

## **Kindergarten Assessment FAQ (For Parents and Guardians) September 2015**

Your child deserves a bright future and so does every other child in Oregon. Investing in our children early is essential to setting them on the path for success in kindergarten and beyond. Oregon is making some fundamental changes to help ensure all students have the strong start they need for school success.

Every child enters Kindergarten at a different stage in learning and development. Some children have mastered letters but have a hard time with numbers. Some are able to communicate ideas and needs, but have difficulty following directions. This is completely normal and expected.

The Oregon Kindergarten Assessment was created to get a clearer picture of early learning experiences across the state, and to provide a snapshot for educators of the skills children are coming to kindergarten with.

In addition, we know that there remains a great deal of inequity in the types of experiences children have before entering school. The Oregon Kindergarten Assessment is essential to understanding, and ultimately closing, the divide for our most underserved early learners.

By providing a statewide perspective, the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment allows educators to track trends and measure progress, and helps ensure that educators are working together to give your child, and every child, a great start in school and in life.

### **What is the Kindergarten Assessment?**

In the fall of each year, educators gather information about the early literacy and early math skills, as well as interpersonal and self-regulation skills, of their students. This information provides an important “snapshot” of how Oregon’s children are doing when they arrive at school.

### **Why does Oregon need the Kindergarten Assessment?**

We have a responsibility to ensure all students -- especially historically underserved students -- have access to high-quality resources. When we invest early in a child’s life with rich experiences to develop the child’s heart and mind, the child is more likely to be successful at all future levels of education, and better equipped to give back to the community later in life. Children currently enter kindergarten having had a wide variety of early childhood experiences. The Kindergarten Assessment sheds light on these differences and allows us to better target resources for families and children where they are most needed. It also gives schools additional information to help them best target resources for students.

### **How will this assessment be used?**

The Kindergarten Assessment is not a pass or fail test of kids or of families; it is a tool for determining how Oregon is doing as a state in supporting children and families before they enter school. The Kindergarten Assessment will provide invaluable information about: whether our public investments are improving the school readiness of Oregon’s children;

how extensive the opportunity gaps are between groups of children; and whether Oregon is succeeding in closing those gaps.

### **What does the assessment measure?**

The Kindergarten Assessment focuses on areas that research has demonstrated are strongly linked to future academic success: self-regulation, interpersonal skills, early literacy, and early math. The self-regulation and interpersonal skills are measured through a survey based on teacher observation of the student during regular classroom activities and routines. The teacher then responds to questions such as “does the child follow directions without requiring repeated reminders?” For the early literacy and math measures, an educator meets with the child one-on-one and asks the child to complete tasks such as identify letters or counting the number of objects in a picture.

### **Who administers the assessment?**

The assessment is administered through educators in your child’s school and overseen by the Oregon Department of Education. In 2013, over 95% of all entering kindergarteners participated in the assessment, providing an unprecedented snapshot of the state of early learning in Oregon.

### **How does this assessment help address inequities in our community?**

The Kindergarten Assessment will help us better identify inequities in order to direct resources and support to underserved communities. The allocation of additional resources and support is intended to help close the opportunity gaps that exist between communities.

### **Can I opt my child out of the test?**

Parents may request that their child be exempted from the Kindergarten Assessment based on religion or disability. When making this decision, it is important to remember you risk losing valuable information about your child. The results from the assessment provide clear, meaningful, and relevant feedback to both parents and educators about your child – and all children’s – strengths and areas for improvement to help close achievement gaps. Without this data, there is currently no other method for getting a statewide snapshot of early learning.

In order for a school district to excuse a student under this rule, the student’s parent must submit a written request to the school district, listing the reasons for the request and proposing an individualized learning activity that would accomplish the same goals as determined by the assessment. School district administrators and District Test Coordinators must evaluate and approve the parental request.

### **Is this too early to be testing children?**

The Kindergarten Assessment is not what is typically thought of as a “test.” The child-friendly assessment is a combination of teacher observations and simple questions that help identify early literacy and math skills, how a child approaches learning, his/her ability to follow directions, and how he/she interacts with other students. Children are never asked to write down responses during any portion of the assessment.

**Does the assessment give an accurate picture of my child's abilities?**

The Kindergarten Assessment is just one measure, and provides a snapshot of progress of the knowledge and skills that have been shown to be correlated to later success in school. The assessment components have been documented by researchers to be reliable and valid for this purpose. No assessment can give a complete picture of your child's abilities, but it can give a snapshot at one point in time.

It is important to remember that kindergarten assessment is not new. Most, if not all, of Oregon elementary schools have used some form of assessment in the past for entering kindergartners. The Kindergarten Assessment establishes a statewide test to gain a meaningful understanding of the overall school readiness of incoming students, enhancing the state's ability to make informed decisions about early learning investments and programs.

**When will my child participate in the assessment?**

The assessment is designed to understand the skills and knowledge that children have acquired before entering school. It is given in the first six weeks of school. Results of the assessment shed light on early learning and development and can also be useful to teachers who want good information about their students' existing skills and strengths.

**Can my child fail the assessment?**

No. Children cannot pass or fail the assessment; this is purely a check in on the skills and knowledge acquired before entering school. All children who have met the age requirement are entitled to attend kindergarten, and this assessment in no way impacts a child's ability to begin kindergarten.

**How many letters are "ready" children expected to name?**

There is no expectation that any child be able to name all letters and letter sounds in the time allotted for the literacy assessment. The short, timed assessment gives a snapshot of a child's comfort with letter recognition. It is not intended to provide a complete picture of a child's letter knowledge.

**Should I try to prepare my child for the assessment?**

You are your child's first and most important teacher. Playing games and talking to your child as much as possible can help set your child up for success in school. If you want suggestions for activities to do with your child, take a look at this [Getting School Ready!](#) booklet. The booklet is available in multiple languages [here](#).

You do not need to prepare your child for this assessment in particular. It is a check in on what kids across Oregon know and are able to do when they arrive at kindergarten.

**How can I help prepare my child for kindergarten?**

Preparing your child for success in school and in life begins even before he or she is born. From the first weeks, talking to your child and playing age-appropriate games can instill a love of learning and build important early social and emotional skills. Check out "[Love. Talk. Play.](#)" or [Getting School Ready!](#) for suggestions.