Pre-K Content Blueprint Series

Language

Developing Assessments for All Pre-K Children

September 2025

MEASURES FOR EARLY SUCCESS

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Introduction

The Pre-K Content Blueprints are intended to help assessment developers learn about and design assessment tools that provide more accurate information about young children's early learning and development. Assessment developers can use these blueprints as they embark on content research, concept definition, and product development to ensure that their decision-making is grounded in the needs that are outlined in the *User-Informed Principles*.[1]

The Pre-K Content Blueprints were originally developed in 2022 to guide the work of the project teams that were selected to design novel assessments through the Measures for Early Success Initiative.[2]

How were the Pre-K Content Blueprints developed?

Each Pre-K Content Blueprint was developed through a systematic review of Head Start and select states' early learning standards (using what was publicly available as of early 2022), as well as theoretical and empirical literature on children's development. To benefit all children served by public pre-K programs, the Pre-K Content Blueprints consider a variety of perspectives, experiences, and needs to highlight domain-specific opportunities for assessment design to ensure that all children are given a fair chance to show what they know and can do.[3]

About the Measures for Early Success Initiative

Central to the Measures for Early Success Initiative is the belief that early learning assessments are a powerful tool for understanding young children's strengths and competencies and where they are at in their learning and development.

Data from assessments can provide users with information to:

- help tailor instruction in the classroom,
- support children's learning in key areas that are unique to them,
- provide or recommend additional support for specific children, and
- inform pre-K system-level policies and supports for pre-K programs.

A key objective of the Measures for Early Success Initiative is to create innovative assessments that provide accurate insights into what all children know and can do.

How can this resource be used?

The Measures for Early Success Initiative generated a set of Pre-K Content Blueprints to guide assessment development in the following domains:*

- Language
- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Executive Function

Each Pre-K Content Blueprint has three primary goals:

Describe skills in each domain and how they develop in children from ages 3 to 5.

Place assessment users' perspectives and needs at the center of the design of innovative assessments in each domain.

Provide an overview of existing assessments in each domain and highlight some ways that they advance toward the goals outlined in the *User-Informed Principles*.

*These domains were emphasized in the first phase of the Measures for Early Success Initiative (through 2024) because current direct assessment tools for these domains are most developed.

Pre-K Content Blueprints can be used in conjunction with the following resources that were developed for the Measures for Early Success Initiative:

- The *User-Informed Principles* resource highlights key goals for innovative child assessment solutions with corresponding criteria and target thresholds. It can help assessment developers address challenges in the current assessment landscape by helping them to identify areas where existing solutions do not address users' priorities; possible measurement items or solutions to address these gaps; and important areas or features to design to ensure that assessments are relevant for all pre-K children.

- *Centering User Perspectives in Assessment Design* describes how assessment tools can be designed in more accurate, usable, and useful ways by integrating users' perspectives, strengths, and needs early in the assessment design process.[4] This resource can be used to make progress toward the goals outlined in the *User-Informed Principles*.

- *Pre-K Content Blueprint Series - Technical Manual* describes the process for using federal and state early learning standards to summarize children's skills and developmental trajectories that are presented in the *Pre-K Content Blueprint Series*.[5]

Federal and State Early Learning Standards

Federal and state early learning standards describe the concepts and skills children develop and learn along the developmental continuum from birth until kindergarten entry. The purpose of these early learning standards is to inform the work of those aiming to foster the healthy development and well-being of young children. Early learning standards often represent minimum thresholds for children's development at various ages. Curricular supports, resources, and activities are selected to align with early learning standards. Pre-K programs also use early learning standards to select assessment tools that track children's developmental progression across early learning domains.

For the purposes of capturing children's skills and developmental progression from ages 3 to 5, this Content Blueprint presents definitions and summarizes developmental progressions—generated from the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF) and a subset of the early learning standards from the Measures Initiative's advisory states—using publicly available information as of early 2022.

Federal early learning standards reflected in the Pre-K Content Blueprints

The Pre-K Content Blueprints feature early learning standards from the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF),[7] which guides federally funded Head Start programs across the country.

