

Silver State Kindergarten Inventory Development Statewide (SSKIDS)
Pilot Evaluation:
Findings from Nevada's Users of the
Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG) Assessment Tool

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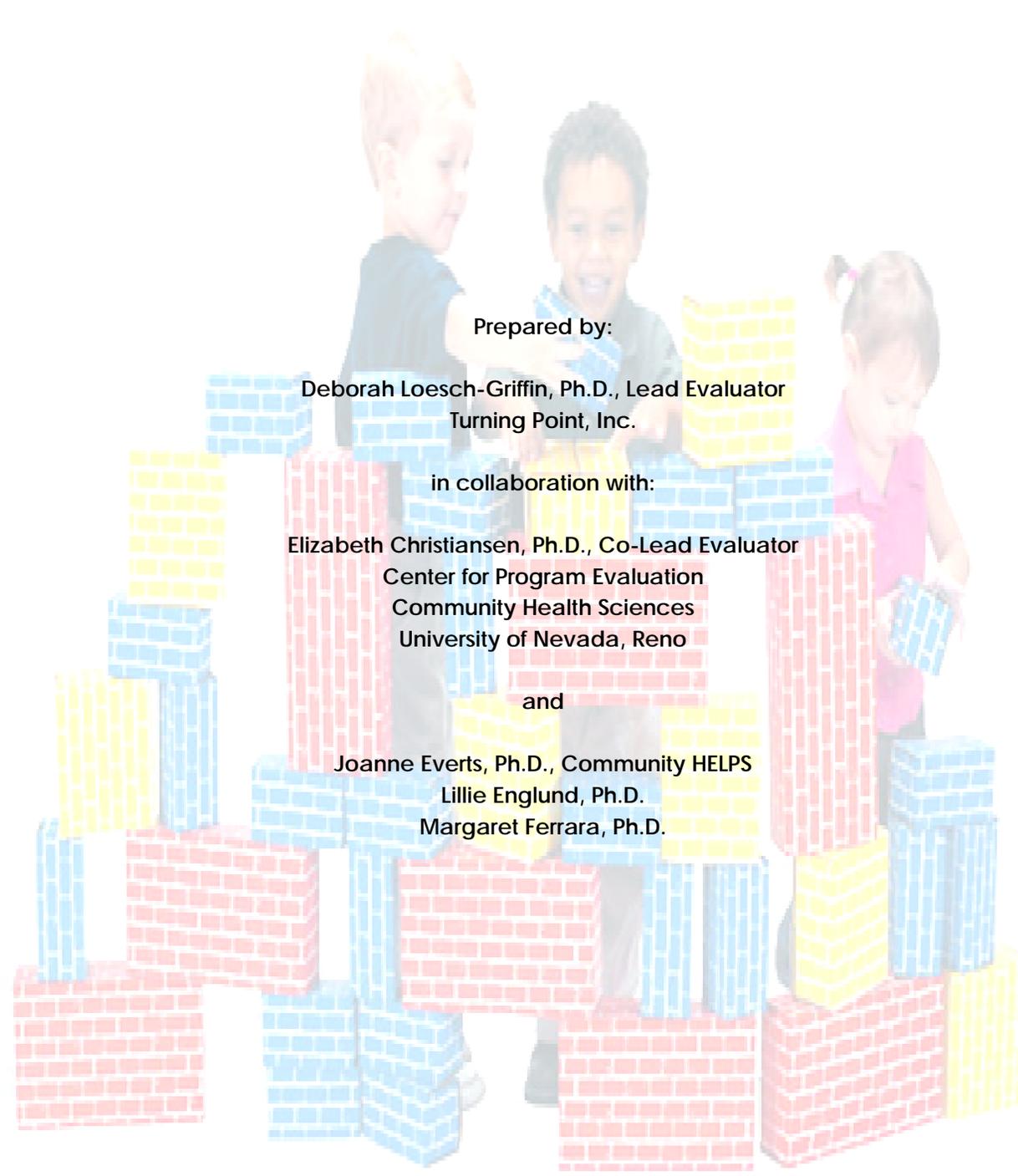
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A background image showing three young children (two boys and one girl) playing with large, colorful blocks (red, blue, yellow) that resemble building blocks. The children are smiling and engaged in their play. The blocks are arranged in various stacks and structures.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The majority of activities associated with the Silver State Kindergarten Inventory Development Statewide (SSKIDS) Pilot Evaluation took place from February 6th through June 6th, 2014. During this span of time, the project transitioned from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) under the Nevada Head Start Collaboration and Early Childhood Systems (HSC&ECS) Office. The evaluation was quite intense as it was reduced from one year to four months of planning and data collection. We'd like to acknowledge the coordinated response, availability, and sustained commitment of Amber Joiner, Deputy Director, DHHS, and Janie Lowe, State Title I Director-Education Programs Supervisor, NDE, as we learned about the system's key stakeholders and the feasibility of our plan, which enabled the evaluation team to move forward in an informed and timely manner.

