Early Learning Standards: Variation Across States and Issues to Consider

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Listening and Learning about Early Learning Meeting
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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

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

- Physical
- Social-emotional
- Approaches
- Language
- Cognitive

- Birth - 36 Mths
- Birth - 18 Mths
- 19 - 36 Mths
Domains Addressed in I/T ELGs—Variation Across States

- Physical
- Social-emotional
- Approaches
- Language
- Cognitive

Legend:
- Mean
- Lowest %
- Highest %
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

- Birth through Kindergarten
  - 0 – 24 mths
  - 25-36 mths
  - Pre-K
  - Kindergarten
Example of Depth Findings—Birth through Kindergarten

- Social play
- Interest
- Initiative
- Persistence
- Concentration
- Cooperative learning
- Problem solving
- Invention
- Willingness to try
Example of Difficulty Findings—
I/T, Pre-K and K

**Difficulty:** Infant/Toddler vs. Pre-Kindergarten Total

- Younger Age Group: 68%
- Equal Difficulty: 10%
- Older Age Group: 22%

*96 Unpaired Indicators

**Difficulty:** Pre-Kindergarten vs. Kindergarten Total

- Younger Age Group: 65%
- Equal Difficulty: 3%
- Older Age Group: 32%

*184 Unpaired Indicators

Legend:
- Pink: Younger Age Group More Difficult than Older Age Group (-)
- Blue: Equal Difficulty (=)
- Yellow: 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