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REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

Why this study?

- The current study is an extension of the [PEER study about assessment use](#) in early childhood education classrooms.
- The previous study discussed the use of assessments administered by early childhood education teachers, but it did not explore how survey responses related to the characteristics of specific assessments.
- The current study examines the alignment between teachers' reported use of assessments and the intended use of the assessments, as stated in the publishers' online documentation.

Study Description

- PEER surveyed teachers from the major early childhood education providers in Bridgeport, Norwalk, and Stamford, CT in winter 2016.
- Participants were asked to complete a survey regarding the use of assessments in their classrooms.
- The survey posed questions about what assessments were used in the classroom and the purposes for which teachers used the assessments. The survey also included questions about how assessment data were used.
- PEER determined the intended purposes for each assessment by reviewing the publishers' websites and online marketing materials.

Key Results

- The majority of survey respondents used each assessment for at least one purpose that was indicated by the assessment's publishers.
- Most respondents also used each assessment for at least one purpose that was not indicated by the publishers.
- According to publishers' online materials, none of the assessments identified by teachers are designed to assess English Language Comprehension. However, many respondents indicated that they were using one or more of these assessments for this purpose.

Implications

- Since assessments are designed for specific purposes, it is essential for educators to receive appropriate training on using assessments for the intended purposes.
- To support data-driven decision-making in classrooms, it is important for early childhood educators to receive training on how to use assessment data most effectively.
- At this time, educators may not have access to an appropriate English Language Comprehension assessment, but survey responses indicate a need for such an assessment. Providing teachers with assessments that fit their needs may decrease the use of existing assessments for unintended purposes.

Background

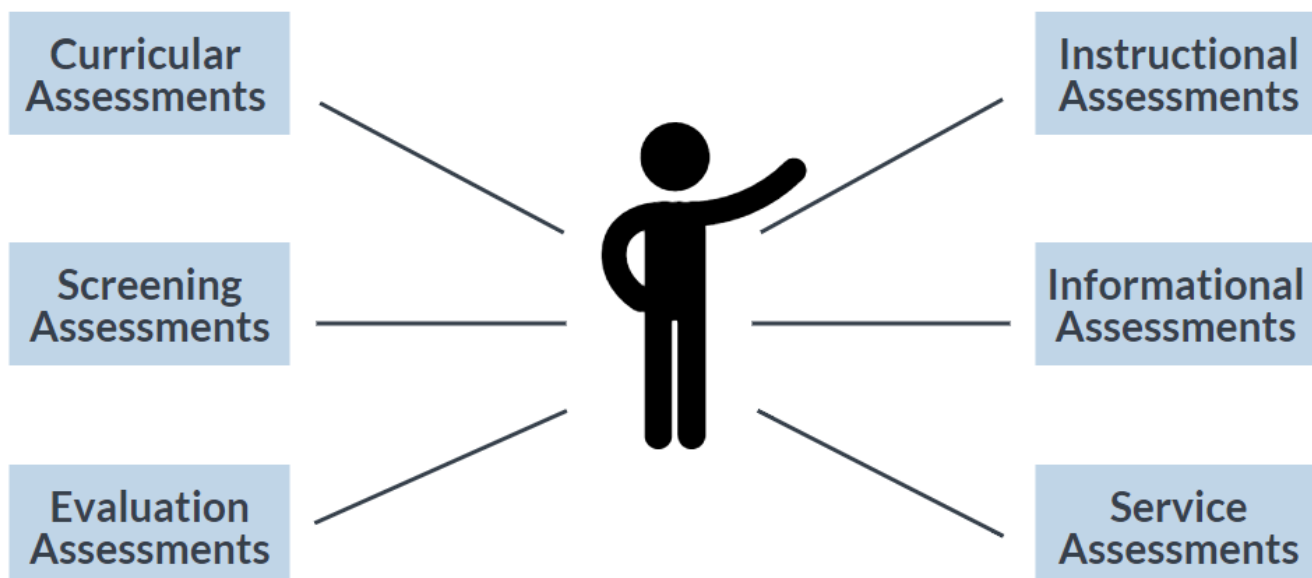
Classroom assessments are essential tools for evaluating areas of strength and opportunities for growth in children. In early childhood education, teachers can use assessment data to design classroom lessons and activities that address the needs of the children.[1] Teachers rely on assessment data for information on their children. Individual assessments are designed with specific purposes in mind, and in most cases, assessment data should only be used for these purposes. Using assessments for purposes that are not intended by the assessment developers may misguide teachers in ways that negatively affect children in their classrooms.[2]

