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Practitioner Perspectives on the Implementation
of the North Carolina Kindergarten Entry As-
sessment

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**Practitioner Perspectives on the Implementation of the North Carolina Kindergarten Entry
Assessment**

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Executive Summary

This study gathered information from practitioners on their perspectives of experiences implementing the North Carolina Kindergarten Entry Assessment (NC KEA). Initially, practitioners were invited to complete an online survey asking them to rate or provide information about several aspects related to implementing the assessment process. In total, 385 practitioners completed the online survey. The survey was made up of open-ended questions and four-point Likert items (strongly disagree to strongly agree). At the end of the survey respondents could notify the research team of their interest in participating in a follow-up telephone interview. Out of 63 practitioners indicating interest in completing interviews, a final group of 15 interviews were conducted to provide a more in depth understanding of NC KEA experiences. The telephone interviews were conducted during late June to early July 2020.

During the analysis of item ratings and open-ended survey questions several findings emerged. A small number of teachers directly said they do not understand the purpose of the NC KEA, however responses to open-ended survey questions and interview questions indicated teachers do not understand the general purpose. One of the Likert-type items addressed perceived support from regional, district, or building implementation teams, 33.3% of respondents did not feel they were supported with implementation of the NC KEA by these teams. Over half (56.7%) of the survey respondents disagreed with the statement “NC KEA data is used to inform instruction in my classroom”. A majority (52.4%) of the respondents indicated they were not aware of NC KEA content and platform changes for the 2020-21 school year at the time they completed the survey.

Findings from the interviews brought about a variety of specific individual experiences. There were other findings that were common across interview participants. Teachers mentioned

the importance of, and context for, using data from the NC KEA in Professional Learning Communities (PLC), with lead teachers, and on grade level teams. Several kindergarten teachers interviewed in the study indicated experiences with time constraints and difficulty managing several assessments simultaneously at the start of the school year. While some interview participants mentioned their appreciation for the NC KEA's whole-child approach to assessment, many teachers expressed concerns over the lack of alignment with other assessments or the redundancy of some kindergarten assessments. It is important to note that many of the responses from interview participants signaled misunderstandings or misuses of the NC KEA as a formative assessment process.

Practitioner Perspectives on the Implementation of the NC KEA

The 2020 NC KEA implementation survey was available online for educational practitioners involved with the implementation of the NC KEA to provide perspectives on their experiences with the assessment. Respondents were made aware that the survey focused on the implementation of the 2019-2020 NC KEA and not the upcoming NC Early Learning Inventory (NC ELI). The survey was intended to gather information from practitioners regarding the following aspects of the NC KEA:

- The type of professional development teachers received to assist in implementing the assessment process.
- How prepared teachers felt they were to implement the assessment following training.
- The resources and supports available to assist in implementation of the assessment process.
- Practitioner opinions on the usefulness of the assessment process in informing instructional individualization for kindergarten students in their classroom, school, and/or district.
- Suggestions on how the assessment process and the available resources and supports could be improved or revised in order to inform implementation of the NC ELI.

At the end of the survey, all respondents were given the opportunity to volunteer to participate in a follow-up interview. The follow-up interviews were conducted to gain a more in-depth understanding of how each individual's unique classroom, school, or district demographics and circumstances may have affected their implementation of the NC KEA. These allowed interviewees to share their thoughts about the upcoming NC ELI and what further resources and training they would like to receive as part of the transition to the new assessment process.

Background

KEAs are implemented at the start of kindergarten to provide a glimpse of where students stand at the beginning of the year across various developmental areas. Implementation of KEAs gained momentum following the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Grant (RTT-ELC) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 (Ackerman, 2018; Little et al., 2020; Weisenfeld et al., 2020). As an RTT-ELC grantee the NC Department of Public Instruction's (NCDPI) Office of Early Learning (OEL) organized a K-3 Assessment Think Tank team in 2013 (Ferrara et al., 2020). The team of kindergarten through third grade teachers, administrators, parents, early childhood experts, and policymakers developed a formative assessment process designed to help teachers individualize instruction. That group developed a formative assessment process occurring at kindergarten entry addressing five developmental domains of school readiness: language and literacy, cognition and general knowledge, approaches toward learning, physical well-being and motor development, and social/emotional development (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], 2019).

Since the inception of the NC KEA, this is the fourth research study on the NC KEA conducted by researchers from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte Center for Educational Measurement and Evaluation (CEME). Previous research informed changes to the assessment content, professional development, availability of resources for implementation and continued use of the formative assessment process, and the online platform (Ferrara et al., 2020). These research studies were a strategic portion of North Carolina's overall implementation plan. Similar to previous qualitative studies on the NC KEA, the purpose of this study was to gain insight into the perceptions of practitioners on their implementation experiences. A new area

explored in this study was interviewed participants providing information about what training and resources they see as necessary to implementing the new NC ELI.

