

EARLY LEARNING LEADERS AND DRIVERS OF DECISION- MAKING IN US PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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**START
CENTER**

STRATEGIC ANALYSIS,
RESEARCH & TRAINING CENTER

Department of Global Health | University of Washington

AGENDA

01 Introductions

02 Project Overview

03

Deep dives:

Context

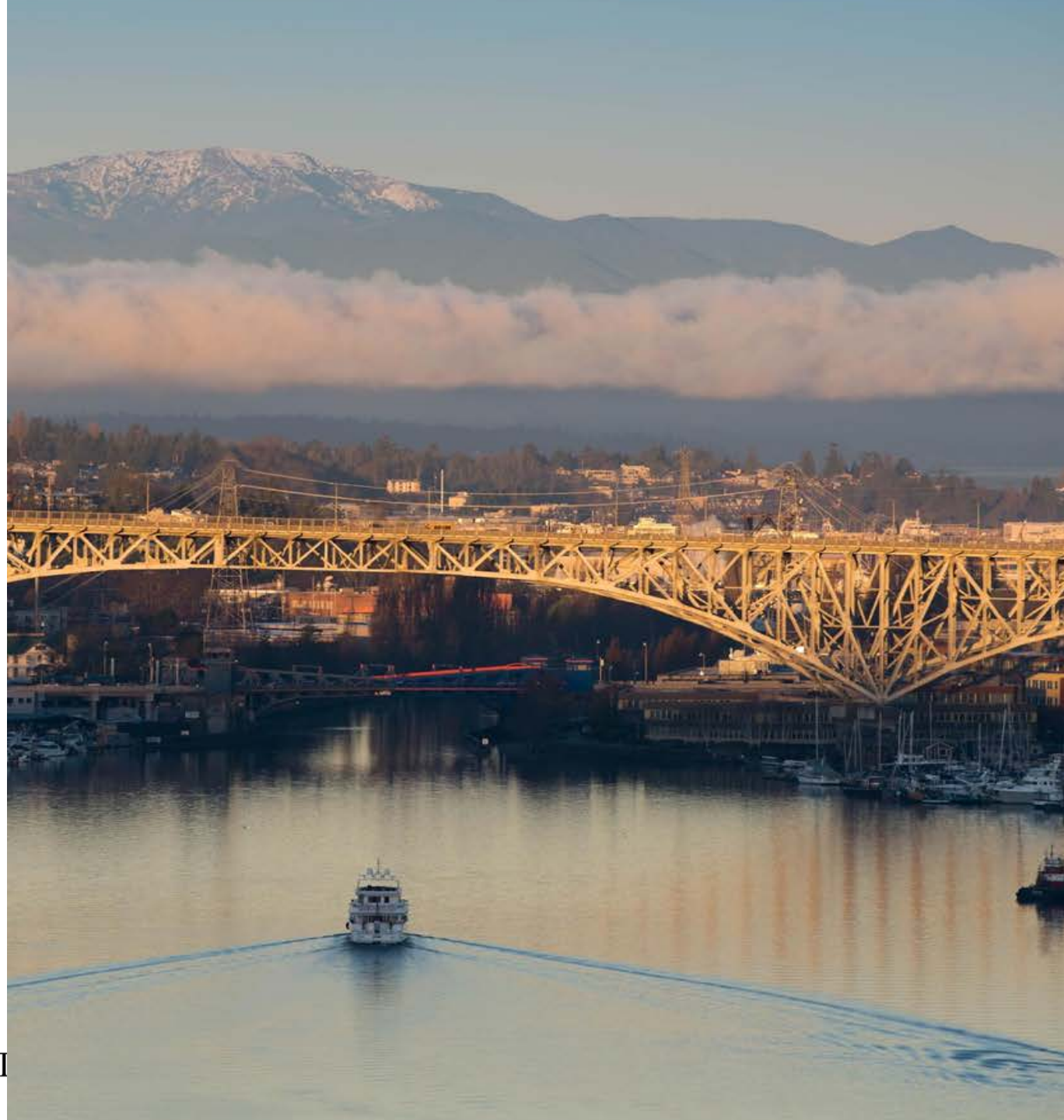
Assessments

Data Use

Professional Development

04

Recommendations



PROJECT TEAM



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The Strategic Analysis, Research & Training Center (START) University of Washington (UW)



Leverages leading content expertise from across the University of Washington



Provides high quality research and analytic support to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and global and public health decision-makers



Provides structured mentorship and training to University of Washington graduate research assistants