As described in [PEER's first brief](#) on the use of early childhood assessments in southwestern Connecticut, early childhood educators use a variety of assessments for a range of purposes. We categorize these purposes into six categories, as shown in figure 1:

- **Curricular assessments** help teachers to develop or make decisions about the curriculum.
- **Instructional assessments** inform lesson planning and classroom activities, and help teachers to place children in instructional groups and establish developmental targets.
- **Screening assessments** are used to identify potential concerns and determine which children need additional assessment.
- **Informational assessments** are used to gather information to share with parents and to collaborate with colleagues to support children.
- **Evaluation assessments** are used to assess and document student skills, compare student skills to developmental norms, show children's progress over time, and determine whether children have met developmental targets.
- **Service assessments** are used to determine whether children need additional services to support their development.

Teachers use various assessment tools to collect assessment data for the purposes described above. Factors like program policy, assessment cost, and previous experience may determine how teachers use each assessment. Furthermore, information about the purposes for which an assessment was designed may or may not be readily available to early childhood educators. For these reasons, it is possible that teachers use assessments for purposes that they were not designed to address. The current study examined this possibility.

Figure 1: Types of assessments considered in this study.



Goals of the study

This study extends the project defined by [Aim 2](#) of the PEER's initial research questions, which explores the use of assessments by early childhood education teachers, as related to six categories above. The current study examines the alignment between teacher-reported use of assessments and the intended uses of the assessments, as stated by the publishers. When the teacher-reported use matches the advertised purpose of the assessments, teachers are more likely to make substantiated conclusions based on the data. However, when there is a mismatch between the reported use and the intended use, it is possible that the assessments are being used to make invalid conclusions.

How the study was conducted

This study involved the major early childhood education providers in Bridgeport, Stamford, and Norwalk, Connecticut. PEER invited all lead teachers from these providers to complete an online survey about how they use assessments in the classroom (available at <https://goo.gl/FYxH2K>). One of the questions asked teachers to indicate any assessments they used from a list of common assessments. For each assessment indicated by a teacher, the survey posed follow-up questions asking respondents to select from a list of purpose(s) for using the assessment and a list of possible uses for the data.

In this study, PEER examined the alignment between the teachers' reported use of assessments and the intended use of the assessments. We began by creating a list of codes for each of the six assessment purposes and twelve assessment data uses that were listed in the survey, for a total of 18 codes (see table A-1 in Appendix A). We also classified these 18 codes into the six assessment categories listed above (see table A-2 in Appendix A).

Next, PEER reviewed the publishers' publicly-available websites and online marketing materials for each of the assessments on the list of common assessments and summarized the assessment's intended purposes, as stated by the assessment publisher (see table B-1 in Appendix B). For each assessment, one PEER researcher assigned codes for its intended purpose



from the list of six identified codes and assigned codes for its intended data use from the list of twelve identified codes (see table B-2 in Appendix B). This coding was reviewed by two other PEER researchers to verify accuracy.

The survey responses were then analyzed in SPSS[3] to identify matches and mismatches between the teacher-reported purposes and uses for each reported assessment and the intended purposes and uses for that assessment, as published online. These analyses showed whether teachers were using the assessments for the advertised purposes and uses, or if they were using the assessments for other purposes and uses.

What the study found

As shown in table 1, survey responses indicated sixteen assessments that were used by one or more teachers.

Table 1: Respondents reported using a variety of assessments in their classrooms.