Participant Information

In April 2020, all participants involved with the implementation of the NC KEA were notified of the 2020 NC KEA implementation survey via email. The survey was left open for one month. There were 385 respondents to the online survey. Out of this group of respondents there were 335 kindergarten teachers, 29 instructional support staff members, 13 school-level administrators, and eight district-level administrators. All teachers and instructional support staff members were licensed in Birth to Kindergarten (BK) or Elementary Education (K-6). A higher percentage of district-level administrators responding to the survey were certified in Elementary Education ($n = 6, 75.00\%$) than school-level administrators ($n = 8, 61.54\%$).

Responses from kindergarten teachers showed teachers with a wide range of teaching experience. Out of the 335 teachers completing the survey, 14.24% of teachers completed three or fewer years of teaching, 35.47% had four to ten years of teaching experience, 33.14% of teachers completed 11 to 20 years, and 17.15% of teachers had over 20 years of teaching experience. Respondents to the survey in instructional support roles had been in their current roles for 5 years on average, with a range of 1 year to 15 years. School level administrators responded being in their current role for an average of just under five years, with the majority of school administrators having been in their current role for three years or less. Out of the eight district administrators responding to the survey, six respondents had been in their current role for under three years. Each of the six district administrators new to their roles had at least ten years of teaching experience in early childhood or elementary grade levels.

Survey Findings

Responses to Closed Ended Rating Scale Questions

The survey contained a series of ten rating scale questions. The questions assessed the respondent's agreement with statements about preparation to implement the NC KEA, resources available to teachers, and the usefulness of the information provided by the assessment process. Each question included a four-point Likert scale with the following response options: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree.

For the first question concerning school or district preparation to implement the NC KEA, most respondents answered "Agree" (63.4%) and 80.2% responded "Agree" or "Strongly Agree." The second question asked about perceived support from region, district, or building implementation teams. Most respondents also answered "Agree" (54.9%) and 66.7% responded "Agree" or "Strongly Agree." However, a substantial minority (33.3%) responded "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree", indicating they did not feel supported by the teams.

When asked whether they possessed the knowledge to implement the NC KEA, most respondents answered "Agree" (65.4%) and 87.2% responded "Agree" or "Strongly Agree." Similarly, when asked about district or school capacity to implement the NC KEA, most respondents answered "Agree" (70.0%) and 87.5% responded "Agree" or "Strongly Agree." Most respondents indicated that they felt supported by their administrators during implementation, as 65.4% answered "Agree" and 79.5% responded "Agree" or "Strongly Agree." When asked whether they possessed the necessary resources to implement the NC KEA successfully, most respondents answered "Agree" (67.4%) and 84.0% responded "Agree" or "Strongly Agree."

When asked whether the NC KEA was developmentally appropriate, most respondents answered “Agree” (70.0%) and 87.5% responded “Agree” or “Strongly Agree.” The pattern of responses was quite different when the respondents were asked about the usefulness of the information provided by the NC KEA for instructional purposes. Only 51.3% responded “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”, and 48.7% responded “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree.” Similarly, when asked if NC KEA data was used to inform instruction in their district, school, or classroom, the majority (56.7%) responded “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree.” When asked if they were aware of the content and platform changes to kindergarten assessment coming for the 2020-21 academic year, the majority of respondents (52.4%) indicated “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree”. For a complete tabulation of the percentages of respondents selecting each response category, see Table 1.

Table 1
Attitudinal questions from the NC KEA Implementation Survey

Question	Percentage by Response Category				
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree + Str Agree
My district/school was prepared to implement the NC KEA.	5.5	14.4	63.4	16.8	80.2
I feel supported by my RIT/DIT/BIT to implement the NC KEA.	6.5	26.8	54.9	11.8	66.7
I have the knowledge necessary to implement the NC KEA successfully.	2.4	10.4	65.4	21.8	87.2
My district/school has the necessary capacity to implement the NC KEA.	2.9	9.5	70.0	17.5	87.5
I feel supported by my district/school administrator(s) to implement the NC KEA.	4.5	16.0	65.4	14.1	79.5
I have the resources necessary to implement the NC KEA successfully.	2.7	13.4	67.4	16.6	84.0
I feel the NC KEA is developmentally appropriate.	3.2	9.8	68.6	18.4	87.0
I feel the NC KEA provides useful data to inform student instruction in my district/school/classroom.	20.8	27.9	42.4	8.9	51.3
NC KEA data is used to inform student instruction in my district/school/classroom.	18.7	38.0	37.2	6.1	43.3
I am aware of the NC KEA content and platform changes coming in the 2020-21 school year.	19.8	32.6	36.7	10.9	47.6

Responses to the Open-Ended Questions on the Survey

The online survey included a series of open-ended questions. In addition, respondents were asked to clarify their answers with narrative responses if they disagreed with any of the statements in the closed-ended rating scale portion of the survey. The following section outlines the themes that emerged from the process of coding the answers to these questions.