PROJECT BACKGROUND

MOTIVATION

The Gates Foundation's Early Learning team aspires that **every child** in the US has access to **high-quality, affordable, personalized** early learning opportunities. Early learning sets children up for success in elementary school and drives long-term educational and well-being outcomes, especially for Black, Latinx, and economically disadvantaged children.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

To **identify the leaders of early education (Pre-K and Head Start programs) in the United States** in the largest urban areas and serving our target populations (Black, Latinx, and/or economically disadvantaged) in all 50 US states

LEARNING FOCI

- **Context**, including responsibilities of early learning leaders
- **Child-level and classroom assessments**
- **Data usage**
- **Professional development and instructional support**
- **Resources or networks** that drive decision making

TAKEAWAYS

Key Challenges for ELLs

1. Minimal peer-to-peer support between ELLs
2. Effective utilization of data and assessments
3. Culturally and linguistically appropriate curriculum and assessments
4. Resource and staffing limitations

Recommendations for the Gates Foundation

1. Create a Network of Early Education Leaders
2. Emphasize Equity-Focused Professional Development
3. Support ELL's Efforts to Increase Family and Community Engagement

METHODOLOGY

PROJECT TIMELINE

October 2023 – February 2024 (4 months)

Identify early learning leaders



**Oct
2023**



Surveys



**Nov
2023**



Key informant interviews



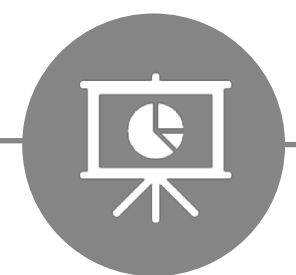
**Jan
2024**



Networking call



Analysis and recommendations



**Feb
2024**

ANALYSES & DELIVERABLES

KEY DELIVERABLES

Database of Early Learning Leaders in key school districts in the United States

Design and administration of surveys

Interviews and transcription of interviews with Early Learning Leaders

Findings, recommendations and next steps

RESPONSE RATE SUMMARY

50

Early learning
leaders identified



15

Surveys
received



11

KiIs
completed



25

Networking
call attendees



CONTEXT QUESTIONS

DISTRICT POPULATION

What is the population served?

PRIORITIZATION BY NEED

Programs with restricted seats prioritize high-needs families, largely based on weighted applications

ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS

Funding constraints affect the number of children they can serve, with 7/11 (**64%**) depending on external funding for services

EXPANSION

All mentioned continuous effort to expand access to seats and improve quality of existing seats

GEOGRAPHIC SERVICES

Services are often provided based on geographic location, with preference given to children in school district area

DIVERSITY

High percentages of Latinx and Black populations in certain districts, as well as multi-language learners

FUNDING

What is the context of your school district's pre-K program (Head Start, state sponsored, school sponsored)?

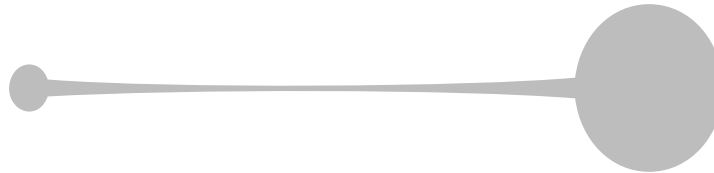
Mixed Models

7/11 (64%) reported using mixed funding for Pre-K, combining state, federal, and local resources, as well as grants



Head Start

8/11 (73%) have Head Start funding; however, some districts manage this funding, while others are managed by external administrators



Local Funding

Districts indicated obtaining funding from local resources, such as the soda tax in Philadelphia and alcohol taxes in Anchorage



Challenges

Participants shared that it is challenging to obtain and navigate complex funding to Pre-K programs



SPECIAL EDUCATION

Do you oversee special education programs for preschoolers?

Generally, participants indicated involvement in special education Pre-K programming

3/11 (**28%**) had direct role in overseeing special education for preschoolers.

