



## Illinois School Readiness Initiative



### **The Pathway to College and Career Readiness: Helping Communities and Families Prepare Children for School**

We know that it takes a coordinated community of support to ensure that all Illinois children are prepared for success in school and in life. This is why Illinois has set ambitious goals to ensure that each and every child has the supports and opportunities they need to graduate college and career ready. Reaching these goals means that children are safe and healthy, with quality educational opportunities at every level. A network of community support, particularly for the most vulnerable children, is necessary to ensure that kids grow and learn. A child who is sick, or hungry, or worried about where they'll sleep that night, or whether they'll make it home safely, is swimming against the current to learn.

The earliest years are the ones with the most significant brain development, setting the foundation for a lifetime. Illinois has been working for years to support local communities in identifying the most vulnerable young children and families and building a system of supports that address health, safety, and learning for children, as well as economic and social emotional stability at home. These local systems look different from community to community, as do the needs of children and families. Across the state, no single entity provides everything children need to be successful. As local communities engage in dialogue, build relationships, and plan around service coordination, having a shared understanding of child outcomes becomes central. "Are all children in our community arriving to kindergarten ready to succeed and if not, what can our community do to change that?"

### **Ready for Kindergarten, Ready for Success**

When a child arrives on the first day of kindergarten fully prepared, her chances of succeeding in subsequent years soar. A school-ready child is one who arrives with strong early language and literacy skills, such as the ability to rhyme, to engage in back-and-forth communication, or to respond to simple requests, such as "Please pick up the crayons." Prepared means possessing early math skills such as the ability to sort beads by color or use words to describe the weight or size of a pumpkin. But beyond cognitive abilities, readiness also includes physical, social and emotional well-being. A prepared child exhibits curiosity about the world around him, and begins to wait turns – most of the time, at least – to, say, ride a favorite tricycle. When he has strong feelings, he usually can find words or gestures to express them. After a block tower falls, with a little

**The Office of Head Start (OHS) defines school readiness as children possessing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later learning and life.**

prompting, she regroups and rebuilds. A prepared child starts to persist, whether in finishing a drawing, stringing beads or completing a puzzle.

We know what school readiness looks like, yet children arrive in kindergarten with a wide variety of early learning experiences. In Illinois, approximately 3 out of every 10 four-year-olds attend state-funded Preschool for All Programs prior to enrolling in kindergarten. Children may also be served by Head Start, school district-funded preschool, publically subsidized child care, private-paid center-based or home-based child care, or may be cared for by a friend or relative.

Regardless of which early experiences a child has had, Illinois' Early Learning and Development Standards and Kindergarten Learning Standards establish expectations for what children are able to do prior to entering kindergarten and upon completion of kindergarten. Research tells us that these readiness skills lay the foundations for child development and later college and career readiness upon graduation. Key readiness skills are also predictive of later academic success.

## Illinois Focus on Readiness

Just as communities must collaborate to support children, so must our state agencies. There are numerous state initiatives that are reorganizing around child outcomes, changing how the state develops and delivers its services. The Governor's Children's Cabinet, Health and Human Services Transformation Team, and cross-agency efforts to establish a cross-agency Office of Community-School Partnerships all center around ensuring that children are safe, healthy, well-educated, and self-sufficient by age 25. At the September 2015 board meeting, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) voted to approve updated goals that focus on the readiness continuum, which recognized the importance of knowing about the readiness of Illinois kindergartners as a step towards the state's subsequent readiness goals.

Illinois State Board of Education Goals:

Every child in each public school system in the state of Illinois deserves to attend a system wherein . . .

- 1. All Kindergarteners are assessed for readiness.**
2. 90% or more 3rd grade students are reading at or above grade level.
3. 90% or more 5th grade students meet or exceed expectations in mathematics.
4. 90% or more students are on track to graduate with their cohort at the end of 9th grade.
5. 90% or more students graduate from high school ready for college and career.