There were several educators across the state without whom this evaluation would not have been possible and would not have yielded the thorough examination of the use of Teaching Strategies Gold that we were able to achieve in this time period. Most specifically, the assistance and support of the following individuals were invaluable in helping organize, schedule and recruit participants to the 16 focus groups conducted in person or virtually around the state:

Patty Oya, Office of Early Care and Education, Nevada-Association for the Education of Young Children (NV-AEYC)
Cindy Roller, Washoe County School District (WCSD) Early Childhood Education and Kindergarten
Sherry Waugh, University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) Early Head Start
Kacey Edgington, Washoe County School District (WCSD) Early Childhood Education and Kindergarten
Brett D. Campbell, Coordinator of Research, Clark County School District (CCSD)
Cheryl King, Administrative Clerk, Research Department, Clark County School District (CCSD)
Juanita Ortiz, Title I, Pre-K Project Facilitator, CCSD
Tameka Henry, Acelero Head Start

We would also like to acknowledge the 21 school principals and other district level or organizational administrators who, in addition to completing a survey, took time during an intensively busy time of year to participate in interviews. These individuals included 12 from Clark County School District, five from Washoe County School District, and one each from the Washoe Tribal Head Start, UNR's Early Head Start Program, Carson City Early Learning Center (WNCC), and White Pine County School District. The response rates of each survey we administered were remarkable and indicative of the commitment and interest of TSG users across the state who are trying to insure that children are ready for kindergarten and can grow and learn in developmentally appropriate environments.

Finally, we'd like to thank the 25 parents who provided insights into the use and value of TSG as a tool for helping them learn more about how their children learn and grow, and most importantly, what they, as their children's first teachers, can do to support their children's learning at home.

Many thanks to you all for your participation in Phase One of the SSKIDS Pilot Evaluation!

The SSKIDS Evaluation Team:

Elizabeth Christiansen, Lillie Englund, Joanne Everts, Margaret Ferrara and Deborah Loesch-Griffin

