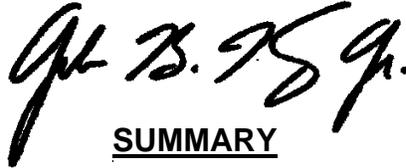




TO: P-12 Education Committee
FROM: Ken Slentz 
SUBJECT: Determination of Kindergarten Readiness
DATE: October 11, 2011

AUTHORIZATION:


SUMMARY

Issue for Discussion

At the request of the Governor, and contingent upon New York State winning the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant, should the Board of Regents direct staff to design, develop and implement a statewide tool to be used for the Determination of Kindergarten Readiness for implementation in the 2014-15 school year?

Reason(s) for Consideration

On May 25, 2011, the US Departments of Education (USDOE) and Health and Human Services (HHS) announced a \$500 million state-level Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant competition that will reward states that build a coordinated cross-agency early learning system that dramatically improves early learning and development programs, particularly for children with high needs. New York is eligible to receive up to \$100 million over four years from this competition.

SED is a participating agency in the development of the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant (ELCG) application for New York State. One of the Criteria and Competitive Priorities of this grant is the development of a tool which measures across multiple domains the kindergarten readiness of our children. As evidence suggests that more than half the achievement gap found in later school years already is present at kindergarten entry and widens through the school years, understanding the level of skills, abilities and knowledge possessed by children at the time of kindergarten entry and using this information to inform instruction is an important step in closing the achievement gap. The Tool for the Determination of Kindergarten Readiness will allow policymakers to use data collected from the tool as one of multiple measures to make informed policy decisions and provide targeted support to early learning and development programs. The Governor has requested the Board consider approval of such a tool.

Proposed Handling

This topic will come before the P-12 Education Committee at its October meeting, where the rationale will be discussed and action considered.

Background Information

1. The Early Learning Challenge Grant: on August 23rd the USDOE announced the latest competition under Race to the Top. Under the grant, NYS is eligible for a \$100 million grant with a focus on the following areas:
 - Successful State Systems
 - High-Quality, Accountable Programs
 - Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children
 - A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce, and
 - Measuring Outcomes and Progress

A key requirement of the *Measuring Outcomes and Progress* area is the establishment of a tool for determining the readiness of our kindergartners. In accordance with grant requirements, the four criteria for the development of the tool are:

- a. The tool is administered to children during the first few months of their admission into kindergarten.
- b. The tool covers all Essential Domains of School Readiness - language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge (including early mathematics and early scientific development), approaches to learning, physical well-being and motor development (including adaptive skills) and emotional development.
- c. The tool is used in conformance with the recommendations of the National Research Council¹ reports on early childhood.
- d. The tool is valid and reliable for its intended purposes and for the target populations and aligned to the State's Early Learning and Development Standards.

It is important to note that the rules of the grant do not allow ELCG funds to be used for this purpose and we have received assurance that additional funding for development of the tool and ongoing maintenance would be provided in SED's budget.

2. The purpose of the tool: the Determination of Kindergarten Readiness tool would allow schools to establish an individualized developmental baseline for each enrolled child. It would be a single-point-in-time measure of the essential domains of school readiness that is more in depth than the screening

¹Stedron, J.M. & Berger, A. "NCSL Technical Report: State Approaches to School Readiness Assessment": August 2010.

requirements currently in place and would be used as one piece of evidence that will help schools understand what knowledge, skills, and dispositions toward learning children possess when they begin kindergarten. Results would be used to inform efforts to close the school readiness gap at kindergarten entry by providing the state with data to improve early learning and development programs and to inform instruction. It is recommended, and ELCG guidance prescribes, that the results of the tool *not* be used to prevent a child's entry into kindergarten, to place them in special education or make other high stakes decisions such as evaluating teacher effectiveness.

3. Current practices:

- a. In NYS currently, Commissioner's Regulations require the screening of every new entrant to the schools to determine which students are possibly gifted, have or are suspected of having a disability, and/or are limited English proficient. In addition, new entrants must also receive a health examination, vision and hearing screening and scoliosis screening. Such screenings are intended to determine if a child needs further evaluation for services in the areas noted above. Beyond screening, a recent statewide survey showed that more in depth determinations of readiness for kindergarten are quite varied both in form and function regarding the domains of learning.
- b. Across the country as of 2010, 25 states had implemented Kindergarten Entry Assessments and four states were in the process of developing a system. Of the 25 states with implemented systems, 21 required that all kindergarten students be assessed.
 - i. Eleven (11) states require schools to use specific instruments that address the five essential domains of school readiness.
 - ii. Nine (9) states require the use of a specific instrument but only assess the domain of early literacy.
 - iii. The remaining five states do not require use of a specific instrument and do not specify the areas of children's development to be assessed.

Recommendation

Contingent on NYS winning the ELCG, the Regents direct staff to 1) develop a comprehensive proposal for implementing a common readiness tool for implementation in the 2014-15 school year and 2) create an Kindergarten Readiness Advisory Council made up of expert stakeholders from around the state.