States' early learning standards reflected in the Pre-K Content Blueprints

The Measures for Early Success Initiative engaged with pre-K leaders from over 20 states to gather their thoughts and feedback on child assessments.

To create the Pre-K Content Blueprints, the early learning standards from a subset of those states were selected to reflect the variation in the population and geography of the United States as well as different types of publicly funded pre-K systems. The state early learning standards in the Pre-K Content Blueprints came from Alabama, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, and Tennessee.* Notably, these states' early learning standards do not represent the early learning standards of all states.

*Oregon's early learning standards largely align with the Head Start ELOF standards. Alabama and Ohio have revised their early learning standards since the Pre-K Content Blueprints were initially researched and developed.

How do skills in the domain develop between the ages of 3 and 5?

This section presents skill definitions and developmental progressions that come from existing research literature and early learning standards in this domain.

How to use: This section can be used as an example of landscaping federal and state early learning standards to inform item development for assessments that measure children's abilities in this domain.

Early Language Subdomains

Each domain is comprised of subdomains, which are groups of related skills. While federal and state early learning standards may label subdomains in different ways (see the right-hand column for examples), the skills in the standards generally align with the following four areas of early language:

● **Receptive Language**

Also includes: Attending and Understanding, Follows Directions, Comprehension

◆ **Expressive Language**

Also includes: Communicating and Speaking, Conversational Ability

■ **Social Language**

Also includes: Social Rules of Language, Social Communication

▲ **Vocabulary**

The skill indicators in this Content Blueprint were drawn from early learning standards that largely focus on the language development of English-speaking, monolingual children. Assessment developers are encouraged to use these skill indicators alongside the *WIDA Early Years Can Do Descriptors* to design assessment opportunities for emergent bilingual children to capture their strengths in language development.[6]

Federal and select state subdomains

Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF)[7] **& Oregon**[8]

- ● Attending and Understanding
- ◆ Communicating and Speaking*
- ▲ Vocabulary

Alabama[9]

- ● Receptive Language
- ◆ Expressive Language**
- ■ Social Rules of Language

New Mexico[10]

- ■ Follows Directions
- ● Conversational Ability
- ◆ Vocabulary

Ohio[11]

- ▲ Receptive Language and Comprehension
- ● Expressive Language**
- ■ Social Communication

Tennessee[***12]

- ● Receptive Language
- ◆ Expressive Language
- ■ Social Language
- ▲ Vocabulary

*ELOF and Oregon include "social and conversational rules" as a Communicating and Speaking Goal (P-LC 4) rather than as a distinct subdomain.
**Alabama and Ohio include vocabulary skills in the Expressive Language Subdomain.
***Tennessee standards do not group language standards by subdomain. Rather, they highlight a breadth of broader skills that align preschool and kindergarten standards. Tennessee standards have been relabeled using the most aligned subdomains presented in this Content Blueprint.

Receptive Language

SKILLS	EMERGING INDICATORS *(36 to 48 months)*	COMPLEX INDICATORS *(by 60 months)*
Attends to communication	Shows acknowledgment of comments or questions, either spoken or nonverbally, while engaging in conversation.[a,e]	Using verbal and nonverbal signals, appropriately acknowledges the comments or questions of others during conversations and group discussions.[a,b,e] Asks and answers questions about what a speaker says to seek help, get information, or clarify something that is not understood.[f]
Understands and responds to communication	Understands and responds (verbally and nonverbally) to increasingly longer sentences and simple questions (yes or no).[a,b,e]	Uses verbal and nonverbal signals appropriately to acknowledge and respond to the comments or questions of others.[a,b,e] Shows understanding of a variety of sentence types, question types, and verb tenses.[a,e] Children who are learning two or more languages may demonstrate more complex communication and language in their home language than in English.[a,e]
Follows directions	Understands and successfully completes one-step directions.[b,c] Recognizes action words.[b]	Understands and follows (in order) multi-step directions.[a,b,c,d,e]
Engages with stories and/or topics	Understands and responds to simple stories.[a,e]	Shows understanding, such as nodding or gestures, in response to the content of books that are read aloud, stories that are told, or lengthy explanations on a given topic.[a,b,e]

a = ELOF (2015); b = Alabama (2020); c = New Mexico (2020); d = Ohio (2012); e = Oregon (2015); f = Tennessee (2018)

