COLORADO DEPARTMENT of EDUCATION

# Frequently Asked Questions

School Readiness Plans and Assessment

November 2013

## General Questions

1. **Why is Colorado implementing school readiness plans and assessments?**
   Senate Bill 08-212 (S.B. 08-212) requires that each child in a publicly funded preschool and kindergarten program have an individual school readiness plan, an individual learning plan informed by ongoing assessment of a child's progress in the developmental and academic domains. The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) encourages educators to consider the individual school readiness plan as a living document where a child's progress is recorded and is a tool for informing instruction.

2. **What is meant by "school readiness"?**
   In 2008, pursuant to S.B. 08-212, the State Board of Education defined school readiness as "both the preparedness of a child to engage in and benefit from learning experiences, and the ability of a school to meet the needs of all students enrolled in publicly funded preschool or kindergarten. School readiness is enhanced when schools, families and community service providers work collaboratively to ensure that every child is ready for higher levels of learning in academic content."

   School readiness describes the status and ongoing progress a child makes within the domains of physical well- being and motor development, social and emotional development, language and comprehension development, and cognition and general knowledge. By monitoring each child's progress across multiple domains, teachers, parents, schools, and caregivers can provide needed support to ensure each child's success in school.

3. **What if a child is "not school ready"?**
   The purpose of assessing and monitoring school readiness is to understand each child's strengths and needs in the developmental and academic domains to provide a responsive learning environment. Information provided by school readiness assessments is intended to help develop an individual readiness plan to inform instruction. School readiness assessment is not designed as a 'ready or not' assessment, but rather an assessment system that helps identify what next steps and supports will provide the greatest opportunity for each child's growth and success. S.B. 08-212 clearly states that school readiness assessment information cannot be used to prevent a child from entering kindergarten or advancing to first grade.

4. **Will the definition of school readiness be revised?**
   S.B. 08-212 requires that the State Board of Education review the school readiness description and school readiness assessments on or before July 1, 2015, and on or before July 1 every six years thereafter.

## School Readiness Plans

5. **What are the requirements for school readiness plans?**
   All children in publicly funded preschool and kindergarten programs are required to have a school readiness plan. S.B. 08-212 states that local education providers must:

   > "Ensure that each student enrolled in a preschool or kindergarten program operated by the local education provider receives an individualized readiness plan that addresses the preschool standards or kindergarten standards, as appropriate, knowledge and skill areas in which a student needs assistance to make progress toward school readiness."

   Furthermore, statute requires that:

"In creating and implementing the individualized readiness plans, a local education provider shall use assessment instruments that are research-based, valid, and reliable to facilitate the systematic measurement of a student's increasing knowledge, skills, and accomplishments within the classroom context. The purpose of the continuing assessments shall be to help direct teachers' practice within the classroom with each student and thereby maximize each student's progress toward demonstrating school readiness."

**6. Is there a specific school readiness form that districts must use?**

No, there is not a required school readiness plan form. However, CDE is currently facilitating a work group to develop a sample school readiness plan template that districts may voluntarily use. Districts may also use the template to inform the design of their own form or create their own form independently.

**7. How will a school readiness plan work with READ plans required by the READ Act?**

Individual school readiness plans are intended to be the single individual learning plan for students in kindergarten. The READ Act (H.B. 12-1238) specifically states that students identified with a significant reading deficiency in kindergarten shall have their READ plan created as a component of their school readiness plan.

**8. If a student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), do they also need the individual school readiness plan? What if they are identified with a significant reading deficiency, will they have a READ plan, an IEP, and an individual school readiness plan?**

See the Guidance Document and the Webinar on the School Readiness Plans and Assessment webpage.

**9. Do we need to assess children prior to the start of the school year so that they have a plan for entry into kindergarten?**

There are no requirements about the timing of initial school readiness assessment. CDE will create guidance for districts to support coordination of assessment timelines for school readiness and the READ Act.