School and kindergarten readiness have also been a central focus of developing high-quality, coordinated Early Learning and Development Systems in Illinois and across the country. In Illinois, supporting children towards school readiness has been a unifying goal for coordination between public and private partners who support early childhood. The Illinois Early Learning Council, Governor's Office for Early Childhood Development, Department of Human Services, Head Start Collaboration Office, and Illinois State Board of Education are some of the state entities collaborating to provide robust

experiences that meet the needs of all children, particularly those most-at-risk of academic failure, to be ready to start school meeting expectations.

## **Reporting Readiness to Support Illinois' Youngest Learners**

A student's success getting to and through college is a story that starts at birth and continues through key milestones, including kindergarten, 3rd grade, 5th grade, and beyond. That success requires more than academic know-how; it is driven by skills across multiple areas of development: social, emotional, attitudes about learning, physical health, self-awareness and problem-solving. Develop these early in a child's life, and the chances for academic success in the next decade or more multiply exponentially.

The Illinois School Readiness Initiative is a process of collecting school readiness information on kindergartners that is meaningful and consistent. Readiness indicators measure those key skills and behaviors that are most predictive of later success. Those indicators are also benchmarked to state expectations for all kindergartners. In addition, districts may have additional indicators of readiness and expectations that reflect their context and community.

State school readiness data provides parents, teachers, and administrators with information about where individual children fall within the range of developmental progressions and where children fall in comparison to state expectations aligned to learning standards. This baseline data can be used in planning, to identify gaps and strengths in programs and services that are available to children and families.

In particular, school readiness data is a tool for schools and communities to collaborate towards the goal that each and every child enters kindergarten *school ready*. Given the diverse tapestry of early learning programs and services, having a shared understanding of school readiness expectations helps providers establish their own program goals, align programs to those expectations, monitor their progress towards those goals, and make the case for increasing access to needed services.



## KIDS: A Readiness Tool to Empower Educators

The Kindergarten Individual Developmental Survey—or KIDS for short—is a research-based observational tool developed for Illinois educators to collect school readiness information in a way that is efficient, supportive of excellent teaching practice, informative to educators and comparable across geographic and demographic boundaries. KIDS provides data to allow communities to organize around local children’s identified needs and even advocate for new resources. KIDS conveys what skills, knowledge and behaviors each child should possess, a beacon to guide the work of preschools, home child cares, Head Starts, homes and every other early childhood setting.

KIDS is comprehensive, with a total of 11 domains and 55 measures. KIDS is not a test or a direct assessment. It is a psychometrically valid and reliable reporting instrument that allows trained teachers to use local instructional and assessment practices as evidence of a child’s developmental level.

Sample KIDS Measure “Language and Literacy Development 9: Letter and Word Knowledge” A teacher uses evidence of progress based on instruction and/or local assessments and determines which of the six levels best represents the level a student has already “achieved”.

The full KIDS instrument is available for download, along with a full suite of resources to support teachers, administrators and parents in using and understanding the tool: [www.illinoiskids.org](http://www.illinoiskids.org).

### What KIDS Can Do

As part of good instructional practice, teachers are constantly observing students to determine what they know and whether they learned a concept or a skill from a lesson. Schools also regularly assess children with a range of locally determined assessments. KIDS allows teachers to use those assessments and observations to determine how far along the developmental continuum a child is on a particular measure within the KIDS tool.

Once teachers have entered observational data, the KIDSTech reporting system will generate psychometrically valid and reliable reports that teachers and administrators can access for individual children, classrooms, or the entire school. Aligned with the Illinois Learning Standards, Illinois Social Emotional Learning Standards, as well as Common Core State Standards, these comprehensive developmental profiles of each student can be shared with parents to help them understand how their child is doing. Teachers can use KIDS data to inform instructional or curriculum decisions, and also to augment professional development supports.

Data reported through KIDS will become part of the student's longitudinal data record. That means that, for the first time in Illinois, KIDS will provide a single, statewide picture of kindergarten readiness among all students, no matter their zip code. The tool creates common language among educators for the skills, knowledge and behaviors children should begin to develop in their early school years. This information will help smooth the often rocky transition from preschool, child care or home into kindergarten.