To review the full survey content, see Appendix A.

Understanding NC KEA Purpose

When asked to describe the purpose of NC KEA in their own words, there were 382 respondents who provided the references. Among 559 references, approximately 42.2% of the references emphasized NC KEA is to assess students' development status across various domains, including students' readiness to enter the kindergarten and the developmental process through their time in kindergarten. To back the previous statement, more than 17.9% of the references mentioned the purpose of NC KEA is to monitor and track students' developmental processes during the first 60 days at school. One respondent summarized: "To see where students enter kindergarten throughout the state and how they have grown in many areas." Common themes were gathering information about students (20.8% of the references), the ultimate goal is to use this information to assist students with their needs (7.0% of the references), and to inform instruction (6.6% of the references). For example, one teacher concluded: "To gather data on the how the whole child is developing, not just academics. It provides formative data that can be used to drive the instruction, support, and learning opportunities provided to the students." Only 3.9% of the references indicated that respondents directly stated they did not understand the purpose of NC KEA.

NC KEA Fitness to the Overall Landscape

There were 382 respondents who provided the references for the question that asked how NC KEA fit into the overall landscape of instruction and assessment in their district, school, and classroom. Within all 565 references, almost 33.6% of the references indicated that NC KEA is not a good fit. For example, one mentioned: "It really doesn't. We are given a deadline to complete it, and then I do not hear anything else about it. I'm not sure how it fits in. Kindergarten teachers work on the social, emotional, and academic development for our students already." Another teacher responded: "I would say it does not fit very well because it does not align with the district or state assessments for kindergarten students." Many respondents believed the NC KEA is a required mission (around 9.9% of the references) that is not useful because it is time-consuming and duplicated what teachers had already done for other assessments or their own needs when the school year started.

Furthermore, the respondents reported the NC KEA is not aligned with the requirements within their district or other state assessments. It is worth noting that some teachers felt the NC KEA is not useful because they have never heard anything back after they submitted the data. There was no follow-up after it finished. For example, "It is another assessment/task for kindergarten teachers to complete. No follow-up assessments or discussions about the KEA are done at the school or district level."

Despite some of the negative responses, just over 26.5% of the references considered the NC KEA as a useful assessment tool in their district, school, and classroom. One respondent indicated: "In the classroom it is another tool we can use to know each student with a 'whole child' lens. As a school it is one more way that we, as a teaching team, can look at each K student's development with a lens of equitability." Other respondents offered some specific

positive features that the NC KEA can offer. The top two features were “informs instruction” (11.5% of the references) and “provides a process to collect useful data” (approximately 7.8% of the references). Some respondents considered the NC KEA a good fit (9.7% of the references). For example, "Our district believes in formative assessment to drive student learning. The KEA easily fit into the structures and processes our kindergarten teachers are familiar with implementing."

NC KEA Data Utilization

The responses to the three questions asking about the utilization of NC KEA data in districts, schools, and classrooms were similar across all the respondents. There was a total of 702 responses for these three questions. Among all 804 references, the top response was that the NC KEA data was not utilized in the respondent's district, school, and classroom. More than 45.4% of the references indicated the respondents do not use NC KEA data. Some respondents revealed that they use the data to inform instruction and monitor students. For example, "To drive instruction, find out students' academic levels, parent conferences, grouping students." Informing instruction is the most mentioned references other than not utilizing NC KEA data (29.2% of the references), including references to group students, determine baseline, set learning goals, support students, and other significant things related to the academic purpose and student growth. PLCs (Professional Learning Communities) were mentioned by some respondents in reference to the utilization of NC KEA in the district, school, and classroom. One said: "Our teachers collect the data during the first 60 days and discuss it in the PLC/grade level planning meetings. Observations and data are used to assist with planning and MTSS. Principals also review with the teachers during PLC meetings."

Comparison with Other Available Assessment and Instructional Data

Regarding the comparison with other available assessments and instructional data, 364 respondents provided the references. Within the total 436 references, over 31.9% of the references indicated that respondents do not use NC KEA data or see NC KEA as useful. Approximately 10.1% of the references illustrated that compared with other assessments, NC KEA focused more on whole child development and it was helpful under different circumstances (11.5%). NC KEA was also seen as a duplication of some other assessments (8.5% of the references), that it does not align with most assessments and standards (8.3% of the references), and that it is hard to conduct (6.9% of the references). One reference noted about the NC KEA, “It is generally more developmentally appropriate and whole-child related, but it tends to duplicate - or not align - with the kinder curriculum.” Some respondents suggested that NC KEA should outweigh other assessments in implementation (1.8% of the references).