Assessment	Number of respondents
Ages and Stages Questionnaires® (ASQ)	10
Ages and Stages Questionnaires: Social-Emotional ® (ASQ-SE)	5
Assessment, Evaluation and Program System for Infants and Children (AEPS)	1
Battelle Developmental Inventory™ (BDI-2™)	2
Brigance® Inventory of Early Development III	38
Carolina Curriculum for Infants Toddlers with Special Needs (CCITSN), 3rd Edition	1
Connecticut Kindergarten Entrance Inventory (CT KEI)	1
Connecticut Preschool Assessment Framework (CT PAF)	50
Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA)	9
Early Screening Inventory-Revised (ESI-R)	5
Hawaii Early Learning Profile (HELP)	1
Locally designed assessment	7
Preschool Early Literacy Indicator (PELI)	8
Social-Emotional Assessment/Evaluation Measure (SEAM™)	2
Splash into Pre-K	2
Teaching Strategies GOLD®	9

Note: 60 teachers responded to these items. Teachers could indicate that they used more than one assessment.

According to their online materials, the publishers of these assessments indicated a wide range of purposes, as summarized in tables B-1 and B-2 of Appendix B. Three assessments were indicated as screeners only, and the publishers indicated between two and five purposes for each of the remaining thirteen assessments.

In terms of how teachers reported using these measures, some of the intended assessment purposes were more commonly indicated than others, as shown in table 2. While some assessment purposes were indicated by a high percentage of survey participants (100% of CT PAF users reported that they use the assessment to show children's progress over



time), other assessment purposes were indicated by a low percentage of survey participants (33% of Brigance users reported that they use the assessment to place children into instructional groups).

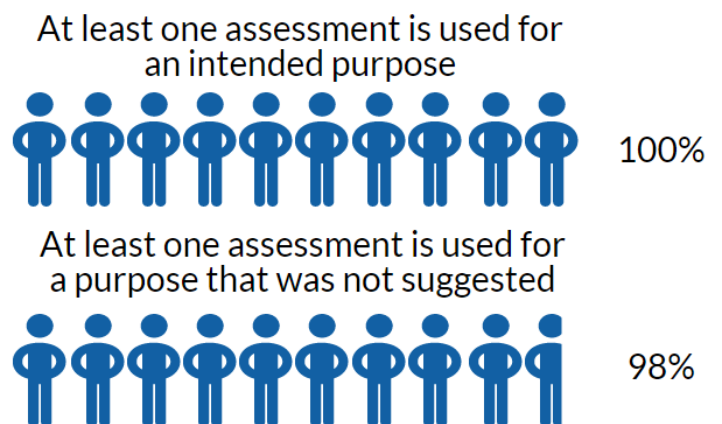
Table 2: Percentage of respondents using each intended purpose for the six most common assessments.

Assessment	Purpose 1	Purpose 2	Purpose 3	Purpose 4	Purpose 5
Ages and Stages Questionnaires® (ASQ) (n=10)	Screen for potential concerns 80%	Determine whether children are meeting developmental targets 70%	Share information with parents/families 60%		
Brigance® Inventory of Early Development III (n=38)	Show progress over time 92%	Create instructional groups 39%			
Connecticut Preschool Assessment Framework (CT PAF) (n=49)	Show progress over time 100%	Develop/select curriculum 71%	Share information with parents/families 78%	Work with other teachers to support children 59%	
Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) (n=9)	Screen for potential concerns 89%	Make decisions about services for children 67%	Inform classroom activities 56%	Inform lesson planning 56%	Create instructional groups 33%
Preschool Early Literacy Indicator (PELLI) (n=7)	Screen for potential concerns 71%	Determine whether children are meeting developmental targets 71%	Show progress over time 100%	Make adaptations to curriculum 57%	
Teaching Strategies GOLD® (n=7)	Document what children can do compared to a specific set of skills 86%	Share information with parents/families 71%			

Note: Complete results are reported in table C-I of Appendix C.

