

## CHILD ASSESSMENT TOOLS IN BOSTON EARLY CARE & EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Katey Connaghan, Ph.D. and Corey Zimmerman, Ed.M.

June 2007

The use of child assessment tools is becoming increasingly popular as a means to improve early care and education quality and demonstrate accountability. To address the interest in child assessment tool use specifically in Boston, Boston EQUIP conducted a survey of all local early care and education programs and providers. These survey findings describe **where Boston programs and providers are**

with respect to implementing and using child assessment tools. The results also inform the community about the **support needs** of Boston early care and education programs and providers to successfully choose and implement a child assessment tool and improve program quality using child assessment data.

### Description of Child Assessment Tool Use in Boston Early Care & Education

**Eighty-one percent** (45) of the survey respondents\* reported that their program conducts some form of assessment and/or observation and recording. **Fifty-five percent** (31) of respondents reported using/beginning to use one of the following child assessment tools (those tools meeting the requirements of the recent EEC UPK grant): High/ Scope COR,

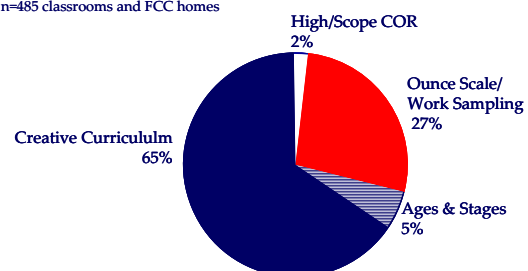
Ounce Scale/Work Sampling, Ages & Stages, and Creative Curriculum. These respondents represent 100 family child care homes and 385 (70 infant-toddler/ 315 preschool) classrooms, and include 78% of the classrooms and family child care homes in the survey.

#### *Which tools do Boston programs and providers use? How long have they been using them?*

As seen in Figure 1, the **majority** of classrooms/ family child care homes reported using **Creative Curriculum**. The greatest user of Work Sampling among our respondents was the Boston Public Schools. When only community-based classrooms and family child care homes using child assessments were analyzed, 2% used the Ounce Scale/Work Sampling and 88% used Creative Curriculum.

The respondents were asked how long their program had been using the child assessment tool. For those programs already using one of the five abovementioned tools, the **average length of use** was **54 months**. The variability

**Figure 1. Child assessment tools used by Boston survey respondents**  
n=485 classrooms and FCC homes



in length of use is demonstrated by the range of 1 month to 10 years. In addition, 161 classrooms/homes were just beginning implementation of a child assessment tool at the time of the survey.

*Can the assessment data be summarized and submitted electronically?*

Of the classrooms/family child care homes using one of the five abovementioned tools, 93% (450 classrooms/family child care homes)

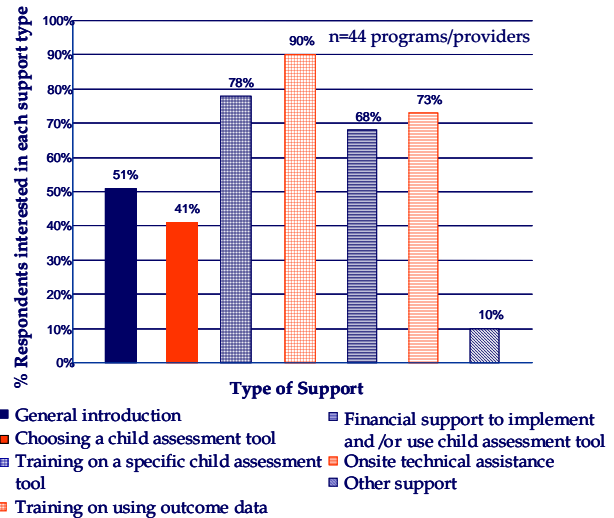
have/are in process of having the capacity to electronically summarize and submit their child assessment data.

**What Supports Do Programs/Providers Want?**

When asked if they were interested in support for using child assessment tools in their programs, 79% responded “yes”. The specific supports preferred are seen in Figure 2, which shows that 90% of the respondents wanting support would like training on using outcome data for continuous program improvement. In addition to these supports, it is imperative to consider other types of supports not captured overtly in the survey. For instance, a few survey responses revealed a lack of understanding of child assessment, as they described specific teaching activities as assessments. Moreover, it is likely that our respondents were biased toward programs using a child assessment tool. Therefore, in developing community supports it is essential that we

address basic educational needs around child assessment and assessment tools.

**Figure 2. Interest in supports to implement and use tool**



**\*Methods: Who Participated in the Survey?**

Surveys were sent to all Boston licensed early care and education agencies and providers (one survey per program). Surveys were completed either online or on paper and returned by postal mail. Independent family child care providers received surveys in both English and Spanish. Fifty-six surveys were returned for an overall response rate of 13%. However, these respondents represent 455 classrooms, 168 family child care homes, and serve 7,685 children (40% of the early care and education capacity in Boston<sup>1</sup>). Table 1 demonstrates the wide variety of programs that responded. Go to [www.bostonequip.org](http://www.bostonequip.org) for further description of the respondents.

**Table 1. Number of surveys sent, received, and response rate**

Type of Program	# Sent	# Rec'd	% Response
Single site center	143	26	18%
Multiple site centers*	15	10	67%
Independent family child care	252	14	6%
Family Child Care System	10	3	30%
Center-based and family child care	5	2	40%
Public school district	1	1	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>13 %</b>

\*There are more than 15 multiple site early care and education centers in Boston. However, in cases where the main contact was unknown, surveys were sent to individual sites. These sites were placed in the “Single site center” category for the purpose of calculating response rate.

<sup>1</sup>Zimmerman, C. & Connaghan, K. (2007). “Where Are the Children!?” Boston EQUIP/Associated Early Care & Education. Boston: MA

**Acknowledgments:** Funding for this project was provided by the Boston Community Partnerships for Children. Thank you to the Boston EQUIP Advisory for their invaluable direction and input. We are also extremely grateful to the survey respondents, who generously gave their time and shared information about their programs.

**About EQUIP:** Boston Early Education Quality Improvement Project (EQUIP) is a project of Associated Early Care & Education. Boston EQUIP was launched in 1994 with a mission “to collaborate with members of the early education community to systematically evaluate, set goals for, and improve upon the quality of Boston’s early childhood programs.”