**10. Our preschoolers are already assessed through Results Matter. Does SB 08-212 require a different or additional assessment for them?**

No. The Results Matter assessment, required for preschoolers funded through the Colorado Preschool Program and preschool special education, meets the requirement for school readiness assessment under S.B. 08-212.

**11. There is already a requirement for Individual Learning Plans for children funded through the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP). Will we be required to have two plans for those children?**

No. Children will have a single plan that meets both requirements. Like the school readiness plan, the CPP Individual Learning Plans are developed by gathering information from families, caregivers and through the Results Matter ongoing assessment systems. Like the school readiness plans, the CCP Individual Learning Plans are designed to identify learning priorities and supports that guide instruction and kindergarten transition planning. Results Matter is working with the assessment companies to have an online form option that will streamline the development of the Individual Learning Plan.

## School Readiness Assessment Requirements

### 12. What are the requirements of school readiness assessment tools within S.B. 08-212?

S.B. 08-212 spells out these requirements for school readiness assessment:

> "The State Board shall adopt one or more assessments that are aligned with the description of school readiness and are suitable for measuring students' levels of school readiness. In adopting assessments of students' school readiness, the state board shall consider assessments that are research-based; recognized nationwide as reliable instruments for measuring school readiness; and suitable for determining the instruction and interventions students need to improve their readiness to succeed in school. School readiness assessments shall not be used to deny a student admission or progression to kindergarten or first grade."

### 13. Are assessments required by the READ Act the same as school readiness assessments?

No. While the information gathered by school readiness assessments and literacy assessments required by the READ Act are complementary, the assessments serve different purposes. Colorado's Achievement Plan for Kids (CAP4K) requires the school readiness assessment to consider the whole child (i.e., physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, language and comprehension development, and cognition) not only areas of academic content mastery. The READ Act requires assessment on the components of reading to inform instruction and intervention in literacy skills.

### 14. Will teachers be required to assess both developmental and academic domains?

Yes. S.B. 08-212 indicates that school readiness includes the developmental and academic domains, specifically noting physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, language and comprehension development, and cognition and general knowledge.

### 15. Will teachers be required to observe and assess all developmental and academic domains?

Yes. School readiness assessment involves observing and collecting data in all developmental and academic domains. School readiness describes the status and ongoing progress a child makes within the domains of physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, language and comprehension development, and cognition and general knowledge. By monitoring each child's progress across multiple domains, teachers, parents, schools, and caregivers can provide needed support to ensure each child's success in school.

### 16. Many of our families pay tuition for their children to attend our preschool program. Are we required to assess and develop school readiness plans for preschoolers who are funded through parent tuition, private grants or local community initiatives?

No. S.B. 08-212 requires that school readiness plans, informed by school readiness assessments, be developed for preschoolers and kindergarteners who are funded through state public school finance funds. At the preschool level, the requirement applies to children funded through the Colorado Preschool Program and preschool special education. That said, programs are encouraged to utilize ongoing assessment and individualized planning for all children in order to inform instruction and facilitate communication with families.

**17. Will districts have to continue with current standardized testing required in kindergarten (i.e., DIBELS, NWEA, etc.) as well as school readiness assessments?**

Districts can use the school readiness initiative and the READ Act as an opportunity to evaluate their current assessment practices in the primary grades, especially in kindergarten. By considering the value added by district initiated assessments within the context of state required assessments (reading pursuant to READ Act, English language proficiency, and school readiness), districts can determine which of their own assessments might still be needed.

The department is currently developing guidance on streamlining assessment and reporting requirements for reading and school readiness. See the Guidance Document version 1.0.

**18. What are the rules about using and sharing school readiness data?**

As stipulated within S.B. 08-212, school readiness assessment results shall not be publicly reported for individual students. The State Board of Education is required to adopt a system for reporting population-level results that provide baseline data for measuring overall change and improvement in students' skills and knowledge over time. Action on these rules is anticipated in 2014.