7/11 (**64%**) indicated that, special education is handled by a separate department or director, but with close coordination to early learning programs

01

Integrated Models

In 9/11 (**82%**) of districts, special education is integrated into pre-K through inclusive classrooms and blended models

02

Inclusivity Emphasis

Focus on ensuring that children with special needs have access to inclusive classrooms through classroom setups, teaching methodologies, and overall integration

03

Resource Allocation

Key role in ensuring that accommodations for special education students are provided and that needed resources are effectively allocated

04

Teacher Support

Successful integration of special education requires comprehensive professional development and training for educators

SPECIAL EDUCATION

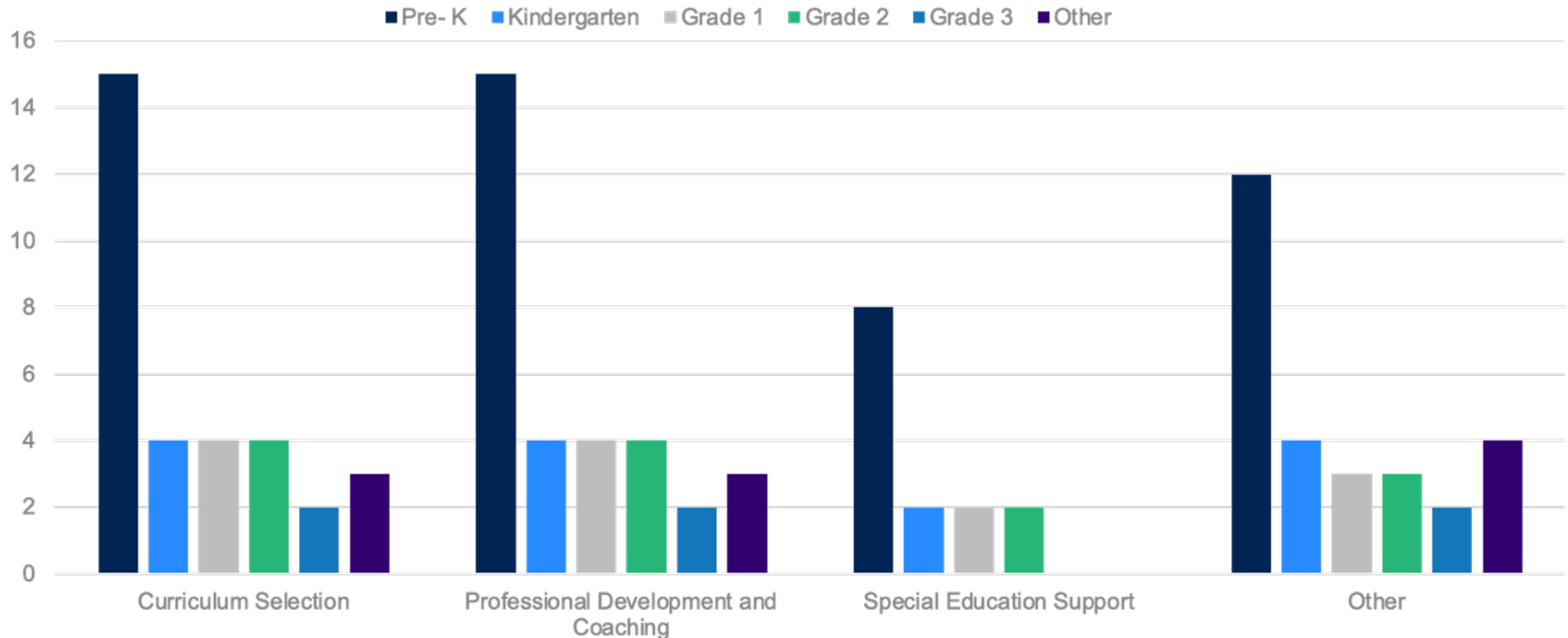
Do you oversee special education programs for preschoolers?

"We do a model of blended programming... We want them to **spend as much time as possible in a [general] Pre-K classroom based on their personal needs.** So one child might spend an hour every day, and then we're working towards getting them more comfortable, accommodated, and acclimated to more time in the classroom. **We want to have as much of an inclusive environment for each kiddo as possible.**"

"We have a dual certification where you can be certified in general education and special education and serve in both roles in the early childhood setting because **we know that naturally embedded instruction is way more effective than this isolated practice rate.** That is the model we're shifting to is one teacher with associate support being able to be getting their services within the classroom, any classroom."

