

To: Senate Early Learning and K-12 Education committee members

From: Lidia Mori

Re: WaKIDS interim project

Date: November 8, 2011

Summary of Final Report from the WaKIDS Pilot

WaKIDS is a kindergarten assessment process that was piloted during the 2010-11 school year by the Washington State Department of Early Learning (DEL) and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), with the financial support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and funding and consultation by Thrive by Five Washington. The research and data analysis for the WaKIDS pilot was led by the University of Washington's College of Education.

During the 2011-2012 school year, WaKIDS will include 68 school districts, 165 schools, 479 teachers, and 11,000 kindergarteners.

Two reports have been produced from the WaKIDS pilot project, one in January 2011 and one in June 2011. The first report derived from the implementation of three pilot tools and the collection of data. The analysis of the data showed that as much as 30% of entering Washington kindergarteners might not be performing at early-kindergarten levels. The second half of the pilot year used surveys and focus groups to reach out to parents, kindergarten teachers, and early learning providers in order to better understand the assessment results from the first half of the pilot year. The second report provides more information about the teachers' experiences with the assessment tool, the parents' opinions about the assessment tools and transition process, and the early learning collaboration.

There are three main components of the WaKIDS pilot: strengthening the family's connection to the child's education environment; creating a comprehensive assessment of the whole child; and cultivating collaboration between early learning providers and kindergarten teachers.

Family Connections. Interviews and focus groups conducted across the state were used to gain information regarding parents' opinions about kindergarten transition and assessment information. One of the themes that emerged from the qualitative data is that that early learning helps with the transition to kindergarten. Parents felt that having their child be in an early learning program helped with kindergarten adjustment both academically and emotionally. Parents of children who did not attend an early learning program described more difficult transitions. In addition, individualized transition strategies were valued by parents,

such the ability to share information about their child before school begins. Regarding assessment, parents consistently emphasized the importance of frequent updates on their child's progress.

Early Learning Collaboration. Ten early learning collaboration meetings were held throughout the pilot year. Early learning providers and kindergarten teachers discussed the current state of transition to kindergarten in their regional areas and the role of assessment. Both providers and teachers clearly want to work together to create a meaningful kindergarten transition but lack of funding and time emerged as strong barriers to more effective transition practices. It was apparent that both providers and teachers spend significant time working with students and families to prepare for kindergarten, but there remains a communication gap between providers and teachers.

Creating a comprehensive assessment of the whole child. A survey was conducted of early learning providers to determine current assessment and curriculum practices, as well as transition strategies. The survey also revealed which of the three piloted WaKIDS assessment tools early learning providers would be most likely to use. A majority of providers reported they would be somewhat or most likely to use the Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment. As for curriculum alignment, only 15% of early learning providers reported making contacts with kindergarten teachers to develop a coordinated curriculum, but 38.4% felt that this was a good idea. A majority of early learning providers reported not having any specialized training to enhance children's transition into kindergarten.

Recommendations from the University of Washington. (OSPI contracted with the UW's College of Education to lead the research and data analysis.)

Family connections: Training and support should be provided for teachers to continue the individualized connections with children and families before children begin kindergarten.

Whole child assessment: The Teaching Strategies GOLD is the recommended assessment tool. Training and support should be provided to teachers in order to implement the tool as intended. Training and support on how to communicate the assessment results to parents should also be implemented.

Early learning connections: It is recommended that support be developed for facilitating early learning connections in order to build preK-3rd systems. Essential elements identified by early learning providers and kindergarten teachers are: common assessments and a system for sharing; common school readiness goals; and joint professional development.