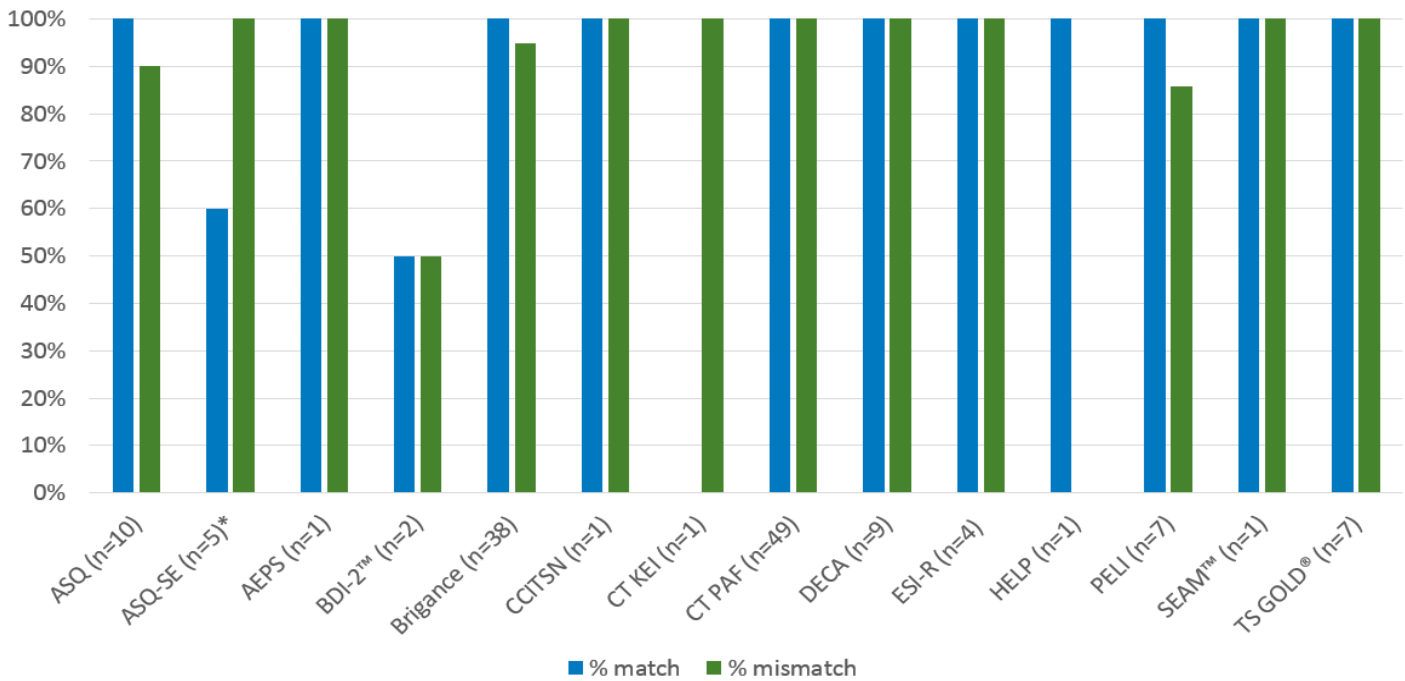
Overall, the survey results show that each of the teacher survey participants reported using at least one assessment for a purpose identified by the publisher. At the same time, almost every teacher reported using at least one assessment for a purpose that was not identified by the publisher. For example, using the Brigance to monitor a child’s progress over time is an intended purpose, as stated by its publishers. However, using the Brigance to document a child’s English language comprehension is not an intended purpose and may not be an appropriate use of the measure. Figure 2 shows the overall alignment between reported uses and intended uses of these assessments.

Figure 2: Overall alignment between reported use and intended use of early childhood assessments.



When considering all the assessments separately, different assessments showed different degrees of alignment and misalignment with intended assessment purposes, as shown in figure 3. For most assessments, a high percentage of teachers reported at least one assessment purpose that matched the publisher’s specifications and a high percentage of teachers reported at least one purpose that did not match the publisher’s specifications. For example, of all ASQ users, 10 out of 10 indicated at least one intended use, but 9 out of 10 also indicated at least one mismatched purpose.

Figure 3: Percentage of match and mismatch between reported and intended assessment purposes/uses.



*Caution should be taken when interpreting percentages for assessments where very few respondents indicated using the assessment.

Note: Splash into PreK is not included above because the publisher’s materials did not clearly state the assessment purposes/uses.

Regarding the six most commonly used assessments (ASQ, Brigance, CTPAF, DECA, PELI, and TSGOLD), all teachers who used these assessments indicated at least one assessment purpose that the publisher intended, as shown in table 3. Most teachers also indicated at least one assessment purpose that was not indicated by the publisher.