Structures and Resources Supported NC KEA Implementation within District and School

When asked about the structure and resources that were in place to support NC KEA implementation in your district and school, there were total 416 responses for these two questions. Among 537 references, many of the respondents indicated that websites, paper-based materials, and technical resources like iPad supported the implementation within their districts and schools (14.9%). About 12.3% of the references identified that administrators, teachers, and co-workers assisted in NC KEA implementation. Others mentioned their instructional coach (over 10.2% of the references) also assisted a lot with implementing the NC KEA. For example, one respondent noted, “With the initial implementation of the KEA, there was plenty of support from our instructional coaches in knowing the expectations for the KEA and organizing

ourselves for implementation. Since that time, we have had support from our coaches as well as our occupational & physical therapists in assessing students.”

Plenty of the respondents also indicated that their PLC (Professional Learning Community) was the resource and structure that helped them to implement the NC KEA (9.1% of the references). As one reference showed, “Our K team is a strong PLC that works together to plan and implement activities that afford us the opportunity to observe each student and document where s/he falls on the continuum of learning within each domain. We discuss and use the data we collect to then plan learning activities for our students. We can rely upon each other to act as resources for the implementation of the KEA as well as the planned learning activities for students.”

Different kinds of training were mentioned by the respondents as well. Approximately 6.7% of references said training and regular assistance within the schools and districts, through various delivery approaches, helped with the implementation of the NC KEA. For example, one respondent indicated, “We have a district team led by a lead teacher and our new elementary director. The lead teachers in each school spearhead the KEA process with their kindergarten teachers. They are kept up on training at their monthly lead teacher meetings and assist with the platform.” Other resources like online materials, technology, professional development, and administration were also mentioned.

To correspond with the results above, 352 respondents gave 405 references about which resources were most helpful. More than 18% of the references identified that websites, paper-based materials, and technical resources and support are the most helpful resources. Almost 7.7% of the references believed PLC is the most helpful resources and 6.4% of the references identified the administrators, teachers, and co-workers are the most helpful support they

received. More than 5.9% of the references thought instructional coach is the most helpful resources to help implement NC KEA.

For the question that asked about training specifically related to NC KEA implementation, 371 respondents offered 457 references. More than 71.3% of the references revealed that the respondents received different kinds of training specifically connected to the NC KEA, for example, general training (25.4%), regional/state/county/district/school-level training (19.5%), and professional development from KEA team and NCDPI (10.1%). However, over 27.4% of the references emphasized that there was no training and professional development offered.

In order to improve the professional development, support, and resources for the NC KEA implementation, 355 respondents provided suggestions. Among 450 references, there were 24.0% of the references that suggested having annual or regular professional development training, including videos, meetings, follow-ups, in-person training, and earlier training in summer before school starts. For example, one respondent noted, "I do think that professional development needs to be provided on an annual basis to new teachers in K as well as any new administrators & instructional coaches in K-5 schools. This professional development needs to be done before the school year starts or early in the school year. The same professional development could be offered to teachers/teams who have been doing KEA for a while as a refresher." The respondents pointed out other suggestions like giving access to the data, resources, and supports (10.9% of the references) and providing an overview of NC KEA (9.1% of the references). Other respondents suggested that training could focus on information regarding the purpose of KEA, what is KEA, why we do KEA, best practices for KEA, and how data could be used. They also suggested promoting a user-friendly platform (4.7%).

Kindergarten Teachers Collecting Evidence

To answer the question of how kindergarten teachers collected evidence of student development and learning for the NC KEA, there were 370 respondents offering a total of 818 references. There were multiple methods mentioned for collecting evidence, including observation (more than 21.9% of the references), notes (around 14.4% of the references), pictures (12.1% of the references), assessment (approximately 9.3%), videos (over 7.3% of the references), various activities (a little over 7.2% of the references), and checklist (more than 5.7% of the references). One respondent demonstrated: "Some evidence is collected from observation...we simply take notes of what we observe during planned learning activities and self-selected learning activities. Some evidence is collected with photographs of students involved in learning activities. Some evidence is collected from student work samples. We also collect evidence from students' performance on certain teacher-directed assessments (book orientation, print awareness, letter naming, object counting)."

When asked how often during the 60-day assessment window do kindergarten teachers collect evidence of learning, there were 365 respondents providing 409 references. Over 16.4% of the references indicated kindergarten teachers collected evidence of students' learning weekly. More than 15.2% of the references concluded teachers collected information daily. Almost 11.1% of the references showed teachers collected information two to three times throughout the assessment window, while around 6.8% of the references demonstrated teachers only conducted information collection once during the assessment period. More than 6.6% of the references reported teachers collected information multiple times a week. About 6.1% of the references illustrated that teachers collected evidence as often as necessary.

Reasons for Continuing to Use NC KEA throughout the Academic Year

Respondents were asked to explain why they continued to use the NC KEA, and how their use of the NC KEA changed over time. There were 55 respondents providing 67 references. More than 26.9% of the references contained information on monitoring and documenting the students' developmental growth. Approximately 19.4% of the references indicated they used NC KEA for the low-performing students who struggled or did not meet goals. As one mentioned, "Only with certain students would I continue to use the KEA assessments. Typically, it was with students that scored very low in areas such as fine and gross motor activities. They were ones that I would target instruction and wanted to have concrete data and proof of their progress or lack thereof." Other reasons offered were to inform instruction (7.5% of the references), to compare and refer to the data (5.97% of the references), for IEP, MTSS, and teacher-parent conferences (3.0% of the references).

