



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### State's School Readiness Assessment Needs Additional Support to Help Children Advance

*PCCY Calls on the State to Improve Strategy to Boost Early School Success*

PHILADELPHIA (October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014) – A review of the state's approach to pilot testing and implementing a new school readiness assessment by Public Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY) finds that the state needs to be much clearer about the assessment's purpose and take proactive steps to ensure the results are used to boost early learning success and gain critical "buy-in" from educators in the early childhood program or kindergarten settings.

The Pennsylvania Kindergarten Entry Inventory (KEI) is a 30 question, observational assessment of learning skills of students starting kindergarten across five key areas: Social and Emotional Development, English Language Arts, Mathematics, Approaches to Learning, and Health, Wellness and Physical Development. (The Philadelphia School District is conducting the assessment on every incoming kindergarten student this fall.)

PCCY Executive Director Donna Cooper stated that, "If primary school teachers are prepared to use the results of the Kindergarten Entry Inventory to adjust how they teach, the KEI can be the linchpin in boosting the share of students who succeed in K-3 education and beyond. But its potential will be realized only if teachers and parents view the KEI not as an end to itself, but as a means for enhancing instructional practices -- and if these educators are given the resources, training, and support to do so."

Thirty states across the nation are rolling out similar assessments. Maryland has a twelve-year record of using a kindergarten assessment as the basis of training and support for early learning programs and kindergarten teachers. In the eleven-year period from SY 2001-02 to SY 2012-13, the readiness of incoming kindergarten students increased from 49 percent to 82 percent.

To achieve the kinds of gains seen in Maryland, PCCY's analysis offers 14 recommendations for state agencies and school districts including:

- Be clear about the purpose of the assessment -- While the state has been very clear what the assessment is not intended to do<sup>i</sup>, it has been less explicit about the intended purpose. PCCY urges the state to release a clear policy statement such as: "The KEI is a tool that will be used to inform instruction by teachers in the early learning sector and kindergarten, and for helping parents gauge and support their child's learning."

- Engage parents and early childhood learning professionals -- Although kindergarten readiness is affected by parents and early learning programs, neither partner in a child's development have information about the tool. PCCY calls on the state to develop outreach strategies that help parents and early learning teachers understand the assessment. For early learning programs, the state must help providers see how the assessment can improve instruction with the goal of aligning early learning programs and kindergarten readiness. Parents must be given tools and support so they can have a more informed role as their child's first teacher and with their child's pre-k and kindergarten teachers.
- Prime the teacher pipeline with knowledgeable teachers - As the entity responsible for certifying teachers, the State Department of Education must bring together its higher education partners to ensure elementary education candidates are fully versed on the KEI and are trained on the instructional strategies that can be employed to address school readiness gaps found by the KEI.
- Make sure teachers have time to do this right - Teachers need time to do a good job conducting the assessment which can take approximately 45 minutes per child. PCCY calls on school administrators to ensure that school staff and classes are organized so that a teacher can take the time with each student to complete a quality assessment.
- Give teachers the tools to address the gaps - Based on the experience in Maryland and other states, kindergarten teachers are likely to become more acutely aware of the learning gaps of each child. So that this assessment matters, teachers need training in proven practices that can help students who need extra attention, while also ensuring those who enter school ready, continue to develop their skills as well.

PCCY's report "Pennsylvania's Kindergarten Readiness Assessment: How Can It Boost Skills of Young Students" was made possible through a partnership with the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania and Southern New Jersey and supported through a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The results of the report can be viewed online at <http://www.pccy.org/report/pennsylvanias-kindergarten-readiness-assessment/>.

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<sup>i</sup> PDE training documents: The Kindergarten Entry Inventory is not a screening tool; it is not a diagnostic tool and therefore, cannot be used to place a child into a program, class or special education. It is not designed to replace existing assessments which have been designed for a specific purpose such as a diagnostic or screener, it is in no means designed as a high stakes assessment of comparison among early childhood programs. Read more online at:



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[http://www.ocdelresearch.org/Reports/Kindergarten%20Entry%20Inventory%20\(KEI\)/2012%20KEI%20Pilot%20Report%20Revised%20January%202014.pdf](http://www.ocdelresearch.org/Reports/Kindergarten%20Entry%20Inventory%20(KEI)/2012%20KEI%20Pilot%20Report%20Revised%20January%202014.pdf)