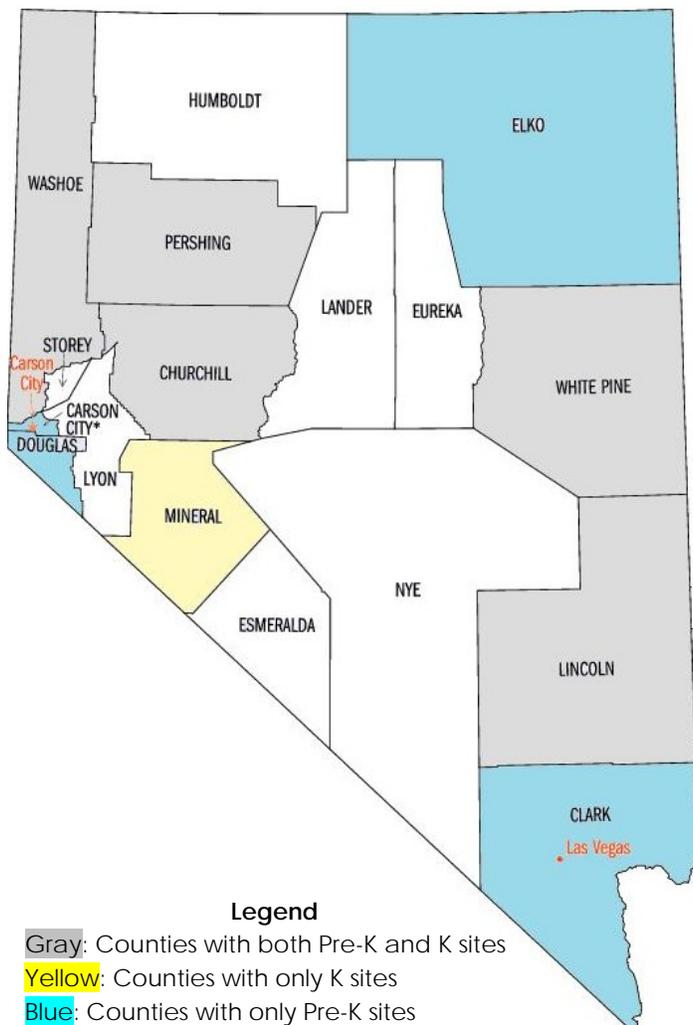
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The state contracted with Turning Point, Inc. to carry out an evaluation of the Silver State Kindergarten Inventory of Development Statewide (SSKIDS) Pilot. This project involved the first phase of evaluating the Silver State KIDS pilot funded by Senate Bill 486, which was passed during the 2013 Legislative Session. Teaching Strategies GOLD (TSG) is the selected tool that has been used throughout this project. Teaching Strategies GOLD is a developmentally appropriate, criterion-referenced system for assessing the knowledge, skills, and behaviors of children from birth through kindergarten. It blends ongoing, authentic observational assessment across 10 areas of development and learning with performance-assessment tasks for selected literacy and numeracy objectives. The purpose of the SSKIDS evaluation, as stated in the original Request for Bids, was for the State of Nevada to understand if the tool does all of the above in Nevada, if Nevada teachers and parents find it easy to use and informative, and whether the state should continue to use the tool into the next biennium. Of primary interest to Nevada, as noted by the Nevada Early Childhood Advisory Council (Nevada ECAC) and the Department of Education was using the TSG assessment tool to determine kindergarten readiness--what percent of children enter kindergarten "ready to learn." The objective of the SSKIDS pilot according to the Nevada ECAC website is to "implement a statewide kindergarten assessment that measures what a child knows and can do upon kindergarten entry, and establish a plan for building a coordinated early childhood data system that links Pre-K data with K-12 data."

A total of ten counties and programs in Carson City participated in the SSKIDS Pilot Project (see Figure A). Eight of the 11 counties involved pre-kindergarten teachers as TSG users and six also involved kindergarten teachers as TSG users. Approximately one-third of the county programs or school districts in the pilot involved both pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers (N=4). The pilot pre-kindergarten programs were largely aligned with the school districts' state-funded pre-kindergarten, early childhood special education and Title I programs. However, among the pre-kindergarten TSG users in the pilot, there were also three counties where Head Start programs were TSG users (Carson City, Douglas, and White Pine counties) and three higher education programs in Carson City, Washoe and Elko Counties.

The evaluation focused on how TSG was implemented in Nevada during the Pilot Phase One, ease of use of the tool, how information from the tool was used by teachers, administrators, districts and parents, if the tool was meeting the needs of stakeholders, and how implementation and the tool might be improved. The state