Additional Suggestions and Thoughts of NC KEA

Respondents were asked to give any other thoughts that they wanted to share about the NC KEA. Within the 279 references, some of the references mentioned there was the need to discontinue NC KEA (nearly 6.8% of the references). Many respondents believed it was a flawed assessment. For instance, they mentioned: time constraints and conflicts of applying NC KEA (around 12.9% of the references), no clue of the where data goes (9.3% of the references), no good understanding of the reason in implementing the NC KEA (more than 8.2% of references), NC standards, and other assessments do not align with the requirement of the NC KEA (almost 6.1% of the references), the NC KEA should connect to first through third grade, the NC KEA does not show growth and provide feedback (just over 5.0% of the references), etc. As one respondent stated: "I feel those that developed the KEA are very passionate about looking at the

whole child- which I completely agree is most important. The disconnect is that other grade levels were supposed to implement it as well, and that never happened. More assessments are being placed on the students and teachers without others being taken away. We only find value in assessments that we can see growth across a span of time. We currently do not use the data (or ever see it again) once it's been submitted."

Instead of complaining about the weakness of the NC KEA, some of the respondents thought the NC KEA was excellent (more than 8.2% of the references) because they believed the perspective of the whole child is really helpful in general, and offers benefits for students who have special needs. Some of the respondents even suggested discontinuing other required assessments.

Phone Interview Findings

Teachers, instructional support staff, and administrators had the opportunity at the end of the 2020 NC KEA Implementation Survey to indicate their interest in completing a follow-up interview to provide further insight into their survey responses and experiences with the NC KEA. There were 63 NC KEA survey respondents that indicated they would be willing to participate in follow up interviews. These 63 teachers were contacted using the email provided in the survey and 30 of these professionals indicated they still had an interest in a phone interview. The group of 30 were asked to provide available days of the week and time of day that they would like to be contacted during the last two weeks of June 2020 and the first week of July 2020. From the group of 30, 17 phone interviews were scheduled. In total, 15 semi-structured phone interviews were conducted. Each interview was recorded and lasted from 12 to 35 minutes. To review the full semi-structured phone interview protocol, see Appendix B.

NC KEA Experiences

When asked to describe previous experiences with implementing the NC KEA, many interviewees explained that the information from the NC KEA is something they do not really use. Many teachers reported that they see it as just something they have to finish. Several teachers mentioned struggling with the overload of assessments kindergarten teachers and students face at the beginning of the year. Another teacher thought the NC KEA's development components were more appropriate for kindergarten than other assessments required during the kindergarten year. This teacher believed the "NC KEA is a good tool in terms of child development. There is a discrepancy between what we look for in children and our county's expectations academically." However, due to higher demands through North Carolina's kindergarten learning standards and other kindergarten assessments, this teacher believed the NC KEA was made irrelevant.

Some interviewed teachers seemed to not understand the purpose of the NC KEA. One teacher explained that her school used it as a baseline assessment during their staggered entry week at the start of the school year. After assessing students during the kindergarten entry week, teachers would use the information from the assessment to group students into classrooms and match them with teachers they thought would work well with specific students. One interviewee when asked about their ideas for improving implementation of the NC KEA stated:

"It needs to become relevant. We need to understand the why. What does DPI do with it? We need to understand why we do not reassess, why we do not reevaluate these students throughout the year? What is the purpose of it? Why is it not done before kindergarten or at the start of kindergarten? There is a big change from August to October. Every county needs a person with not just how to use the program, but what DPI does with it and what

the purpose of the program is. What the end goal is. Without a clear goal it just becomes another task to check off.”

This kindergarten teacher demonstrated a lack of understanding regarding the purpose of the NC KEA and the frustration that can follow this type of misunderstanding.

There were conflicting explanations for how information from the NC KEA could be used to explain student progress to other stakeholders. Some teachers mentioned that the information about where students were placed on progressions did not go to anyone else, while other teachers mentioned how they used information gathered during the NC KEA implementation as a tool in parent conferences. Specifically, one teacher explained she used the NC KEA progressions to “show parents where the student was developmentally and where they needed to go.”

Another common theme across the phone interviews dealt with the amount of time teachers were spending implementing the assessment. Some teachers identified having issues entering information into the system. The collection of student information was not a problem, their problem was in adding anecdotal notes and other evidences into the platform. When explaining difficulty with time, one experienced kindergarten teacher mentioned having trouble juggling the requirements between the multiple assessments at the start of kindergarten required in her district, and with collecting data related to meeting kindergarten standards.