Expressive Language

SKILLS	EMERGING INDICATORS *(36 to 48 months)*	COMPLEX INDICATORS *(by 60 months)*
Communicates through speaking	Uses two- to five-word phrases and sentences to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas through speaking. [ELOF: three to five words,[a] NM: three to four words,[c] AL: two to three words[b]]. May also use gestures and facial expressions to express meaning.[b,c]	Combines five to eight[b] words into two to three connected,[c] complex sentences to: • give directions[a,e] • tell a story orally[a,b,e] • communicate ideas, thoughts, and feelings[c,d,f] • problem solve, reason, predict and seek new information[d] • engage in pretend play[b] • describe familiar people, places, and experiences[d,f] Children who are learning two or more languages may switch between their languages.[a,e]
Asks questions and makes requests	Uses simple questions and familiar phrases with limited word choice[b] (for example, “Help me,” “Me run,” “more”) to ask for things or to gain information.[b,c]	Understands and uses question words (for example, who, what, where, when, why, and how) to understand and solve problems.[a,b,d,e,f] Uses language, spoken or signed, to clarify a word or statement when misunderstood.[a,d,e]

(continued on next page)

a = ELOF (2015); b = Alabama (2020); c = New Mexico (2020); d = Ohio (2012); e = Oregon (2015); f = Tennessee (2018)

Expressive Language *(cont'd)*

SKILLS	EMERGING INDICATORS *(36 to 48 months)*	COMPLEX INDICATORS *(by 60 months)*
Answers questions	Answers simple questions and offers multiple (two or three) pieces of information on a single topic.[a,b,e]	Answers a variety of question types[a,e] with detailed and more abstract words and ideas.[b,f]
Speaks clearly	Communicates clearly enough to be understood by familiar adults but may make some pronunciation errors.[a,b,e]	Speaks audibly and communicates clearly enough to be understood by adults across a range of situations. Pronunciation errors are isolated and infrequent.[a,b,d,e]
Begins to understand and use correct grammar	May make some grammatical errors.[a,e]	Grammatical errors are isolated and infrequent.[a,b,d,e] Shows proficiency with prepositions, regular and irregular past tense, possessives, and noun-verb agreement.[a,d,e]

a = ELOF (2015); b = Alabama (2020); c = New Mexico (2020); d = Ohio (2012); e = Oregon (2015); f = Tennessee (2018)

Social Language

SKILLS	EMERGING INDICATORS *(36 to 48 months)*	COMPLEX INDICATORS *(by 60 months)*
Engages in conversation	Uses pauses and prompts to maintain a conversation. Listens and pays attention to the speaker by using eye contact and by asking questions.[b]	Demonstrates appropriate conversational interactions including listening, speaking, answering questions, asking related questions, responding on topic, and observing wait times within individual conversations and larger groups.[a,b,d,e,f] Uses language to communicate with others during familiar and unfamiliar social situations.[b]
Takes turns in conversation	Takes turns in conversation[c] by initiating and sustaining a simple conversation for at least two or three turns with varied peers and adults.[a,b,e]	Initiates[b] and participates with varied peers and adults in collaborative conversations in small or large groups about appropriate topics during multiple (at least five)[b] turn-taking exchanges.[a,b,d,e,f]
Adjusts volume and tone	With support, will sometimes adjust tone and volume for different situations.[a,e]	With increasing independence, matches the tone and volume of expression to the content and social situation, such as by whispering when another child is sleeping nearby.[a,e]

Note: *Social conventions of language are culturally determined and varied.*

a = ELOF (2015); b = Alabama (2020); c = New Mexico (2020); d = Ohio (2012); e = Oregon (2015); f = Tennessee (2018)