## **KIDS Measures What Matters**

In addition to math, language and literacy development, KIDS empowers teachers to measure other skills that are just as important to long-term success. Included are social and emotional development and approaches to learning and the ability to regulate emotions and behaviors.

### **14 State Readiness Measures**

#### **Approaches to Learning - Self-Regulation**

- ATL-REG: 1 - Curiosity and Initiative in Learning
- ATL-REG: 2 - Self-Control of Feelings and Behavior
- ATL-REG: 3 - Engagement and Persistence

#### **Social and Emotional Development**

- SED 3 - Relationships and Social Interactions with Familiar Adults
- SED 4 - Relationships and Social Interactions with Peers

#### **Cognition: Math**

- COG: MATH 1 - Classification
- COG: MATH 2 - Number Sense of Quantity
- COG: MATH 3 - Number Sense of Math Operations
- COG: MATH 6 - Shapes

#### **Language and Literacy Development**

- LLD 3 - Communication and Use of Language (Expressive)
- LLD 4 - Reciprocal Communication and Conversation
- LLD 6 - Comprehension of Age-Appropriate Text
- LLD 8 - Phonological Awareness
- LLD 9 - Letter and Word Knowledge

## **From Pilot Program to Statewide Snapshot: How Your Feedback Has Shaped KIDS**

The current KIDS instrument is the product of many years of planning, research, development and state implementation. In March 2010, the State Superintendent of Education convened a Kindergarten Readiness Stakeholder Committee to explore the feasibility of adopting a statewide kindergarten readiness data collection. At that time,

states across the country had begun exploring or implementing processes focused on school readiness in kindergarten. Maryland had been implementing the Maryland Model for School Readiness for 10 years and had seen dramatic improvements in student outcomes and reductions in achievement gaps. Colorado had also seen similar results with their *Results Matter* initiative. The committee produced a report with recommendations in April 2011, [\*A New Beginning: The Kindergarten Individual Development Survey\*](#). That report provided a number of recommendations based on national research, state case studies, and survey data reported by Illinois principals through the Illinois Principals' Association regarding kindergarten assessment practices. Those recommendations were the basis for the development of the current KIDS instrument, through the Early Childhood Block Grant. Subsequently, the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant and Preschool Expansion Grant have included reporting on school readiness as part of the grant evaluation measures. A KIDS Advisory Committee representing a range of perspectives and types of expertise was established in 2011 which has provided guidance on the initiative.

**Spring 2012** – ISBE adopted rules requiring school districts offering kindergarten programs to administer the KIDS. The rules included a pilot in 2012-13, with limited implementation in 2013-14 and 2014-15, with full statewide implementation in 2015-16.

**Summer 2012** – KIDS contract was awarded to WestEd Center for Child and Family Studies, in partnership with the Berkeley Evaluation and Assessment Research Center and the University of California Berkeley and the California Department of Education.

**2012-2013** - The KIDS pilot began in volunteer school districts, with most teachers reporting on 29 measures (33 for English Learners) at three points in time. 371 teachers from 65 school districts were trained and reported data on 7054 kindergartners. A select group of teachers participated in a field study in which they collected all 55 measures over the course of the school year. 27 teachers from 7 school districts participated provided data on 391 kindergartners.

**2013-14** – Based on a series of teacher surveys, data from pilots, and 24 site visits, adjustments were made to the implementation process and instrument enhancements were made to better align it to the Kindergarten Common Core State Standards and reduce “ceiling effects”. Trainings were improved and new resources were developed.

**2014-15** – In response to feedback from the field and key educational partners, implementation requirements were reduced for the second reporting period. Based on survey and implementation data, as well as ongoing discussions with stakeholders, ISBE amended its rules, modifying the implementation timeline to enable school districts to engage in preliminary planning activities recommended as best practices by participating school districts. These activities include establishing a team of teachers and administrators who could inventory kindergarten assessments and cross walk them with KIDS, incorporating teacher training into the annual professional learning plan, training instructional leaders as coaches to be able to support teachers in observational assessment, and aligning report cards and timelines with KIDS reports to

have the two complement each other. In addition, the middle reporting period was eliminated to further reduce the administrative burden on teachers.