Table 3: Intended and unintended uses for the six most commonly used assessments.

Assessment	Number of teachers who used the assessment	Number of teachers who used assessment for at least one intended purpose (e.g. match)	% match	Number of teachers who used assessment for at least one unintended purpose (e.g. mismatch)	% mismatch
Ages and Stages Questionnaires® (ASQ)	10	10	100	9	90
Brigance® Inventory of Early Development III	38	38	100	36	95
CT Preschool Assessment Framework (CT PAF)	49	49	100	49	100

Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA)	9	9	100	9	100
Preschool Early Literacy Indicator (PELI)	7	7	100	6	86
Teaching Strategies GOLD®	7	7	100	7	100

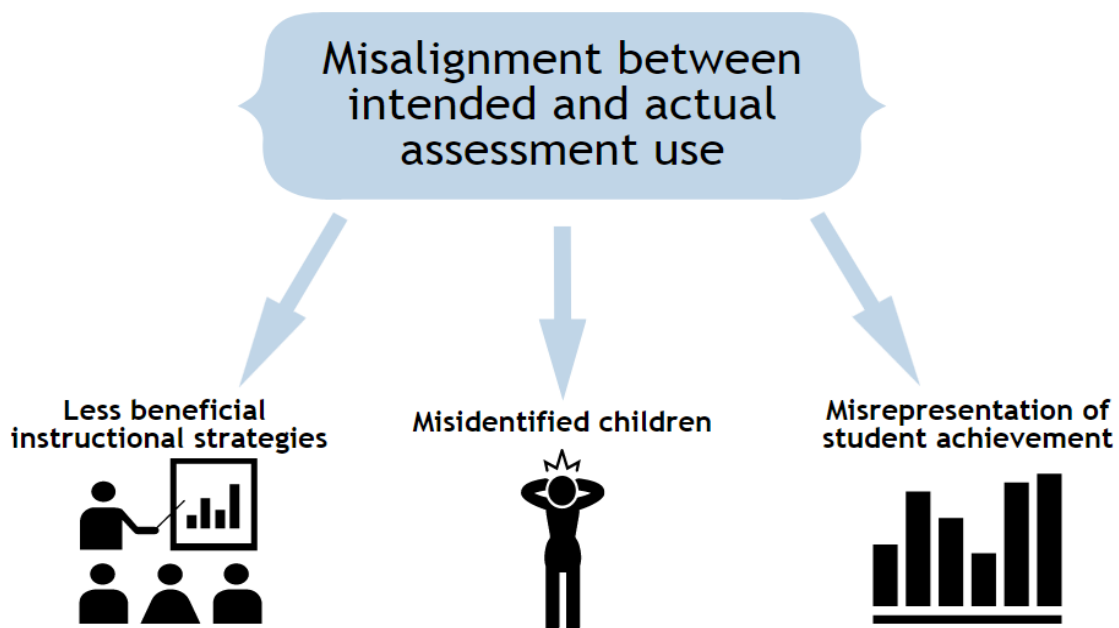
Note: Complete results are reported in table C-I of Appendix C.

Interestingly, although the publishers did not list assessing English language comprehension as an intended purpose for any of these assessments, many respondents indicated that they used one or more assessments for this purpose. This result indicates that teachers find it important to assess English language comprehension. In the absence of an assessment that is designed to assess English language comprehension, teachers are using the available assessments to do so.

Implications

As described above, teachers use assessments for a wide range of purposes, including informing instruction, tracking children’s progress, determining whether additional assessments are needed, and identifying children who may need additional services. Using assessments to gather and use data is the first step for successful data-informed decision making in the classroom, and it is promising that survey respondents reported these activities. At the same time, using a specific assessment for a purpose that was not intended by its designers may yield unreliable data or invalid conclusions. For example, using assessments for unintended purposes may lead to the selection of suboptimal instructional strategies, misidentification of children for special education services, and inaccurate assessment of children’s progress. The inappropriate use of assessments could lead to problems like the mislabeling of English learner children as having a learning disability, which could prevent the delivery of appropriate services⁴. Assessment is an essential element of high quality early education, but teachers must have access to appropriate assessments, along with the training and support to use assessment data appropriately.