Vocabulary

SKILLS	EMERGING INDICATORS *(36 to 48 months)*	COMPLEX INDICATORS *(by 60 months)*
Acquires and uses new vocabulary	Shows a rapid increase[a,e] in the acquisition of new vocabulary words that describe actions, emotions, things, or ideas that are meaningful within the everyday environment.[a,c,e] Uses new vocabulary words to describe relations among things or ideas. Repeats new words offered by adults.[a,e]	Demonstrates the use of multiple (two or three) new words or signs a day during play and other activities.[a,d,e,f] Shows recognition of or familiarity with key domain-specific words heard during reading or discussions. With multiple exposures, uses new domain-specific vocabulary during activities.[a,e] Determines the meanings of unknown words or concepts using the context of conversations, pictures that accompany text, or concrete objects.[a,d,e,f]
Categorizes words	Uses known words in the correct context and, with support, shows an emerging understanding of how words are related to broader categories, such as sorting things by color.[a,e]	With modeling and support, explores relationships between word meanings.[a,c,d,f] Identifies shared characteristics and relationships among people, places, words, things, or actions.[a,c,d,f] Identifies common synonyms and antonyms.[a,d,e] Distinguishes shades of meaning among familiar verbs describing the same general action (such as jog or sprint).[f]
Possesses vocabulary base	Has an expressive vocabulary of at least 200 words.[b]	Has an expressive vocabulary of at least 1,000 words.[b]

a = ELOF (2015); b = Alabama (2020); c = New Mexico (2020); d = Ohio (2012); e = Oregon (2015); f = Tennessee (2018)

What are domain-specific opportunities for innovation?

This section provides examples that are specific to the development of assessment tools in this domain.

How to use: This section should be used to reflect on the current state of assessment in this domain and to identify potential opportunities for innovation in this domain. However, these examples are not exhaustive.

Centering User Perspectives in Assessment Design

Given the broad range of families and children served by publicly funded pre-K programs, the *Centering User Perspectives in Assessment Design* resource was created to ensure that the decision-making used to develop and design early learning assessments focuses on the perspectives, challenges, and context of those who will ultimately use the tools in pre-K programs and systems.[4]

Assessment developers are encouraged to use that resource and this Content Blueprint to:

Expand the types of skills that are measured to capture the strengths and capabilities of all children.

Explore how children might demonstrate these skills in different ways.

Innovate approaches to address key user considerations in new assessments in this domain.

Consider the progress of existing tools in this domain—as well as any new tools—in advancing toward the goals outlined in the *User-Informed Principles*.

Review the goals in the *User-Informed Principles*

GOAL 1
Content

GOAL 2
Psychometrics

GOAL 3
Experience

GOAL 4
Usefulness

GOAL 5
Scalability

Examples of Opportunities

The examples on this page can be used to reflect on the current state of language assessments and to identify potential opportunities for innovation in the language domain.

Many existing language assessments focus on a narrow set of skills such as children's knowledge of specific vocabulary words. Which words children know are likely dependent on whether they have exposure to these particular words at home or in formal learning settings. Capturing additional subdomains may more appropriately reflect the strengths of children who have not typically been part of early assessment design. For example, Black children often demonstrate strengths in oral discourse, such as the use of decontextualized language.[13]

How can assessments capture subdomains of children's language skills more comprehensively?

Children who speak multiple languages or multiple forms of English are often able to flexibly switch between their languages. Children's true language abilities are reflected by their distributed knowledge across each language's vocabulary and structure. However, current assessments rarely allow children to flexibly respond across the languages they speak.

How can assessments capture children's full linguistic repertoire and account for their translanguaging abilities (the practice of fluidly using their languages for communication)?

Assessments that test children in two languages often consider each language separately to capture distributed knowledge across languages, resulting in assessments that are considerably longer for emergent bilingual children or that need to be administered across two days.[14] Scores on lengthy assessments may be confounded by young children's attention or self-regulation skills, rather than reliably measuring their language skills.[15]

How can assessments reliably capture children's language skills without placing undue burden on them?

Examples of Opportunities *(cont'd)*

The examples on this page can be used to reflect on the current state of language assessments and to identify potential opportunities for innovation in the language domain.

What additional opportunities for innovation do you see in the assessment of language?