## School Readiness Assessment Requirements

**19. How was the school readiness assessment menu determined?**

In 2010, CDE engaged an assessment stakeholder committee to provide input on Colorado's new assessment system pursuant to S.B. 08-212. The stakeholder committee included a subcommittee that developed recommendations related to school readiness assessment. This subcommittee was re-engaged in 2012 to review specific school readiness assessment systems using a rubric with criteria based on the requirements for the assessment in S.B. 08-212, the December 2010 State Board of Education agreements for the design specifications of Colorado's assessment system , and recommendations of the 2010 school readiness subcommittee. The review tool also incorporated (to the greatest degree possible) components of the assessment review tool used by the Content Collaboratives.

**20. What assessment(s) are currently on the school readiness assessment menu?**

In December 2012, the State Board of Education voted to offer districts a menu of school readiness assessments. The first approved assessment tool for the menu is Teaching Strategies GOLD. Pending positive technical reports and final review, the State Board of Education will approve additional school readiness assessment tools for the menu.

**21. What other assessment systems is CDE considering adding to the menu?**

The school readiness assessment subcommittee has recommended that HighScope Child Observation Record and Desired Result Developmental Profile be considered as additions to the school readiness assessment menu. Both assessment systems address the kindergarten age level and are currently field testing and validating newly revised versions. CDE will continue its review once reliability and validity studies are complete and, if results are satisfactory, these systems will be added to the menu.

**22. When will there be additional assessments added to the approved school readiness assessment menu?**

Decisions on additional assessments are anticipated by the fall of 2013. The school readiness assessment subcommittee provisionally approved two other assessments: HighScope Child Observation Record kindergarten assessment and the Desired Results Development Profile contingent upon successful field testing and validation studies that are still underway. Once the technical reports are available, the subcommittee will

meet to review the reports and determine whether to recommend the assessments for inclusion the menu. The marketplace for appropriate kindergarten assessments that meet the requirements of S.B. 08-212 is in its infancy. CDE anticipates more assessments coming to the marketplace or being developed by other states in the coming months and years. CDE is in the process of determining the most appropriate cycle for reviewing the school readiness assessment menu. When the next review cycle is initiated, CDE will conduct a formal Request for Information process to solicit submissions from vendors.

S.B. 08-212 requires that the State Board of Education review the school readiness description and school readiness assessments on or before July 1, 2015, and on or before July 1 every six years thereafter.

**23. When the state expands readiness assessments beyond Teaching Strategies GOLD, will this apply to the preschool level as well?**

No. The decision making process described here applies to kindergarten. The assessment review process for children funded through the Colorado Preschool Program, preschool special education and Title I is governed by the Results Matter Advisory Committee which is made up of local, state and national advisors. The Committee has reviewed a number of newly nominated and newly revised assessments over the years. Teaching Strategies GOLD is a fairly new assessment that was reviewed extensively in the year before its publication. Currently, a revision of the HighScope Child Observation Record called COR Advantage is under review and the Committee is working closely with the HighScope Educational Research Foundation as their validation study continues.

## Support for the School Readiness Initiative

**24. How will kindergarten teachers manage the assessment requirements of both the READ Act and S.B. 08-212?**

See the Guidance Document version 1.0 on the School Readiness Plans and Assessment webpage.

**25. What support will CDE provide with implementation of school readiness?**

Through funds provided within the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Fund, CDE will be able to provide financial support for school readiness assessment subscriptions, training and school readiness plan templates.

**26. What kind of financial support will districts receive through the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Fund grant program?**

As stated in Colorado's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Fund application, the grant will cover 100 percent of the assessment system subscription costs in 2013-14 and 2014-2015. 60 percent of costs in 2015-16 and 30 percent of costs in 2016-17. Districts that do not begin implementing the school readiness assessment until the 2015-16 school year will still have access to funding. In this case, the grant will cover 100 percent of the assessment system subscription costs in 2015-156 and 60 percent of costs in 2016-17.

**27. How do districts sign up to receive assessment subscription cost funding?**

The online sign up process for 14-15 will be available in early 2014.

