

# **Association of Early Learning Coalitions**

## **Examining Relationships between Scores on the Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screening and the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test**

*Issues for Consideration*  
**June 2010**

### ***Background***

In 2002 Florida became the third state in the nation to provide universal prekindergarten when voters passed a constitutional amendment to provide high-quality voluntary prekindergarten to every 4-year-old child in the state. Florida delivers the Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program (VPK) through a state/local partnership between state agencies, local early learning coalitions, public schools, and private early learning center-based and family child care providers. Over 160,000 children now participate in the program annually, close to 70% of those eligible.<sup>1</sup>

As part of the program, the Florida Department of Education (DOE) is required to oversee administration of a kindergarten readiness screening for all children entering kindergarten, establish scores to differentiate children that are 'not ready' for kindergarten, analyze the scores of those children attending Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program (VPK), and work in partnership with the Agency of Workforce Innovation to identify 'low performing' VPK Programs (those programs with a certain percentage of children identified as 'not ready'). Kindergarten teachers administer the kindergarten readiness screening within the first 30 days of kindergarten. These results are used to determine children's readiness for school, inform kindergarten classroom instruction, and provide useful information to parents.

Since 2006-07, the Kindergarten Screening consisted of a subset of the Early Childhood Observation System (ECHOS<sup>TM</sup>) and two measures from the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS<sup>TM</sup>). ECHOS<sup>TM</sup> is a brief observational screening instrument, designed to measure a child's performance across seven developmental areas. Beginning with the 2009-10 school year, the DIBELS<sup>TM</sup> measures were replaced with two measures from the new Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading (FAIR) focusing on letter-naming/phonemic awareness and listening comprehension/vocabulary, developed in collaboration with the Florida Center for Reading Research.

During the 2009-10 school year, the first participants in Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program entered third grade and completed Florida's standardized assessment, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT).

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<sup>1</sup> Agency for Workforce Innovation Early Learning Services Fact Book. Available: <http://www.floridajobs.org/earlylearning/factbook/>

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An analysis of how Florida's VPK participants performed on the FCAT is anticipated. This paper outlines important considerations for the analysis.

### *Issues for Consideration and Recommendations*

#### *Confounding Variables/Demographics*

Many child, family, and environmental factors affect children's growth and development, and thus, their readiness for school and school success. Socio-economic status, disability/special needs, and language issues may impact where children are initially in VPK, the progress they make, their performance on assessment tests, their school readiness, and their school success. These issues have not been sufficiently addressed in kindergarten readiness screenings and in determining low-performing providers. Many early childhood professionals have concerns about the impact of these issues on VPK provider willingness to accept children with special needs and dual-language learners. These issues need careful consideration in any analysis. Furthermore, because of these issues, the analysis of the relationship between Florida's kindergarten readiness screening and the FCAT should not be connected to individual children or providers.

The analysis of the relationship between kindergarten readiness screening and FCAT scores should include an examination by socio-economic status. There may be variations in participation levels by income from the first year of VPK to subsequent years, and if so, these variations should be noted prior to drawing any conclusions. In addition, academic assessment gains that fade by third grade have been found in other child assessments for populations of low-income children. In order to investigate the possible fade effect, the analysis must include a break down by socio-economic status.

#### Recommendations:

Determine if there are differences between VPK completers, VPK non-completers, and VPK non-participants. Is 'some' VPK better than 'none' or do we have evidence that there is a particular 'dosage' that is required to impact child performance? If there are differences, do these differences vary by demographics?

Analyze the impact of socio-economic status on VPK participation. Does kindergarten readiness vary by socio-economic status? Does the impact of VPK vary over time by socio-economic status?

Analyze the impact on dual language learners. Does kindergarten readiness vary by primary language? Does the impact of VPK vary over time for dual language learners?

Analyze the impact of disability. Does kindergarten readiness vary by disability/special needs? Does the impact of VPK vary over time by disability/special needs?

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### *Psychometrics*

One of the greatest concerns of professionals in the field regarding the Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screening is the use of a screening administered at one point in time for high stakes accountability, assessing school readiness of young children and making determinations about program quality and success. Long-standing principles about assessment of young children underscore the dynamic nature of young children's development and the inappropriateness of assessments that do not include multiple sources of information taken over time, involve input from families, and take into account varying languages and special needs. These principles are not respected in the current screening process, calling into question any analyses and comparisons.

The breadth of screening is also an issue. It is widely accepted that children grow and develop in multiple domain areas, and federal guidelines have spurred states to identify what children should know and be able to do as foundations of school readiness systems. In Florida, early learning guidelines and VPK standards include social-emotional, language and literacy development, cognitive development and general knowledge, approaches to learning, and physical and motor development. Although the ECHOS™ instrument includes items across seven domains of development, concerns remain that the limited number of items used do not sufficiently address or assess the full range of readiness skills and that the primary focus of the kindergarten readiness screening in Florida is on language and literacy. These concerns should be noted and examined in any analysis.

In addition, the instruments used to assess kindergarten readiness have not remained consistent since the first administration, and comparisons between the FCAT with its assessments of math cannot be made for year one VPK participants as there was no corollary assessment of math skills in the kindergarten readiness screening. It will be important to note these differences and the impact of instrument changes on making comparisons from year to year.

#### Recommendations:

Analyze the relationship between the kindergarten readiness screening and school success. What is the relationship between reading scores on the kindergarten readiness screening and the FCAT? What is the relationship between ECHOS™ scores on the kindergarten readiness screening and the FCAT? It is important to determine if assessment scores at kindergarten entry are predictive of performance on subsequent assessments, providing important information about the effectiveness of VPK services and/or the validity of the kindergarten screening.

Complete a data field correlation. A thorough analysis should be conducted to determine if the kindergarten readiness screening is measuring the types of things that are important to school success and subsequent assessments of performance. How does each instrument perform in predicting school success?