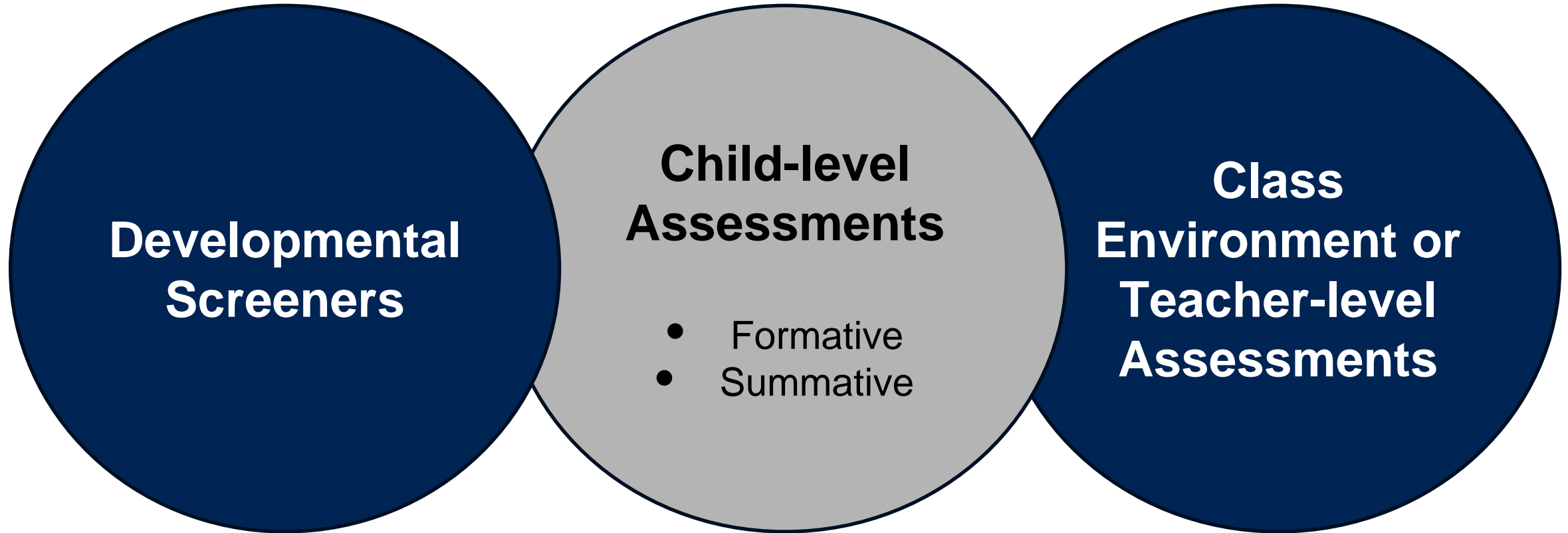
PRIMARY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Most early learning leaders surveyed oversee Pre-K exclusively; however, 4/15 (27%) of participants' oversight extended through to 2nd grade.



ASSESSMENTS

ASSESSMENT TYPES



STUDENT LEVEL ASSESSMENTS

What assessments are being used?

- **Teaching Strategies GOLD** is the most common student-level assessment
 - 9/11 KII Interviewees reported previously or currently using GOLD
- About 4/9 respondents' reported GOLD is city (n=2) or state-mandated (n=2)



DRIVERS FOR CHOOSING GOLD

01

Observation-Based

02

Comprehensive Domains

03

Formative and Summative
Uses

04

Supports Individualized
Learning

EXPERIENCES WITH GOLD

*“I've been using GOLD for years even before coming to this district. **It's responsive to the children where they are...**[with GOLD], you can show what you know without being able to speak English, in the way that the tool is set up.”*

*“I feel **very confident and comfortable with the assessments** that we're using [including GOLD]...I do think that Teaching Strategies GOLD is the **best available tool on the marketplace** right now, so we continue to use it. **But like I said, it's not without significant detriment to functioning of the classroom at times.**”*

CHALLENGES WITH GOLD

01

Labor-Intensive

02

Instructional Shifts

03

Difficulty in Data Disaggregation

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES WITH GOLD

*“It's intended to be observation-based. It's **very labor-intensive, very time-intensive**. And so, as a state, it's **unintentionally shifted instruction toward the assessment instead of the standards** when they mandated it 12 years ago.”*

*“One of the things that was troublesome about TS GOLD to our team was that it **wasn't easily disaggregated by race** and all the different characteristics that you're speaking to in demographics, and so being able to use it to drive our equity work was challenging.”*

One respondent noted GOLD is not appropriate for children with disabilities

*“**[GOLD] does not monitor progress in areas that are impacted by disability very well, so you can't see small amounts of progress being made**. And when you're using that data to report to families, or to monitor growth, it can appear that students with disabilities have not made any measurable gains, and that impact isn't true.”*

OTHER STUDENT- LEVEL ASSESSMENTS

01

Ages & Stages (ASQ-3, ASQ-SE) (n=4/11)

02

Work Sampling System (n=1/11)

03

Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) (n=1/11)

04

School-district developed assessment system (n=3/11)

ASSESSMENT CHALLENGES

Black, Latinx, & Multilingual Learners

ASSESSMENT OPTIONS SOMETIMES SEEN AS INADEQUATE

- Assessment and curriculum not always perceived to affirm or represent Black or Latinx students and their communities
- Recognition that better assessments needed for multilingual learners
- Inability to disaggregate data easily by key populations

“We don't really have a good assessment for dual language learners – that comes up over and over.”