Children who are bilingual or bidialectal have great variability in the vocabulary used by their communities. Different regions use different words to describe the same object or concept, making it important that assessments not elevate one community over another when designing item prompts. For example, the word "car" in English can be translated as *coche* or *carro* in Spanish, which can have different meanings depending on the background of the child being assessed.[16] Conversely, the same word may be used to describe different concepts depending on the region. For example, the word "torta" means cake in many Spanish-speaking regions but refers to a sandwich in Mexico.

How can language assessments be designed to include a variety of terms that will permit children to respond using the words that are most meaningful to them and their community?

The grammar and pronunciation rules of an emergent bilingual child's home language may influence the child's understanding and development of English. There may be positive language transfer when there are similarities between the two languages or negative language transfer when there are differences, resulting in expected errors.[17] For example, a Spanish-speaking child will likely find it easy to pronounce "baby" and "bebe," as the /b/ sound exists in both languages. This child may, however, pronounce "spoon" as "espoon," because the Spanish language does not have an initial /s/ sound.

How can assessments be designed to distinguish between expected errors while learning two languages due to language transfer versus unexpected or developmentally concerning errors?

Some cultures emphasize respect for and deference to adults.[18] For this and other reasons, young children may not converse comfortably with adults they do not know. As a result, children who do not confidently engage with adults on assessments may falsely appear to have low language abilities.

How can language assessments create experiences and environments that allow children to feel comfortable expressing themselves and displaying their true language abilities?

How are skills in the domain currently measured?

This section presents a sample of direct assessments that measure skills in this domain. An overview of each assessment is provided and some ways that each tool is aligned with the *User-Informed Principles* are highlighted.

How to use: This section can be used to understand the current state of assessments in this domain and to identify potential opportunities for innovation and improvements. These tools are elevated as examples—not exemplars—of direct assessments of young children's skills in this domain.

Assessment developers should not try to replicate these tools or copy example prompts or items as most of these tools are primarily used in research environments. Assessment developers should consider the needs of educators, children, and families, and other assessment users when designing their tools.

Current Measure of Early Language Skills

Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT-5)[19]

Subdomain(s) Measured

Receptive language; Vocabulary

Age Range

Ages 2 years 6 months through 90+ years

Language Version(s)

English; Spanish: TVIP (Test de Vocabulario en Imagenes Peabody)
Note: The Spanish version has been discontinued, though recording forms and manuals are available to existing users while supplies last.[20]

Administration

- The PPVT-5 is administered one-on-one with each child and is generally used for developmental, diagnostic, and research purposes. It can assess change across a broad range of ages.
- Assessment publishers note that the test takes approximately 10 to 15 minutes per child to complete;[23] in practice, it can take up to 35 minutes with a varying number of items, based on the child's performance.
- Items involve an adult saying a word (e.g., flamingo) and then the child pointing to the picture among four options that best matches the word.
- The paper and pencil version of the test uses a flipchart with four pictures on each page. There is also a web-based version that can be administered on an iPad. There are two forms of the test with 251 items across 20 categories.[21] A child's age determines the item the child starts with.

Sample Items[21]

The assessor asks the child to indicate the picture with a given word using prompts like the following:

- "Put your finger on [word]." "Show me [word]." "Point to [word]." Example words include laughing, group, boy, and refueling.

Scoring

- Raw scores are computed using the child's basal and ceiling levels. A basal level reflects the point on the test where the examiner is confident the child would answer all previous questions correctly.[22] A ceiling represents the point on the test after which the items are too difficult for the child.[22] On the PPVT-5, the basal level is indicated by three consecutive correct responses, whereas the ceiling is indicated by six consecutive incorrect responses.[23] A child's raw score is created by subtracting the number of errors from the ceiling item, such that the raw score reflects the total number of correct items (including those below the basal item).[24]
- In addition to the raw score, the PPVT-5 generates age-based standard scores, percentiles, normal curve equivalents, stanines, age equivalents, and growth scale values.[25]

Alignment with the User-Informed Principles

GOAL 2: Psychometric Strengths

Reliability: The PPVT has gone through extensive psychometric testing over decades to examine the reliability of its scores across demographics, ages, and grade levels.[26] Moreover, items are designed to reduce the influence of rater bias on scores.