**October & November 2015** – Pursuant to a charge by the State Superintendent, the KIDS Advisory Committee made recommendations on ways to collect readiness data for all kindergartners in a way that is meaningful, comparable, and workable – particularly given the many pressures and constraints facing school districts. The committee prioritized state needs, clarified the purpose, and made recommendations for the core state requirements. The committee urged ISBE to continue to offer and support the use of KIDS as a comprehensive assessment, should districts choose to use it that way.

**Winter 2015** – ISBE met with superintendents, educational partners, and the KIDS Advisory Committee to refine and strengthen the state’s school readiness implementation plan.

## **So, What’s the Plan?**

All Districts will report to ISBE on 14 State Readiness Measures in the fall for each kindergartner, beginning in 2017-2018. Data for each student, based on local instruction and assessment practices, will be reported through the KIDSTech rating system.

- Under this plan, there is only one required data collection period, instead of the initial three periods. Districts looking to use KIDS to monitor progress and growth can continue to collect and enter data during the winter and spring reporting periods.
- 55 measures and 11 domains of the full instrument will continue to be available to schools at no cost. Of those, 14 key measures are required to be reported. These measures were selected because they provide information about unique and important aspects of behavior that are predictive (based on empirical research) of kindergarten readiness and later academic success.
- Data will not be required statewide until 2017-18, providing districts with additional time to plan and train teachers. Districts currently using KIDS may continue to do so.

## **Timeline Overview**

- 2016-2017
  - Districts name a School Readiness Coordinator which will be the central point of contact regarding trainings, resources, and data collection
  - Districts provide ISBE with information regarding school readiness assessments currently utilized
  - Online and in-person training is available for School Readiness Coordinators, teachers, and other administrators throughout the state.
- 2017-2018
  - All districts report 14 State Readiness Measures to ISBE by the 40th day of student attendance, utilizing the KIDSTech rating system.

## **Supporting You to Support School Readiness**

In the coming months, ISBE will share important information about how teachers and administrators can use KIDS to support school readiness goals, including:

- Teacher trainings
- Implementation toolkit
- Regional support coaches
- Virtual and in-person administrative trainings
- Ongoing resources
- Communications tools

### **Key Frequently Asked Questions**

Additional FAQs and other resources are available at <http://www.isbe.net/kids/pdf/KIDS-faqs.pdf>

#### ***Is KIDS aligned to the Illinois Learning Standards, including CCSS ELA and Math?***

KIDS is aligned to Illinois standards. As a follow-up to the pilot process, the instrument was revised, with additional levels added to some of the measures. In the spring of 2016, Illinois educators and child development experts will work with WestEd and ISBE to set measure-by-measure benchmarks to the Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards and Kindergarten Standards. Research and standards alignment summaries are available for download on the KIDS website: <https://www.illinoiskids.org/content/standards-alignment-and-research-summaries>

#### ***What cost is involved?***

The full KIDS instrument is available to Illinois school districts with no licensing, materials, or use costs. The free, two-day teacher training is currently being provided by ISBE in a variety of formats.

#### ***Where and how can teachers be trained?***

In-person regional trainings are being offered throughout the state. Districts can also request that a training be provided on-site for their teachers. Districts and ROE's may also send someone to be trained as a Certified Coach Trainer. These individuals can then directly train teachers. One-day and online trainings are currently being developed. Training dates and contacts to set-up trainings are available on the [KIDS website](#).

#### ***Are there any differences between full-day and half-day implementation?***

No, there is no difference in requirements. The 14 required measures should be observable during half-day programs.

#### ***How can I contact someone or get additional information about KIDS?***

Any questions regarding KIDS or school readiness can be e-mailed to [kids@isbe.net](mailto:kids@isbe.net). Additional information is available on the ISBE and KIDS websites: [http://www.isbe.net/earlychi/html/kindergarten\\_corner.htm](http://www.isbe.net/earlychi/html/kindergarten_corner.htm) and [www.illinoiskids.org](http://www.illinoiskids.org).