Figure 4: Potential consequences of misalignment between intended and actual assessment purposes



Limitations of the study

There are several limitations to the study:

- As described in [PEER's first brief](#) on early childhood assessment practices, the 33% response rate limits how much these results can be generalized to the larger population. Future studies should implement the survey with a larger, random sample of teachers.
- Survey respondents may have interpreted some survey questions differently than they were intended, which could impact survey responses. For example, the assessment purpose related to “English language comprehension” may have been interpreted as a question targeting dual language learners or as a question about the development English language skills among native speakers. Before future administration of the survey, it may be wise to conduct cognitive interviews to ensure that respondents are interpreting the questions as intended.
- When respondents were asked to indicate all the purposes and uses for which they administer assessments, it is possible the respondents overreported their activities, which would yield inflated values for the frequencies with which each purpose was reported.
- It is possible that the online materials used for coding assessments did not accurately represent the assessment purposes and uses described in the technical manuals that were written by the assessment developers.

Conclusion

Despite the small sample size for this study, the results indicate some potential areas of improvement in the use of assessments. Of all survey respondents, 98% are using at least one assessment for a purpose that does not match the intended purpose for that assessment, which shows that there is likely room for improvement in teachers’ assessment practices. To ensure that assessments are being used to their full potential, assessments should be used as the developers intended, until we are able to determine whether they are valid and reliable for other uses. To support assessment practices in early childhood classrooms, teachers should receive adequate professional development on the administration of assessments, and on the interpretation and use of assessment data. Finally, early childhood administrators should periodically evaluate the assessments that are available to their teachers, to ensure that teachers have access to appropriate assessments that serve all necessary purposes.

Recommendation #1

Ensure teachers have training to decipher the intended purposes of assessments

Recommendation #2

Ensure teachers have training to use assessment data wisely

Recommendation #3

Ensure teachers have access to an assessment designed to assess English Language comprehension

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Appendix A: Survey items linked to assessment purpose and data use codes

Table A-1: Assessment purpose survey item with codes and assessment types assigned by PEER

In my classroom, this assessment is used to: (Check all that apply.)	PEER Code	Assessment type
Document what a child can do compared to a specific set of skills	CRT	Evaluation
Compare a child to what most children can do (developmental norms)	NRT	Evaluation
Screen for potential concerns	SCREEN	Screening
Show children's progress over time	PROGRESS	Evaluation
Document a child's English language comprehension	ELCOMP	Services
Other (please specify):	OTHER	N/A

Table A-2: Assessment data use survey item with codes and assessment types assigned by PEER

For what purpose(s) do you or others use the data from this assessment? The data from this assessment are used to: (Check all that apply.)	PEER Code	Assessment Type
Develop or make decisions about curricula	DevCurric	Curricular
Determine if additional assessment(s) may be necessary	AddAssess	Screening
Place children into instructional groups	InstGroup	Instructional
Inform lesson planning	LessonPlan	Instructional
Inform classroom activities	ClassActiv	Instructional
Make decisions about services for children	Services	Services
Share information with parents/families about their child	InfoParents	Informational
Work with other teachers to plan activities or supports for children	WorkOther	Informational
Check that children are meeting developmental targets	DevTarget	Instructional or Evaluation*
Make adaptations to curriculum	AdaptCurric	Curricular
Monitor children's progress	Progress	Evaluation
Other (please specify):	Other	N/A

* Instructional assessment when used to set targets, evaluation assessment when used to determine whether targets were met.

Appendix B: Intended purposes of common early childhood assessments

Table B-1: Intended purposes of common early childhood assessments, created by PEER based on publishers' online materials.

