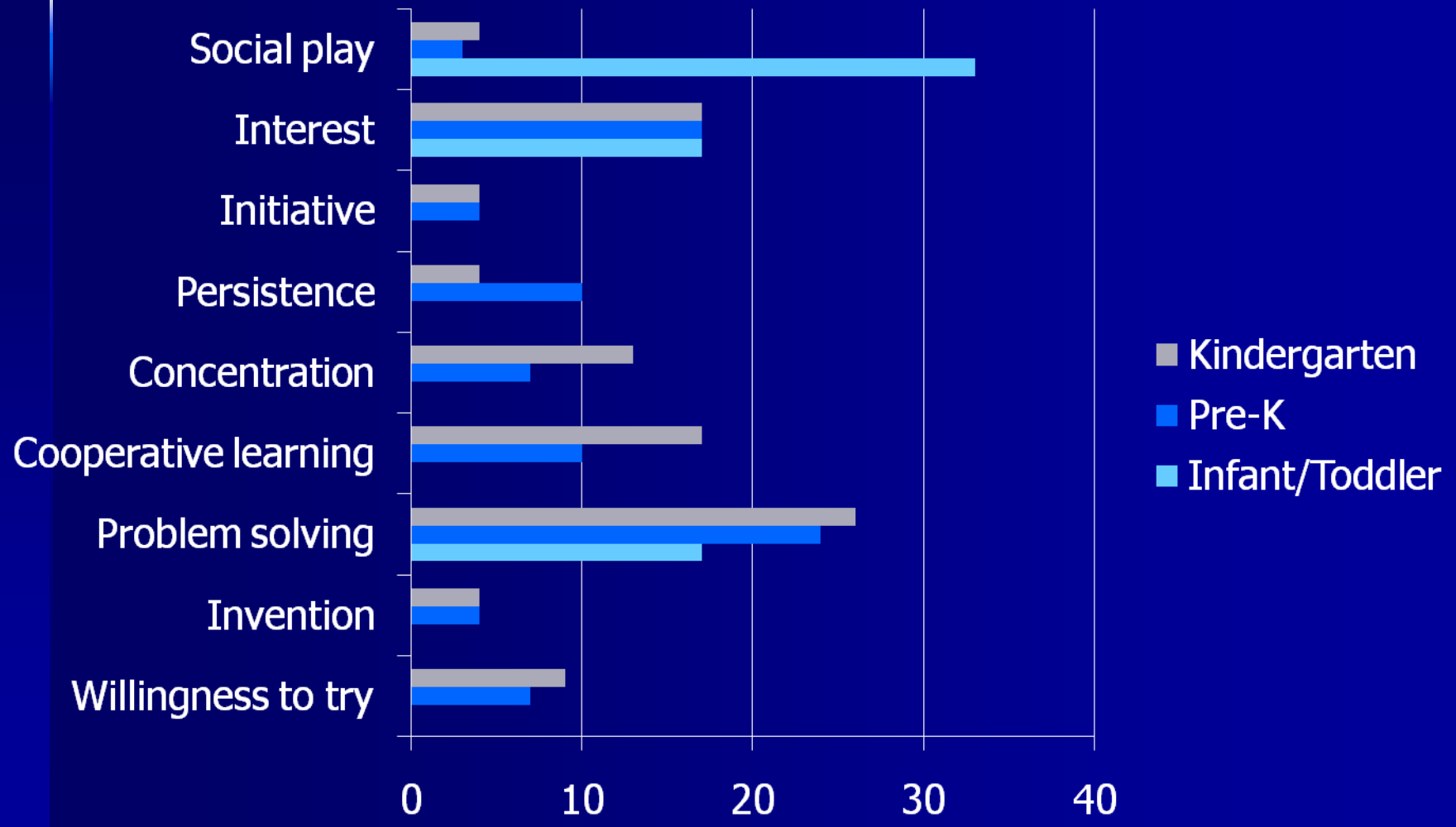
Social and Emotional Development

Approaches to Play and Learning

Language and Communication

Cognitive Development and General Knowledge

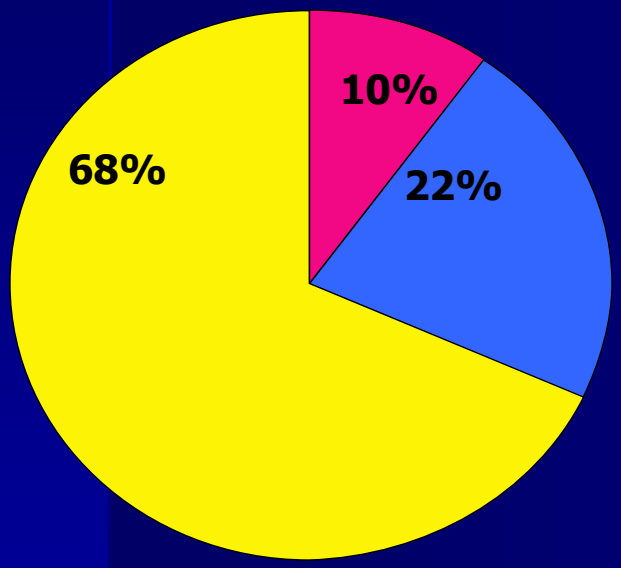
Example of Depth Findings—Birth through Kindergarten



Example of Difficulty Findings— I/T, Pre-K and K

Difficulty:
Infant/Toddler vs. Pre-Kindergarten Total

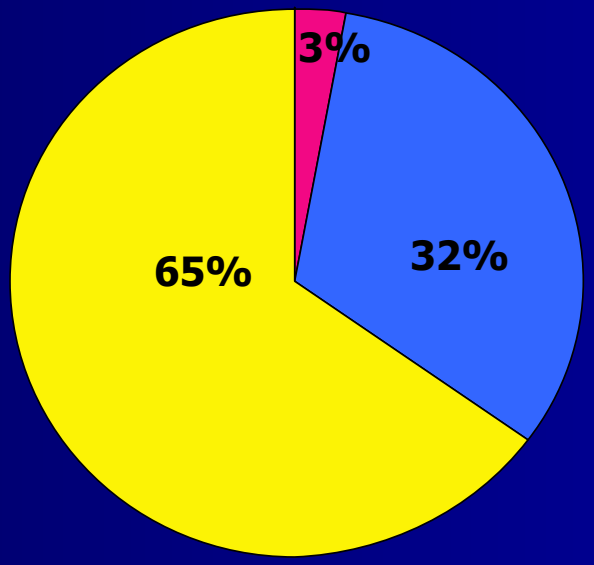
% of Standard Indicator Pairs



**96 Unpaired Indicators*

Difficulty:
Pre-Kindergarten vs. Kindergarten Total

% of Standard Indicator Pairs



**184 Unpaired Indicators*

- Younger Age Group More Difficult than Older Age Group (-)
- Equal Difficulty (=)
- Older Age Group More Difficult than Younger Age Group (+)

Implementation

- Cannot overlook the complexity of implementation
- Must dedicate significant resources to ensure that the ELS are
  - Infused across systems
  - Used in different settings
  - Used appropriately with all children

Pros and Cons of National ELS Effort

Pros (if done well)

- Pool national resources to address issues and produce high quality document
- Conduct more in-depth analyses of content
- Generate greater consensus and consistency across the country

Possible "cons"

- Reflect the cultural backgrounds and values of individual states?
- Age-validation within states?
- "Buy in" from state-level stakeholders?
- Alignment within states?
- Implementation?

Conclusion

Sources

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