Figure A. Map of SSKIDS Pilot Sites

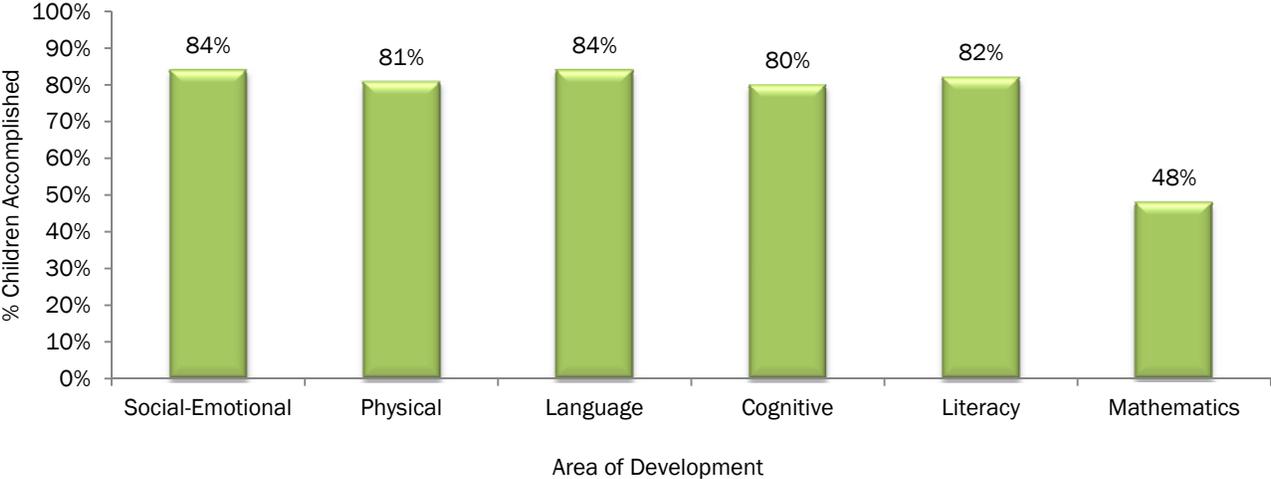


developed a set of 10 evaluation questions which guided Phase One of the evaluation project and are answered in this report. To address the evaluation questions, TPI conducted 16 focus groups, 20 interviews and five on-line surveys with TSG users and stakeholders throughout the state between March and June 2014. A total of 579 TSG teacher users and trainers, 72 principals and 38 administrators responded to the first four of five surveys, for an average response rate of nearly half (49%). The response rate of the final post survey administered to active TSG users topped 50% (53%) and included 292 TSG users. Focus groups were conducted with teachers (11 groups; 122 participants total), administrators (2 groups; 16 participants total), and parents (3 groups; 25 participants total).

Definitions of school readiness abound in the literature. As noted, a primary purpose for selecting the TSG was its ability to assess kindergarten readiness. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) states that “school readiness includes the readiness of the individual child, the school readiness for children, and the ability of the family and community to support optimal early childhood development.” States are currently revising definitions to include new brain research and importance of “non- cognitive skills” or executive function on academic success. In Nevada, the definition of school readiness mirrors the AAP’s definition: READY FAMILIES + READY EDUCATORS + READY SCHOOLS + READY COMMUNITIES + READY SYSTEMS = CHILDREN ARE READY FOR SCHOOL (Nevada ECAC). The Teaching Strategies Gold Assessment tool measures kindergarten readiness focusing on what the child is able to do upon entry in six distinct domains of development: 1) social-emotional; 2) physical; 3) language; 4) cognitive; 5) literacy and 6) math.

Figure B presents the results for children entering kindergarten in the pilot schools in fall 2013, some of whom had a public, quality Pre-K experience, some of whom might have had another Pre-K experience, and some who had no Pre-K experience prior to entering kindergarten. Information on enrollment in Pre-K was not available for this year’s pilot kindergarten cohort. Figure B shows the readiness levels accomplished by kindergarten children (without IEPs) in the study based on each of six

Figure B. SSKIDS Pilot Kindergarten Readiness at Start of Kindergarten



developmental areas. At the kindergarten fall checkpoint, social-emotional, language and literacy were the areas with the highest percentages of ready children. The range of readiness for TSG Kindergarten sites in the pilot study was 80-84% for five of the six domains and 48% for math.

While the TSG is an important tool for assessing kindergarten readiness, of equal or greater importance is how these data are used by teachers to inform instruction and how they inform the myriad of activities that support a child’s learning, growth and development. Table C presents the teachers’ responses regarding how they use the TSG results. Over half (58%) of the teachers use the results to share with

parents and increase their “readiness” as the child’s first teacher. Over half (55%) use the results to help write IEPs for children with special education needs; and over half (54%) use the results to target more individualized areas for the child. Nearly half (49%) use the results to develop and plan curriculum for their group of children.