Assessment	Purpose 1	Purpose 2	Purpose 3	Purpose 4	Purpose 5
Ages and Stages Questionnaires® (ASQ)	developmental screening tool	pinpoints developmental progress	teach parents	creates the snapshot needed to catch delays and celebrate milestones. - highlight a child's strengths as well as concerns	highlight results that fall in a "monitoring zone," to make it easier to keep track of children at risk
Ages and Stages Questionnaires: Social-Emotional® (ASQ-SE)	Screen for potential concerns				
Assessment, Evaluation and Program System for Infants and Children (AEPS)	target instruction	monitor child progress	aid in identifying disability and determining eligibility	accurately assess children's current skill levels	
Battelle Developmental Inventory™ (BDI-2™)	Screens and evaluates early childhood developmental milestones, Screening of key developmental milestones for school readiness	Assessing current developmental strengths and needs	Measuring longitudinal growth of development	Determining eligibility for special education services	Assisting in development of Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSP) and Individualized Education Programs (IEP)
Brigance® Inventory of Early Development III (Criterion Referenced)	monitor child progress	plan individualized instruction based on assessment results	ongoing assessment of school readiness skills		
Brigance® Inventory of Early Development III	compare a child's performance to that of a nationally representative sample of children the same age, benchmarking, standardized reporting	providing documentation to support referrals			

Carolina Curriculum for Infants Toddlers with Special Needs, 3rd Edition (CCITSN)	evaluate a child's progress	encourage children's development through teaching activities		
Connecticut Kindergarten Entrance Inventory (CT KEI)	evidence about children's preparedness	tool for teachers to engage families	understanding the early learning and development of kindergarten students across multiple domains	
Connecticut Preschool Assessment Framework (CT PAF)	Observe and monitor progress	Support curriculum development and planning	organize and mutually share information between families and program staff members	share information with teachers and support effective transitions
Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA)	screen for children	identify children who are low on the protective factors so that targeted classroom and home-based strategies can be implemented	generate classroom profiles indicating the relative strengths of all children so that classroom design and instructional strategies can build upon these strengths	
Early Screening Inventory-Revised (ESI-R)	ESI-R is an individually administered screening instrument to identify children who may need special education services.			
Hawaii Early Learning Profile (HELP)	document the child's growth and progress, tracking growth and development	determining 'next steps' (target objectives).	identifying needs	
Preschool Early Literacy Indicator (PELI)	identify students who may be at risk for difficulties acquiring early literacy skills (universal screening)	help teachers identify skill areas to target instructional support	monitor progress of students	identify curricular needs at the system level

Social-Emotional Assessment/Evaluation Measure (SEAM™)	monitor child progress	assist with developing developmentally appropriate goals and intervention activities	build strong, proactive partnerships with families, promote positive parent–child interactions in the critical first years of life	support development of important social-emotional skills
Splash into Pre-K	Comprehensive checklists for informal daily and weekly observations of each student	Correlation to the Early Growth Indicators Benchmark Assessment for formal assessment three times a year		
Teaching Strategies GOLD®	generate comprehensive reports that can be customized easily and shared with family members and other stakeholders	gather and organize meaningful data quickly, including online portfolios where children’s work can be stored	create a developmental profile of each child to answer the questions, “What does this child know? What is he or she able to do?” that can be used to scaffold each child’s learning	

Table B-2: Intended purposes of common early childhood assessments, as coded by PEER based on publishers' online materials.

Assessment	Purpose 1	Purpose 2	Purpose 3	Purpose 4	Purpose 5
Ages and Stages Questionnaires® (ASQ)	Screen	DevTarget	InfoParents		
Ages and Stages Questionnaires: Social-Emotional® (ASQ-SE)	Screen				
Assessment, Evaluation and Program System for Infants and Children (AEPS)	InstGroup	Progress	Services	CRT	
Battelle Developmental Inventory™ (BDI-2™)	Screen	DevTarget	Progress	Services	Other
Brigance® Inventory of Early Development III	Progress	InstGroup			
Carolina Curriculum for Infants Toddlers with Special Needs, 3rd Edition (CCITSN)	Progress	ClassActiv			
Connecticut Kindergarten Entrance Inventory (CT KEI)	CRT	InfoParents			
Connecticut Preschool Assessment Framework (CT PAF)	Progress	DevCurric	InfoParents	WorkOther	
Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA)	Screen	Services	ClassActiv	LessonPlan	InstGroup
Early Screening Inventory-Revised (ESI-R)	Screen				
Hawaii Early Learning Profile (HELP)	Progress	DevTarget			
Preschool Early Literacy Indicator (PELI)	Screen	DevTarget	Progress	AdaptCurric	
Social-Emotional Assessment/Evaluation Measure (SEAM™)	Progress	DevTarget	ClassActiv	InfoParents	Other
Splash into Pre-K	Not possible to determine intended purpose from available materials				
Teaching Strategies GOLD®	CRT	InfoParents			

Appendix C: Alignment of reported assessment purposes with intended assessment purposes

Table C-1: For each assessment, percentage of respondents indicating use for each intended purpose.