Perceived Support and Resources

Other issues arise in the consistency of training received to implement the NC KEA. Kindergarten teachers had different modalities for learning how to implement the assessment, making student placements on the progressions, and utilizing information to inform instructional practice. One kindergarten teacher mentioned having received training from an administrator

“with a lot of KEA knowledge.” Several other interviewed teachers mentioned never having any form of training. “Our principal doesn’t know how it works. She just tells us to do it and if you have questions email somebody. It seems like there is a new contact person at the district level every year and that contact person has never actually done it themselves. They are just like ‘do the best you can and submit it’.”

One teacher noted that her school has never implemented the KEA in her three years as a kindergarten teacher. “We never used this in our school for the past three years I’ve been there. We are a restart school, so we have the ability to do things differently. We have used our own program.” An elementary school principal described her difficulty in supporting kindergarten teachers:

“When I came into the principalship, I had a high school and middle school background. None of the elementary school teachers could tell me what (the NC KEA) was for either. They didn’t have a clue. All they were trained on was how to put the information into the system. We really didn’t know how to use the data, still don’t really know how to use the data, to make any changes to our practice, to use it how to teach kids how to read or develop their motor skills. I’ve been at two different schools now, none of the teachers at either school have known. It’s really been a hoop we have to jump through in the first 60 days of school and then we move on.”

Some teachers mentioned the support of members of their grade level team being very influential in their understanding of how to implement the NC KEA. “The kindergarten teacher beside me has been teaching kindergarten for 20 years, using KEA for a while. I felt like in house, our questions were answered.” Another teacher mentioned the importance of her kindergarten team, “(my team) was there every step of the way, it was a very good experience.

My assistant was very helpful with it too. If I had a question about a certain task, my team explained things to me.”

Unique Classroom Characteristics Impacting Implementation

One barrier that was mentioned by two teachers related to assessing non-English speaking students. “Students who don’t speak English is a big barrier, they don’t understand the questions we ask. We don’t have anything, no one to translate. There’s quite a few at our school. There isn’t anything to help us with that. It would be nice to have a translator for the staggered entry days. Someone from DPI or (the county) come out and help with that.” While this statement points to some misunderstandings of the purpose of the formative process of the NC KEA, having students with no experience with English could impact a teacher’s ability to make valid placements of students on progressions.

An interviewed teacher mentioned teaching primarily Spanish speaking kindergarten students. She had a hard time trusting the information since it was limited to the first 60 days. She sees the first 60 days as not enough time to make informed placements of students with special circumstances, like her students with no prior experience in school settings or in environments utilizing English. She mentioned the importance of having adequate time to build relationships with students to trust the information she was inputting during the assessment process:

“I don’t know if the information was actually legit because the children still did not have, I did not have the relationship I needed with the child to make sure I was implementing the information that was necessary. There are so many assessments at the beginning of the school year and then not having built the relationship with my children to make sure they feel comfortable with me. Especially...I teach in the eastern part of the state, it

seems to be harder on this side. Our children have not been as exposed to as much as the central part or western part of the state has. I want to make sure the information they are asking reflects the different demographics we teach here versus there.”

Upcoming Changes: NC KEA to NC ELI

Teachers received varying degrees of information about changes coming to the assessment for the 2020-21 school year. Some teacher knowledge changed from the time they completed the online survey (early May 2020) to when they were involved in follow-up phone interviews (late June 2020). Some teachers experienced communication about developing new district implementation prior to the early ending of the school year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. After that point this teacher was informed to keep checking her email because she “would be receiving information about training as far as KEA and remote learning and reopening.” One teacher mentioned her district held a zoom training online where they got to play around on the new platform. Her feelings about the new platform were positive. The new platform “looks similar to the KEA platform. I like how we now have the option for parents to be involved and can be used in parent conferences.”

One teacher had frustration with switching to a new assessment and platform for the NC KEA. There is “already a lot of frustration right now with everything going on in the world. Just imagine, for a minute, teaching kindergarten virtually at the start of the year (laughs). You know, that is going to be a task in itself. And then I think adding (a new assessment) onto it is going to be very difficult and teachers are going to be burnt out before we get started.” Another mentioned her worries over an increased amount of demands that could be part of the new assessment. “The possibility of having two time points to enter data kind of worries me at the beginning.” However, this same teacher mentioned a negative to the NC KEA being that she gets

the assessment finished and never looks at it again. It is fair to say that having two time periods to enter data could encourage teachers to at least view the data and possibly do more analysis than in previous years. She noted, “I would like to have something from DPI, not something strictly from the county, and some contact from someone at DPI that we can ask our questions to that actually knows the answer.” This same teacher thought the changes she heard about “are positive changes that are getting a better picture of the whole child and not just an initial reaction. I like the outside support, that we can get additional feedback about the child.”