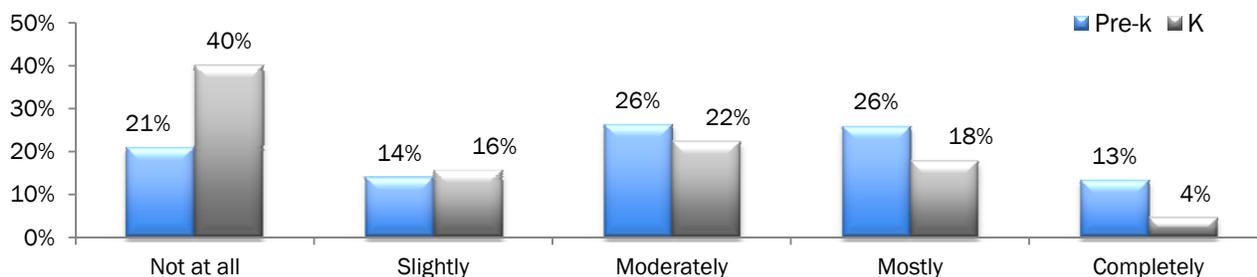
Table C. Ways Teachers Use TSG results (n=277)	
To share with parents and to help at home (n=150)	58%
To help write IEP’s	55%
To target more individualized areas	54%
To develop/plan curriculum, lesson plans, activities	49%
To set goals	41%
To group children according to needs	32%
To bring in new materials to support new activities	29%
I have not used results for instruction.	14%

Figure D. Top TSG User Needs for Additional Training



Ideally, all teachers using TSG would report using the results to improve instruction and to address the individual learning needs of each child. Training is noted as an important reason why more teachers are not using results to inform instruction or to communicate the results to others as a way to support READY FAMILIES, READY SCHOOLS and READY SYSTEMS. These aspects of training were rated only second and third to time management skills as areas for future training (see Figure D).

Figure E. Willingness to Continue Using TSG



TSG is embraced by Pre-K/early childhood special educators (65% were *slightly* to *completely* willing to continue using TSG) as a valuable assessment tool that addresses the whole child in a developmentally appropriate manner (see Figure E). As such, it is useful for guiding instruction. An important consideration is whether TSG is suitable for use in kindergarten. One of the state’s largest school districts has already established policy and practices for use of an alternative assessment tool for kindergarten.

In the school sites (three to date) where the tool is used consistently by both Pre-K and kindergarten teachers, there is emerging evidence that it can be a useful tool for communicating child growth and development and readiness for kindergarten and in planning instruction accordingly. Further conversations and work on behalf of teachers, administrators, TSG developers and NDE personnel is needed to: 1) review and evaluate the appropriateness of the alignment of TSG with Nevada Academic Content Standards for kindergarten and 2) identify and unpack the sets of skills from domains to more accurately reflect actual growth and learning along the continuum of development of children in kindergarten—much as Washington has done with its Teaching Strategies Gold assessment project by reducing the number of domains measured. It is recommended that an in-depth evaluation of these sites be conducted to learn how the tool facilitates the transition to kindergarten. In addition, as more consistent training is provided to pilot sites along with Inter-Rater Reliability certification, the evaluation should focus on how consistently and comparably the TSG is used by Pre-K/ECSE and K teachers as a full assessment and instructional guidance tool.

Three major findings from SSKIDS Evaluation Phase 1:

- 1) TSG is a useful tool for determining kindergarten readiness, and is particularly useful when those results are shared among peers and colleagues and between Pre-K/Early Childhood Special Educators and Kindergarten (K) teachers to inform instruction.
- 2) TSG is highly recommended by educators—teachers and administrators—and parents for continuing use, with specific attention to the adjustments and adaptations found in this report as reflected in the third finding.
- 3) For successful implementation and sustained use of the TSG tool, users specifically need adequate time, professional development and training, technical support and leadership from both site level and program administration as well as the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) and funding to sustain TSG use beyond the pilot.