Comparisons: The PPVT has a co-normed expressive language test called the Expressive Vocabulary Test that allows users to compare children's receptive and expressive language skills. PPVT scores also demonstrate expected associations with those from related language assessments.

Current Measure of Early Language Skills

Pre-Language Assessment Scales (preLAS 2000)[27]

Subdomain(s) Measured

Receptive language; Expressive language; (plus an optional early literacy assessment)

Age Range

Ages 3 through 6

Language Version(s)

English; Spanish: preLAS Español.[28]

Administration

- The preLAS 2000 is administered one-on-one with each child.
- The test takes approximately 15 minutes per child to complete.
- The test is comprised of five subtests: (1) Simon Says (receptive language, listening comprehension, following directions, and total physical response); (2) Art Show (expressive language); (3) Say What You Hear (receptive and expressive language); (4) The Human Body (expressive language); and (5) Let's Tell Stories (expressive language).
- The test includes a total of 42 items (10 questions each for subtests 1 through 4 and two prompts in subtest 5).[29]
- The optional pre-literacy assessment uses a board game to assess children's literacy skills in action as they move around the board.
- The Spanish version assesses abilities within that language, as it is a measure of proficiency in that language (rather than a cross-linguistic or bilingual assessment).

Sample Items[30]

Children are asked distinct items on each subtest:

- **Simon Says:** Children are asked to do what Simon tells them ("Simon says touch your head.").
- **Art Show:** Children look at an image in the Cue Picture Book and are asked to identify the object and questions related to the image ("What is this? What is it used for?").
- **Say What You Hear:** Children are asked to repeat something the assessor says ("Don't forget your coat." "The principal looked at me.").
- **The Human Body:** Children are asked to look at an image in the Cue Picture Book and identify 10 body parts.
- **Let's Tell Stories:** Children listen to a story with corresponding pictures in the Cue Picture Book. Children are asked to tell the examiner what happened in the story.

Scoring

- A raw score of Oral Language is generated by summing a weighted total of correct items across the five subtests (e.g., each correct Simon Says item is multiplied by two, whereas each correct item on The Human Body is counted once).[30]
- Raw scores are converted to proficiency levels ranging from 1 (non-English speaker) to 5 (fluent English speaker) following age guidelines (e.g., raw scores of 0 to 56 translate into level 1 for 3- and 4-year-old children and 0 to 61 into level 1 for 5- and 6-year-old children).[27]

Alignment with the User-Informed Principles

GOAL 3: Experience Strengths

Child experience: The assessment includes game-like prompts, such as Simon Says to assess children's receptive language skills.

GOAL 4: Usefulness Strengths

Actionable insights: The preLAS provides insight into children's relative proficiency in English and Spanish that can help monitor children's progress as they acquire language skills. The preLAS can also help identify needed supports for new students.

Current Measure of Early Language Skills

Preschool Language Scales (PLS-5)[31]

Subdomain(s) Measured

Receptive language; Expressive language; (plus an optional early literacy assessment)

Age Range

Birth through 7 years and 11 months

Language Version(s)

English; Spanish: PLS-5 Spanish;[32]
French: Échelle de langage préscolaire[33]

Administration

- The PLS-5 is administered one-on-one with each child and is generally used for developmental, diagnostic, and research purposes, and can assess change across a range of ages.
- The English-only version takes approximately 45 to 60 minutes per child to complete.
- In the bilingual version, Spanish-only administration takes 20 to 45 minutes and dual-language administration takes 20 to 65 minutes. This version was standardized with bilingual children. Each item can be administered across the two languages and the assessment generates a single score of language development.[32]
- Assessors ask children to complete a series of tasks using manipulatives and score the children's responses as correct or incorrect. Tasks involve children pointing or verbally responding to pictures and objects.
- The assessment starting point is established using each child's age.
- The PLS-5 is designed to be play-based, using manipulatives like blocks, rattles, plastic animal figurines, and play dishes. To engage children, the picture manual has been created with large, colorful illustrations.

Sample Items[25]

Example receptive language script for a child aged 4 years and 5 months.