Assessment	Purpose 1	Purpose 2	Purpose 3	Purpose 4	Purpose 5
Ages and Stages Questionnaires® (ASQ) (n=10)	Screen 80%	DevTarget 70%	InfoParents 60%		
Ages and Stages Questionnaires: Social-Emotional® (ASQ-SE) (n=5)*	Screen 60%				
Assessment, Evaluation and Program System for Infants and Children (AEPS) (n=1)	InstGroup 0%	Progress 0%	Services 0%	CRT 100%	
Battelle Developmental Inventory™ (BDI-2™) (n=2)	Screen 50%	DevTarget 0%	Progress 50%	Services 50%	
Brigance® Inventory of Early Development III (n=38)	Progress 92%	InstGroup 39%			
Carolina Curriculum for Infants Toddlers with Special Needs, 3rd Edition (CCITSN) (n=1)	Progress 100%	ClassActiv 0%			
Connecticut Kindergarten Entrance Inventory (CT KEI) (n=1)	CRT 0%	InfoParents 0%			
Connecticut Preschool Assessment Framework (CT PAF) (n=49)	Progress 100%	DevCurric 71%	InfoParents 78%	WorkOther 59%	
Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) (n=9)	Screen 89%	Services 67%	ClassActiv 56%	LessonPlan 56%	InstGroup 33%
Early Screening Inventory-Revised (ESI-R) (n=4)	Screen 100%				
Hawaii Early Learning Profile (HELP) (n=1)	Progress 0%	DevTarget 100%			
Preschool Early Literacy Indicator (PELI) (n=7)	Screen 71%	DevTarget 71%	Progress 100%	AdaptCurric 57%	
Social-Emotional Assessment/Evaluation Measure (SEAM™) (n=1)	Progress 100%	DevTarget 100%	ClassActiv 100%	InfoParents 100%	
Teaching Strategies GOLD® (n=7)	CRT 86%	InfoParents 71%			

*Caution should be taken when interpreting percentages for assessments where very few respondents indicated using the assessment.

Note: 60 teachers responded to these items. Splash into Pre-K was not included in this table because the publisher's materials did not clearly state the assessment purposes/uses.

Table C-2: Use of each assessment for intended purpose(s) and unintended purpose(s).

Assessment	Total number of teachers who used the assessment	Number of teachers who used assessment for at least one intended purpose (e.g. match)	% Match	Number of teachers who used assessment for at least one unintended purpose (e.g. mismatch)	% Mismatch
Ages and Stages Questionnaires® (ASQ)	10	10	100%	9	90%
Ages and Stages Questionnaires: Social-Emotional® (ASQ-SE)	5	3	60%	5	100%
Assessment, Evaluation and Program System for Infants and Children (AEPS)	1	1	100%	1	100%
Battelle Developmental Inventory™ (BDI-2™)	2	1	50%	1	50%
Brigance® Inventory of Early Development III	38	38	100%	36	95%
Carolina Curriculum for Infants Toddlers with Special Needs, 3rd Edition (CCITSN)	1	1	100%	1	100%
Connecticut Kindergarten Entrance Inventory (CT KEI)	1	0	0%	1	100%
Connecticut Preschool Assessment Framework (CT PAF)	49	49	100%	49	100%
Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA)	9	9	100%	9	100%
Early Screening Inventory-Revised (ESI-R)	4	4	100%	4	100%
Hawaii Early Learning Profile (HELP)	1	1	100%	0	0%
Preschool Early Literacy Indicator (PELI)	7	7	100%	6	86%
Social-Emotional Assessment/Evaluation Measure (SEAM™)	1	1	100%	1	100%
Teaching Strategies GOLD®	7	7	100%	7	100%

Note: 60 teachers responded to these items. Splash into Pre-K was not included in this table because the publisher's materials did not clearly state the assessment purposes/uses.