TEACHER- LEVEL ASSESSMENTS

CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System) (N=3):

Used to observe and assess the quality of teacher-student interactions within the classroom. While primarily focused on student outcomes, CLASS provides feedback that can inform teacher professional development and instructional strategies.

"I don't think we're using it to the full capacity that it has to offer because it takes so much energy just to do the assessment..."

We could probably use it in stronger conversations with our teachers to strengthen practice. And I know that when there are concerns...we don't have the capacity to have those rich conversations over and over on the schedule that we should."

DATA UTILIZATION

CHALLENGES WITH DATA

01

Data reported but remains unused

02

Rudimentary technology used to store or analyze data

03

Unable to analyze data in a timely manner to make substantive adjustments

SUCCESSSES WITH DATA

*We just got our Fall data. If you're a multilingual learner, you're **3x more likely to meet the kindergarten benchmark if you attend preschool. And if you're living in poverty [and you attend preschool], you're 2x as likely to meet the benchmark in kindergarten. Which is amazing, right?** If you really break down the different subgroups and by race, it's almost 2x as likely that you'll meet benchmark. Pretty exciting.*

"Our District goals are based on the achievement of black and brown students.

Our last two superintendents have been pretty bold because it's very clear that there's a gap. And so instead of just washing over... Our number one goal is that all children are reading by fifth grade, but when you break down to the sub-goals, our goal is the progress of Black and Hispanic kids."

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

Coaching and Mentoring (n=8)

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) (n=7)

Curriculum-based Professional Development (n=6)

Data-driven Instructional Improvement (n=5)

Equity-focused Training (n=4)

Specific Department for Teacher Professional Learning (n=1)

Integration of Special Education Services in PD (n=1)

Choice Sessions for Professional Learning (n=1)

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND ORGANIZATIONS

Do you belong to a professional organization from which you receive support?

10/15 survey respondents (66%) said they belong to a professional organization from which they receive support:

- **National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)**
- National League of Cities
- SECA
- Division of Early Childhood

Multiple networking call participants expressed the desire for regular collaboration with other Directors for Early Learning across the US

KEY CHALLENGES

COMMON CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS



Building Leadership Network in Early Education: Connecting leaders to enhance collaboration and improve educational outcomes



Professional Development Needs: Ensuring all educators have access to and can effectively utilize training on new or existing assessments



Engagement Challenges: Engaging families in the assessment process and ensuring they understand and can act on assessment findings



Cultural and Linguistic Relevance: Ensuring assessments are culturally and linguistically appropriate for the diverse populations served



Resource Limitations: Constraints in funding, staffing, and materials necessary for comprehensive assessment and intervention



Data Utilization: Effectively using assessment data to inform instruction, intervention, and policy

RECOMMENDATIONS & NEXT STEPS

RECOMMENDATION 1

Create a Network of Early Education Leaders

WHY CREATE THE NETWORK	DESCRIPTION
Collaboration and Resource Sharing	Facilitates the exchange of innovative ideas, strategies, and best practices among leaders, enabling them to enhance their programs and address common challenges more efficiently
Professional Development	Provides a platform for continuous learning through workshops, seminars, and peer mentoring, contributing to the professional growth of leaders and, by extension, the quality of early childhood education
Advocacy and Influence	Strengthens the collective voice of early education leaders, empowering them to advocate for policy changes, funding opportunities, and community support that benefit early childhood education at local, state, and national levels

NEXT STEPS

How to Create a Network of Early Education Leaders

01

Initiating Outreach for Network Engagement: Utilize the contact information collected by the START team to initiate outreach, inviting leaders to an introductory meeting (virtual or in-person) to discuss the network's vision, goals, and potential benefits.

02

Establishing a Collaborative Online Platform: Create an online forum or platform (e.g., a social media group, or a collaboration tool like Slack) that enables members to easily share resources.