- **Focus:** using present progressive (verb + *-ing*)
- **Practice:**
  - [Assessor points to a picture of a girl in a sandbox.] "This girl is playing."
  - [Assessor points to an image of a girl sitting in a chair, eating a sandwich.] "Tell me about this girl. She is____." (Child answers with words like eating, sitting, or smiling. Any verb ending in *-ing* that is related to the image is accepted.)
  - [Assessor points to an image of a girl sleeping in bed.] "Now tell me about this girl. She is_____." (Child answers with words like sleeping, taking a nap, or closing her eyes. Any verb ending in *-ing* that is related to the image is accepted.)
- *Note: if the child speaks a dialect that marks present progressive differently from Mainstream American English, refer to appendix E for correct dialectal variations. [For example, in African American English, auxiliary verbs (e.g., is or can) may be omitted. Child may say "She eating the sandwich."]*

Scoring

- Assessors score each part of an item as correct or incorrect. Once the item series, or prompt, is complete, the assessor compares the child's response pattern with its criteria. Children receive a score of 1 if they meet the prompt criteria or a score of 0 if they do not.
- Assessors begin with a suggested starting point corresponding to the child's chronological age. The basal is established once a child receives three consecutive scores of 1. The ceiling is established with six consecutive scores of 0. The last item administered for each subtest is the ceiling (the most difficult item a child was asked and correctly answered).
- To calculate the raw score, subtract the number of 0 scores from the last item number administered (ceiling) for each subtest (Auditory Comprehension and Expressive Comprehension).
- Scores from all assessed prompts are aggregated to generate total language, auditory comprehension, and expressive communication scores. Each of these scores can be presented as standard scores, growth scores, percentile ranks, and age equivalents.
- Scoring rules were adapted to account for the following dialects: African American English, Spanish-influenced English, Chinese-influenced English, Appalachian English, and Southern English.[34]

Alignment with the User-Informed Principles

GOAL 1:
Content Strengths

Domain coverage: Assessment tasks become progressively more complex in line with the developmental trajectories of how children's language skills unfold overtime.

Developmental and linguistic relevance: Items were reviewed by experts for appropriateness and bias in updating to the PLS-5 from the PLS-4 (for example, changing items using physical money that today's children are less familiar with). Scoring guidelines integrate guidance for children who speak dialects other than Mainstream American English. The Spanish version was developed to assess cross-linguistic proficiency for bilingual children.

GOAL 3:
Experience Strengths

Child experience: The assessment employs everyday objects (cups, comb) and toys (squeaky duck) to engage children in assessment activities.

Current Measure of Early Language Skills

Quick Interactive Language Screener (QUILS)[35]

Subdomain(s) Measured

Receptive language; Vocabulary

Age Range

QUILS: 3 years through 6 years 11 months;
QUILS English-Spanish (QUILS:ES): 3 years through 5 years 11 months[36]

Language Version(s)

English; Spanish: QUILS:ES (English-Spanish)[36]

Administration

- QUILS is a web-based assessment that children complete on a tablet or computer. Internet access is required. Little adult supervision is needed, as colorful characters guide children through the assessment.
- QUILS takes 15 to 20 minutes to complete and has 48 multiple choice items. Developers recommend screening children once per year.
- Children who speak English and Spanish complete a bilingual version (QUILS:ES) comprised of two separate tests (one in English and one in Spanish), each with 45 items for a total of 90 items across the two languages.[37]

Sample Items[38]

Example vocabulary item:

- [Children are presented three images and are asked to select the image where the doll is above the present.] "Show me the doll that is above the present."

Example syntax item:

- [Children are shown a picture of a boy with a hose in one hand and a sponge in the other hand. The sponge is on the head of a dog in a washtub. The children must then choose between three images: the boy's hand holding the sponge on the dogs head, the boy's hand holding the hose, or the boy.] "How is the boy filling the washtub?" (The correct response is the image of the boy's hand holding the hose.)

Example process item:

- Part 1) [Children have to choose between four pictures. Three images are of animals wearing hats, with two being known nouns (cat and dog) and one being an unfamiliar/invented animal.] "A gelp is wearing a hat. Show me the gelp with the hat." (The correct response is the invented animal.)
- Part 2) [Children are asked to choose between four different animals, including one that is the same shape as the gelp in the previous question. The gelp is a different color and pattern from the original item.] "Can you show me another gelp?" (The correct response is the gelp.)

