



New Mexico Kindergarten Observation Tool

What is the new Kindergarten Observation Tool (KOT)?

As part of its comprehensive plan to ensure that all New Mexico students have the opportunity to succeed in school, the Public Education Department (PED) is developing an observation-based assessment tool that will be used as children enter kindergarten. For the past six years, PreK teachers in New Mexico have been administering a similar assessment tool and using the results for curriculum planning. Because this effort has been so well-received by educators and families, the KOT will incorporate many elements of the New Mexico PreK Observational Assessment.

The administration of the KEA will be funded for all New Mexico kindergarten students by the PED with state-wide implementation planned for Fall 2016. All assessment processes are in keeping with the National Research Council's recommendations on early childhood assessment. Because the KOT will be used for all children entering kindergarten, special steps have been taken to ensure it is appropriate for use with New Mexico's diverse student population and that it contains culturally sensitive content. This observation tool allows for students to respond in their home language.

What will the KOT assess?

The Kindergarten Observation Tool (KOT) will support teachers in observing what entering students know and can do in relation to the kindergarten standards for learning described in the *New Mexico Early Learning Guidelines: Birth through Kindergarten*. The *Guidelines* are aligned with the state's kindergarten Common Core State Standards in English language arts and mathematics. The outcomes and indicators for kindergarteners that are described in that document are linked to learning in six developmental domains:

- (1) Physical Development, Health, and Well-Being
- (2) Literacy
- (3) Numeracy
- (4) Scientific Conceptual Understanding
- (5) Self, Family, and Community
- (6) Approaches to Learning.

Following the Pilot phase, New Mexico kindergarten teachers were asked to provide recommendations about these indicators to ensure that the final set fully captures all critical elements of kindergarten readiness. From the 67 indicators across all domains, 24 key indicators ("*Essential Indicators*") have been identified by New Mexico educators and WestEd researchers as high priorities for instruction and appropriate for an assessment intended to provide a snapshot of what children know and can do at school entry.

How will the KOT be administered?

Following training on administering and scoring the KOT, kindergarten teachers will observe students as they engage in a variety of classroom activities and use a scoring rubric to assign a rating that describes their level of performance on a set of target behaviors. They then enter the information about each child into a secure database. Once all student-level assessment data are entered, teachers will be able to run queries that can help them differentiate instruction and communicate with families.

How will KOT results be used?

This authentic observation tool will provide kindergarten teachers with critical information regarding children's learning that can be used to inform curriculum planning and differentiated instruction. Doing so will help to ensure that each student's unique learning need(s) are met. KOT data also can be shared with families interested in fostering their children's learning.

How can I support the KOT development process?

With support from its partner, WestEd, PED recruited **kindergarten** teachers to participate in a small-scale pilot administration of the draft KOT in October 2014. They administered the assessment from November 2014 to January 2015 and provided feedback on their experiences via an online survey and focus groups. The KOT continues to undergo refinement based on their recommendations for improving the assessment and responses to key questions such as the following:

- Is the KOT developmentally appropriate for entering kindergarten students?
- Is the KOT a fair assessment of what students from diverse backgrounds know and can do?
- Does the KOT measure knowledge and skills that are essential indicators of readiness to learn in a school setting?
- Can this assessment be administered to all students in the first 30 days of school?
- Can the assessment be administered in the course of daily school activities?
- Are the rubrics clear and useful for guiding decision-making about different levels of performance?

In September 2015, the KOT will be formally field tested in a large number of New Mexico kindergarten classrooms. Feedback from teachers and school leaders will be used to further refine the assessment. Additional information about participating in field testing in fall 2015 has been distributed to proposed Field Test sites.