03

Organizing Regular Educational Events: Plan and host regular events, such as workshops, roundtable discussions, and conferences, focusing on pertinent topics in early childhood education.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Emphasize Equity-Focused Professional Development (EFPD)

WHY FOCUS ON EQUITY-FOCUSED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	DESCRIPTION
Addresses Systemic Inequities	Helps educators recognize and address systemic inequities within the education system, ensuring that all students, regardless of their racial, cultural, or socioeconomic backgrounds, have access to high-quality education.
Improved Outcomes for All Students	By focusing on the specific needs of marginalized groups, EFPD can lead to improved educational outcomes for students of color, students with disabilities, and other underserved populations.
Culturally Relevant Teaching	It equips educators with the skills and knowledge to implement culturally relevant teaching practices, fostering a more inclusive classroom environment that respects and reflects the diverse backgrounds of all students
Professional Growth and Awareness	EFPD enhances educators' awareness of personal biases, fostering empathy, continuous growth, and equitable learning opportunities.

NEXT STEPS

How to Introduce Equity-Focused Professional Development

01

Ongoing Training and Workshops: Host frequent equity-focused training and workshops to engage educators and equip them with strategies for inclusive teaching.

02

Curriculum Adaptation and Support: Offer continuous resources and coaching to help educators make their curriculum culturally relevant and inclusive, ensuring effective implementation and adjustments.

03

Data-Driven Strategies: Support creating Culturally Responsive Assessments that reflect Black and Latinx children's cultural and linguistic backgrounds

RECOMMENDATION 3

Support ELL's Efforts to Increase Family and Community Engagement

WHY INCREASE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	DESCRIPTION
Bridges Cultural Gaps	Engages families in a culturally relevant manner, reflecting and respecting their backgrounds
Enhances Parental Involvement	Increases parents' active participation in their children's education, fostering a supportive home learning environment
Builds School-Family Trust	Strengthens relationships between educators and families, promoting mutual trust and understanding
Leverages Community Resources	Utilizes local organizations and resources to support educational programs and address students' holistic needs

NEXT STEPS

Support ELL's Efforts to Increase Family and Community Engagement

01

Implement Parent Education Programs: Offer programs that educate parents on how to support their children's learning and development at home

02

Create Advisory Councils: Form councils that include family members to provide feedback on policies and quality improvements, ensuring their voices are heard in decision-making processes

03

Conduct Surveys and Listening Sessions: Use these tools to gather qualitative feedback from families, understanding their needs and preferences to tailor engagement strategies effectively

DISCUSSION

QUESTIONS?

THANK YOU



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Appendix



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NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES WITH GOLD

“It has significant pros and cons associated with it. It's very labor-intensive. We don't find that the amount of information that it generates is worth the amount of time that it takes, particularly because the time that it takes is often during the actual class, and so it's actually directly reducing the amount of opportunities for feedback and instruction that students have. I think we find the tool to be very reliable, but I don't know that it is productive overall because of the limitations I mentioned.”

*“One of the shifts we're trying to make right now is not focusing so much of teaching to the GOLD objectives, but actually teaching to [our state's] early learning standards because **GOLD is our assessment, not our standard.**”*

AGES & STAGES (ASQ-3, ASQ-SE)

4/11 Klls reported using ASQ-3 / ASQ-SE

AGES & STAGES ASSESSMENT

Developmental and Social-Emotional
screening

Early Indicator for Risk

Formative and Summative Uses

"We have a significant population of asylum seekers in [our school district]. I do feel that the ASQ was not normed for that population. It was normed for American children."

DESIRED RESULTS DEVELOPMENTAL PROFILE (DRDP)

Transitioned from GOLD to DRDP due to difficulty disaggregating data

	DESCRIPTION
Observational & Comprehensive	DRDP is highlighted for its observational nature, capturing multiple data points authentically across the day. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of how students engage and perform in a variety of settings, not just in test situations.
Supports Equity	The DRDP has the capacity for data disaggregation by race and other demographics, which is critical for driving equity work within education. This feature was seen as an improvement over other assessments, enabling targeted support and interventions.

"Using it skillfully is hard, and so training our teachers to use it in a really skillful way - the way it's intended - is a thing I think we're still working on."

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENTS CREATED BY DISTRICTS

All respondents with district-created curriculum and assessments reported relying heavily on the evidence-base around early childhood learning

For one respondent, the curriculum and summative assessments of the district were based on:

- 01 Research data
- 02 Community relevance
- 03 Ease of use for teachers

"I have to use the community... [Our district] is where over 40% of the slaves in the United States came through. There is a culture and history that you cannot ignore."

USE OF DATA