Additionally, there were misconceptions and confusion over what the new assessment will involve. One interviewed teacher was not clear on whether the progressions would span birth through third grade or if students would be assessed using the same system through third grade. Another explained her doubts about how the new assessment will roll out, “we never really hear from our county as far as the decision to use the KEA until October. Then they decide we are going to use it. And it is a mad rush to do all the assessments for the students. We do the assessments, then we never hear anything about it for the rest of the year. Then the following fall rolls around and we start the process all over again.”

Some teachers were reluctantly optimistic about the new changes coming to the platform. “I think it might be good. I think it’s good that it gives parents some access and it, I guess, provides the fact that you can provide evidence.” Another, “I think it looks a lot better. It looks like it’s a little more...usable, a little more understandable.” One teacher explained that she “likes the fact that we’re going to get information from pre-K to know where (students) stopped.” While these statements do not demonstrate a vast understanding of changes coming to the platform, there was at least some optimism from interviewed kindergarten teachers with changes coming to the new system.

Conclusion

This report echoed findings from previous studies on the implementation of the NC KEA. After over five years of implementation across North Carolina, there are still misuses and misconceptions of implementing a formative assessment process. With many teachers reporting their perception of the assessment as a task to complete in open-ended or interview questions, it is apparent that there is a disconnect between the assessments intended and actual use. Nearly 87.5% of survey respondents agreed that the NC KEA is a developmentally appropriate assessment. Similar to previous findings, the classroom teacher is the main driver behind successful implementation and data usage practices. Findings also indicated that support staff and administrators have an important part in appropriate understanding and implementation of the formative assessment process.

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Appendix A

NC KEA Implementation Survey Questions

Background:

1. What is your role:
 - a. District Administration
 - b. School Administration
 - c. Instructional Support
 - d. Teacher
2. How long have you been in your current role?
3. [District/School Administration and IS only] If you have classroom teaching experience, please list what grade levels, subject areas, and duration.
4. If you are or have been a classroom teacher, please select your teaching certification(s):
 - a. Birth-Kindergarten
 - b. elementary (K-6)
 - c. middle grades (6-9)
 - d. secondary grades (9-12)
 - e. special subjects (K-12)
 - f. exceptional children (K-12)
 - g. other
 - i. please specify:
5. [District/School Administration and IS only] Outside of KEA specific professional development and supports, what training have you received in early childhood development and education?

KEA Knowledge and Value:

1. In your own words, please describe the purpose of the NC KEA.
2. How does the NC KEA fit into the overall landscape of instruction and assessment in your district/school/classroom?
3. [District Administration only] How is NC KEA data utilized in your district?
4. [District Administration only] How useful is NC KEA data for supporting the instructional and learning needs of students in your district?

Implementation and Supports:

1. [District and School Administration only] What structures and resources are in place to support KEA implementation within your district?
2. [School level respondents only] What structures and resources are in place to support NC KEA implementation within your school?
3. Please describe any professional development and/or training you have received to specifically assist with implementing the NC KEA.
4. Of the professional development, supports, and resources available to help support NC KEA implementation, which do you find the most helpful and why?
5. What suggestions do you have to improve the professional development, supports, and resources available for NC KEA implementation?

New Educator Onboarding:

1. [District/School Administration and IS only] Please describe the onboarding process your district/school utilizes for new administrators, instructional support staff, and/or teachers involved in NC KEA implementation.
2. If you entered your current roll within the last two school years, please describe any NC KEA specific professional development, training, and/or support you were provided as part of your onboarding process.

Evidence Collection and Data Use [Teacher specific questions]:

1. How do you collect evidences of learning for the NC KEA?
2. Over the course of the 60-day assessment window, how often did you collect evidences of learning?
3. Over the course of the 60-day assessment window, when did you collect the most evidences of learning?
 - a. At the beginning (first 20 days)
 - b. In the middle (middle 20 days)
 - c. At the end (last 20 days)
 - d. Collected equally throughout
4. Did you continue to use the NC KEA after the 60-day assessment window?
 - a. If yes, please tell us in your own words why you elected to continue using the assessment and how your use of it may have changed, if at all (i.e. only utilized certain progressions, only use with certain students, etc.).
5. How is NC KEA data utilized in your school?
6. How do you utilize NC KEA data in your classroom?
7. How useful is NC KEA data in supporting the instructional and learning needs of your students?

Evidence Collection and Data Use [School Administration and IS specific questions]:

1. To your knowledge, how do your Kindergarten teachers collect evidences of student learning for the NC KEA?
2. To your knowledge, how often during the 60-day assessment window do your Kindergarten teachers collect evidences of learning?
3. How is NC KEA data utilized in your school?
4. How useful is NC KEA data in supporting the instructional and learning needs of the students in your school?