**28. How will training and technical assistance be provided?**

Through the Early Learning Challenge Fund, CDE will be able to provide limited initial training. However, Teaching Strategies GOLD has a number of teacher modules and recorded webinars for support. Teaching

Strategies GOLD also has an inter rater reliability online certification test. As a support to principals, Teaching Strategies GOLD allows administrators to monitor how teachers are doing with their modules and their inter rater reliability certification.

**29. If we are to begin phasing in this program for the 2013-2014 school year, will there be stipends for teachers from the grant for the additional work time that teachers will have to put in for this implementation?**

No. Grant funds from the Early Learning Challenge Fund are limited and can only cover costs of subscriptions and some training support.

## Teaching Strategies GOLD

**31. Will there be an abbreviated version of Teaching Strategies GOLD for kindergarten?**

This is currently being studied. If it is determined that an abbreviated version is feasible, CDE would hope to pilot in the 2014-15 school year in order to have it available for widespread use in the 2015-16 school year.

Colorado is currently working with Teaching Strategies to determine whether a customized version of GOLD assessment might be developed for use in Colorado. As part of this process we will be conducting focus groups and determine next steps in the process with other teachers using the tool.

**32. What is the cost of Teaching Strategies GOLD for kindergarten?**

Teaching Strategies, LLC has offered Colorado a special rate of $8.95 per child portfolio per year. (This applies to kindergarten only, the preschool cost is still $9.95.) The Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Fund does carry some provisions for assisting districts with this cost of the kindergarten assessment over the four year period of the grant. CDE will be providing additional guidance about this and how to access the funds.

**33. Is the kindergarten version of Teaching Strategies GOLD different than the preschool version?**

There is one version of Teaching Strategies GOLD based on a birth through kindergarten assessment continuum. The objectives for development and learning are the same for all age groups, but the indicators vary with each level, including kindergarten.

**34. Can teachers and administrators get access to the Teaching Strategies GOLD platform and look at the kindergarten platform?**

Yes, but only if you currently have access to the original Teaching Strategies GOLD platform. The differences in the new kindergarten platform include the Common Core State Standards on the rating scale and an inter rater reliability test specific for kindergarten teachers. A webinar focused on Teaching Strategies GOLD in kindergarten has been recorded and can be accessed here.

**35. Will the information from Teaching Strategies GOLD be used to meet the Educator Effectiveness requirements that are required by Senate Bill 10-191?**

Teaching Strategies GOLD does yield growth data that can be used by school districts for multiple purposes. For examples, please see this year's Colorado Preschool Program legislative report. http://www.cde.state.co.us/cpp/legreports.htm.

To learn more, view CDE's fact sheet with information about educator evaluation for early childhood educators.

**36. Is Teaching Strategies GOLD required for preschool?**

Preschool age children funded through the Colorado Preschool Program, preschool special education or Title 1 are required to be assessed using either Teaching Strategies GOLD or HighScope Child Observation Record . Those are the two assessments on the Results Matter menu. The vast majority of district programs have chosen Teaching Strategies GOLD, however, the HighScope Child Observation Record remains a choice as well. The results of these assessments plus information gathered fromt home visits will inform the individual plans for preschool children. The requirement for individual learning or readiness plans has been in place since 1988. Therefore, Colorado's Achievement Plan for Kids (CAP4K) changes very little for the preschool program.

## Other Questions

**39. How is the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Fund related to school readiness?**

The Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Fund will provide funds to cover the initial district cost of subscriptions to Teaching Strategies GOLD for each kindergarten student. This grant will also cover some costs related to training and technical assistance provided by CDE. More information on the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Fund as it pertains to school readiness can be found at http://www.cde.state.co.us/early/

**40. How are efforts related to increasing access to the Colorado Preschool Program and full day Kindergarten related to school readiness?**

Colorado's Achievement Plan for Kids (CAP4K) does not address an increase in the access to the Colorado Preschool Program or provision of full-day kindergarten. However, both of these possibilities have been considered within the Governor's proposed budget and by the School Finance Partnership as they prepare to recommend revisions of the School Finance Act.

## Where can I learn more?

**CDE's early learning and school readiness website:** http://www.cde.state.co.us/schoolreadiness