Scoring[38]

- Scores are automatically generated at the end of testing. In addition to overall scores, the QUILS produces vocabulary, syntax, and process subscale scores. Raw scores reflect the sum of correct items. These scores are also converted into standard and percentile scores. This means the QUILS produces a total of 12 scores.
- The QUILS:ES generates the same 12 English scores, as well as 12 scores in Spanish (i.e., raw, standard, and percentile rank for overall, vocabulary, syntax, and process in Spanish). In addition, the QUILS:ES produces best scores intended to capture dual language learners' distributed knowledge across English and Spanish.[36] They are generated by examining the proportion of correct answers for each question type across each language. The maximum proportion for each question type is then summed and used in generating vocabulary, syntax, and process scores such that best scores for each subscale range from 0.0 to 4.0 and overall best scores range from 0.0 to 12.0. This means the QUILS:ES produces 36 scores.

Alignment with the User-Informed Principles

GOAL 1:
Content Strengths

Domain coverage: The QUILS and QUILS-ES capture not only the products of children's language (i.e., vocabulary and syntax) but also the processes of how they learn language. The assessments' "process" subscale captures how children learn new nouns, verbs, and adjectives, and how well they can convert new words from active to passive tense.

Developmental and linguistic relevance: The QUILS-ES was designed to capture bilingual children's distributed language across English and Spanish. The test yields a best score that represents their strengths on certain item types across two languages.

GOAL 4:
Usefulness Strengths

Family engagement: The assessments automatically generate a family report to communicate scores to families. There is also an associated website for families containing tips and activities on encouraging language development with young children.

Current Measure of Early Language Skills

Woodcock-Johnson IV Tests of Oral Language (WJ IV OL)[39]

Subdomain(s) Measured

Receptive language; Expressive language; Vocabulary

Age Range

Ages 2 through adult

Language Version(s)

English; Spanish: three subtests included in the OL Battery (Oral Language, Broad Oral Language, and Listening Comprehension)[40]

Administration

- The Woodcock Johnson is administered one-on-one with each child and is generally used for educational, developmental, diagnostic, and research purposes. It can assess change across a broad range of ages.
- The tests of oral language include 9 subtests that each take approximately 5 minutes to complete.
- Subtests include: Picture Vocabulary; Oral Comprehension; Segmentation; Picture Naming; Sentence Repetition; Understanding Directions; Sound Blending; Retrieval Fluency; and Sound Awareness
- These subtests are also found in the Woodcock Johnson/Batería IV and Woodcock-Muñoz Language Survey III, each of which provides varied information.

Sample Items[41]

Example picture vocabulary items:

- "Here is a picture of a dog and a picture of a bus. Put your finger on the dog."
- [Child is shown a picture of a violin.] "What is this called?"

Example sentence repetition items:

- "I am going to say some words and then I want you to repeat them." Example phrases or sentences include "Big Bird" and "The girl stopped to smell the flowers."

Example oral comprehension items:

- "You will hear some sentences and then fill in the blank at the end." An example sentence is "A cow goes ____."

Scoring

- Subtests have variable raw score approaches, although most are scored manually using basal and ceiling levels such that the raw score represents the total number of correct items.
- Raw scores can be converted into age- or grade-level equivalent scores, standard scores, and percentiles using the web-based or mobile scoring application. The Woodcock-Johnson subtests also produce equal interval W scores to illustrate growth in abilities.[42]
- For emergent bilingual children who speak English and Spanish, the test generates a Comparative Language Index to compare abilities across the two languages.[43]

Alignment with the User-Informed Principles

GOAL 1: Content Strengths

Domain coverage: Together, the Woodcock-Johnson Oral Language subtests capture multiple subdomains of language, painting a comprehensive picture of children's abilities in the domain.

GOAL 2: Psychometric Strengths

Comparisons: The Woodcock-Johnson Oral Language subtests generate a comparative language index for several subscales to compare children's English and Spanish abilities in different aspects of language development.

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