Likert Questions

Four-point scale of Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, followed by “If you disagree, please explain.”:

1. My district/school was prepared to implement the NC KEA
2. My district/school has the necessary capacity to implement the NC KEA
3. I feel supported by my RIT/DIT/BIT to implement the NC KEA
4. I feel supported by my district/school administrator(s) to implement the NC KEA
5. I have the knowledge necessary to implement the NC KEA successfully.
6. I have the resources necessary to implement the NC KEA successfully.
7. I feel the NC KEA is developmentally appropriate

8. I feel the NC KEA provides useful data to inform student instruction in my district/school/classroom.
9. NC KEA data is used to inform student instruction in my district/school/classroom.
10. I am aware of the NC KEA content and platform changes coming in the 2020-21 school year.

Summary Questions:

1. Outside of the questions already answered, please provide any additional comments, anecdotes, thoughts, or suggestions regarding the NC KEA:
2. In order to gain a more in-depth understanding of practitioner perspectives on the NC KEA, we are seeking volunteers to participate in a follow-up interview to this survey. If you would like to participate, please provide your email address here and we will contact you soon to setup a time to speak. Your email address will be stored separately from you survey responses to maintain your privacy and only made available to our research staff for the express purpose of scheduling your interview. Once that follow-up contact is made, all volunteer email addresses will be deleted.

Appendix B

Telephone Interview Verbal Consent Script

Hello, my name is ___ and I'm calling from UNC Charlotte to talk about the North Carolina Kindergarten Entry Assessment. Is this still a good time for you?

Before we get started, I would like to tell you a little bit more about the purpose of this call and go over any questions you may have. As you know from your participation in our survey, we are conducting a research study to learn more about your experience with the NC KEA and assist DPI in determining what resources are still needed to support practitioners' use of the assessment and its data. While our survey allowed us to gather some basic information from a wide range of participants, it isn't the best avenue for gaining a more in-depth understanding of how each individual's unique classroom, school, or district demographics and circumstances may have affected their implementation of the NC KEA. This is why we requested volunteers as part of our survey, and we appreciate your giving us some time to gain your unique perspective.

This interview will likely take around 30 minutes, but please feel free to stop me if you have questions, concerns, or you need to end our call early. To ensure the privacy of your responses, interview data from all of our interviewees will be aggregated for analysis with all potential identifying data, such as names and places, deleted. Our reports will list general themes in the data and not individual responses. With your consent we will also audio record the interview so that we can transcribe it for later analysis and focus on your responses to our questions in the moment rather than writing extensive notes during this call. Once the interview is typed into a document, we will delete this audio file.

This interview is part of an ongoing research project on the NC KEA. As such, after this phase of the study is complete your interview data may be used in further studies by the current research team without asking for your consent again. The data we use will NOT include information that could identify you, however, and it will not be shared with researchers outside of the current research team.

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you are welcome to withdraw your consent for us to utilize your responses at any time during or after this call. If you would like to revoke your consent after we disconnect, please either email or call me via the contact information in my last email and I will ensure all records of this interview are destroyed.

Do you have any questions or concerns about this interview?

Before we get started, do I have your permission to audio record our conversation?

And can you affirm that you are willing to participate in this interview?

Participant Name _____

Verbal Consent Obtained on _____

Interviewer Signature _____

NC KEA Survey Follow-up Phone Interview Questionnaire

1. Please give us an overall picture of your NC KEA experience thus far, from initial implementation until now.
2. How supported do you feel in your role to implement the NC KEA?
3. What has been the most helpful resource/support you've received to assist your implementation of the KEA.
 - a. How has [insert their response] helped you?
4. What has been the greatest barrier to your implementation of the KEA?
 - a. Why?
 - b. What strategies or resources have you tried to troubleshoot or work-around [insert their response]?
 - i. How effective were they?
 - ii. What suggestions do you have for DPI to help alleviate/eliminate/avoid [Insert their response]?
 - iii. What suggestions do you have for other [insert role] to avoid or work around this barrier if they encounter it?
5. What unique district/school/classroom characteristics or circumstances have affected your KEA implementation?
 - a. How?
 - b. What suggestions do you have for resources/supports/training that would take these characteristics/circumstances into account?
 - c. What suggestion do you have for changes to the assessment content/process that would take these characteristics/circumstances into account?
6. Looking at your survey, you indicated that you are/are not aware of the changes coming to the NC KEA for next year. Let's talk about that.
 - a. For those who ARE aware:
 - i. How were you informed about these changes?
 - ii. Please tell me what you know of the changes coming.
 - iii. What is your initial reaction to these changes?
 - iv. What training/resources/supports have you already received to assist with this transition?
 - v. What has been the most helpful?
 - vi. What training/resources/supports would you like to request to assist with this transition?
 - b. For those who ARE NOT aware:
 - i. Interviewer will provide a short description of the changes coming.
 1. What is your initial reaction to these changes?
 2. How far out from the beginning of next school year do you feel you and those in your role should be notified in order to be properly prepared to implement these changes?
 3. What training/resources/supports would you like to request to assist with this transition?
7. The purpose of this interview was to gain your perspective on the NC KEA process and how your unique district/school/classroom experiences may have affected your implementation of the assessment. What other thoughts, suggestion, or concerns would like to add that we haven't asked about?