K-3 Assessment Sustainability Plan

Office of Early Learning
NC Department of Public Instruction
I. Program Summary

K-3 Assessment Project Goals
Project 15.1, K-3 Assessment, was funded for the purpose of developing and implementing a K-3 assessment that measures five domains of development (approaches to play and learning, general cognitive development, emotional and social development, health and physical development, and language and literacy development) for use by all kindergarten through 3rd grade teachers to inform teaching and learning. This project also supports the goal that by December 2016, North Carolina will have a valid, reliable kindergarten entry assessment that has been piloted extensively and is ready to be implemented on a statewide basis and entered into the statewide longitudinal data system.

K-3 Assessment Design and Development
Work on this activity began officially with the convening of the K-3 Formative Assessment Think Tank, a group of North Carolina scholars, scientists, and researchers who authored a report, Assessment for Learning and Development in K-3, in which claims, or broad learning goals, were identified and supported with research, a formative assessment process was promoted, and recommendations for design and implementation were noted. This report was delivered to the Assessment Design Team, which was convened in September, 2013. Margaret Heritage, a nationally-recognized expert on formative assessment, guided the design process, and Catherine Scott-Little, a nationally-recognized expert on early learning standards, facilitated meetings of the Assessment Design Team. Claims and learning goals identified by the Think Tank were deconstructed to identify constructs within five developmental domains, learning progressions and assessment means were developed, and all assessment materials underwent extensive external review. Assessment design was finalized in June, 2015.

K-3 Assessment Pilot Testing
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte has coordinated the pilot testing of the K-3 Assessment. Dr. Rich Lambert, the primary investigator for the pilot, designed a pilot study that includes a survey of all participating teachers, as well as classroom observations and interviews with select teachers and administrators from across the state. The first pilot study included the kindergarten portion of the K-3 Assessment and was conducted in 250 kindergarten classrooms from August – November, 2014. Findings from the pilot were used to make revisions to assessment materials and inform ongoing work on the full K-3 assessment.

The second phase of pilot testing, which included the full K-3 assessment was conducted from February – April, 2016. Two hundred fifty Kindergarten through 3rd grade teachers from five districts used the assessment materials for three select constructs with students in their classrooms. Given findings from the first phase of pilot testing, which indicated that teachers were challenged by the need to learn both new content and the formative assessment process, the amount of time and number of constructs included in the second phase of pilot testing were reduced. Findings from this phase of pilot testing are being used to inform planning for scaling up the full K-3 assessment. In addition,
participating districts continue working with the assessment materials and providing feedback for improvement.

**K-3 Assessment Roll Out and Scale Up**

Implementation of the kindergarten entry portion of the K-3 Formative Assessment Process began in all kindergarten classrooms in the fall of 2015. Based on findings from the first phase of the pilot process, and consistent with changes made in legislative requirements, implementation began with three constructs. During the first 60 days of school, Kindergarten teachers were required to collect documentation of learning for all of their students in the areas of Book Orientation, Print Awareness, and Object Counting. Districts were encouraged to promote exploration of the remaining constructs throughout the remainder of the 2015-16 school year. District Implementation Teams responsible for overseeing the implementation of the first phase of KEA were established in each district and convened at a series of regionally-based, face-to-face meetings for training related to the content of the assessment, as well as select elements of implementation science. With guidance from RTT-ELC staff, members of the District Implementation Teams developed plans for professional development, teacher support, and communication. In addition, ongoing support was provided throughout the school year by RTT-ELC staff and contractors through written communication, virtual meetings, webinars, and onsite visits.

In preparation for full implementation of the kindergarten entry portion of the K-3 Formative Assessment Process in the fall of 2016, District Implementation Teams were brought back together at regional meetings in the spring of 2016. Teams revised their implementation plans, reviewed professional development materials, organized training sessions, and planned for ongoing support. During the first 60 days of the 2016-17 school year, Kindergarten teachers collect evidence of learning for all of their students in seven constructs covering all five domains of development. Again, districts are encouraged to have their kindergarten teachers continue implementing the formative assessment process after the first 60 days, collecting and analyzing evidence gathered during instruction to better understand each child’s development and provide the support needed to move learning forward.

Plans for implementing the K-3 Formative Assessment Process in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades are under development. Findings from the 2nd phase of pilot testing, along with lessons learned and success stories from statewide implementation of the kindergarten portion of the assessment are essential to the development of a plan for scaling up that is sustainable over time.
# II. Key Elements for Sustainability

## Political Support
- NC’s General Assembly has incorporated requirements related to the KEA into the Excellent Public Schools Act, making this a statewide mandate for all kindergarten children.
- NC’s General Assembly has revised legislation related to the components of the state’s assessment program that requires the State Board of Education to develop, adopt, and make available to districts assessments appropriate for K-3 children, and requires districts to use those assessments.

## Funding Stability
- With the addition of the KEA mandate to the Excellent Public Schools Act, NC’s General Assembly began allocating resources to support development and implementation of the K-3 assessment.
- NC’s General Assembly approved an expansion to the Excellent Public Schools Act to fully fund the K-3 assessment project and to support permanent positions to support the initiative.

## Partnerships
- The State Implementation and Scaling Up of Evidence-based Practices (SISEP) has provides training for staff and contractors on implementation science and has guided the scaling up process.
- UNC Chapel Hill has developed a coaching model for the project, trained staff on that model, and provides coaching and support for staff as the coach District Implementation Teams.
- Two Schools of Education are exploring ways to use the KEA technology with their students.

## Organizational Capacity
- On November 28, 2016, the Office of State Budget and Management formally approved funding for all positions currently supporting the K-3 Assessment project.
- Funding included in the Excellent Public Schools Act to support this project is also adequate to continue contracts with individuals who are members of Regional Implementation Teams that provide support to District Implementation Teams overseeing implementation of the assessment.

## Program Evaluation
- UNCC and Child Trends are conducting an evaluation designed as a case study looking at what state, regional, district, and school supports are needed to implement the K-3 Formative Assessment Process. Data from interviews, focus groups, document review, and the technology platform assess the impact of implementation efforts to date, which supports have had the greatest impact, and what, if any, variation exists across schools, districts, and regions. Findings will inform planning.
Program Adaptation

- Stakeholder input has been essential for this project. Focus groups with teachers, administrators, and families informed design, development, revisions, training, and implementation.
- Pilot study findings have informed revisions to professional development and implementation.
- An Advisory Council was established, meets quarterly, and informs planning and implementation efforts.

Communication

- Developed key messages, strategies, and resources for a public awareness around the K-3 assessment.
- Implemented a statewide campaign to build public awareness of the K-3 assessment.

Strategic Planning

- With an expansion to the Excellent Public Schools Act and expectation that staff positions would shift from grant funds to state funding, project personnel began developing a long-term strategic plan that strengthens implementation efforts in kindergarten and builds capacity for scaling up the assessment in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades. With the recent approval to fund all project positions with state funds effective January 1, 2017, implementation of the strategic plan formally begins.