



Summation of Findings from Culminating Activity on "Measuring and Reporting Social-Emotional Development in Early Childhood"

May 8, 2013, Natcher Conference Center, NIH Main Campus, Bethesda MD.

The Forum on Child and Family Statistics sponsored a full day event in order to consider the state of the field on measures of social-emotional development as well as opportunities for including such measures in the *America's Children* report and future federal data collections. Outcomes included recommendations on measures that are appropriate for both the federal statistical system as well as for more general purposes in the field .

Guiding Principles

1. What gets measured matters, thus it is important to have precise, rigorous measures that lead to accurate conclusions.
2. It is important to *know what you want to know* when selecting a measure.
3. National measures are important but only if they provide high quality data.
4. Collaboration and coordination is essential between agencies, which may potentially ease financial burden.

Short-term priorities for measuring socio-emotional (SE) development in federal data collections

1. Clarity is needed on the sub-domain(s) being assessed.
 - a. Clear conceptualization of how we are operationalizing social-emotional development is necessary before measuring and reporting.
 - b. Measures which are selected must accurately assess the selected area of development. It is critical to review items included in the measure when classifying a scale into a sub-domain, rather than just the scale or subscale names which can be misleading.
2. Guidance to federal data collectors on prioritizing among the five identified sub-domains if necessary.
 - a. Space and time limitations may require that surveys choose among the sub-domains. In that case, is it best to choose one narrow domain with a larger set of questions, or is it best to attempt to measure multiple sub-domains with a small set of questions for each?
 - b. Note: Emotional competence is the sub-domain with the least available measures for both indicators in *America's Children* or surveys.
3. Data quality: capitalizing on currently available resources, while ensuring that selected measures are reliable and valid, especially if adapted or shortened.
 - a. Agencies often validate a full scale measures and then use a shorter, modified version. Thus, we need to be cognizant that several measures in Child Trends' draft Paper and Inventory are based on psychometrics for the full scale, which does not necessarily

match the shorter, modified scale that is currently in use in a particular federal data collection.

- b. There was a consensus on the importance of sound measures, and on prioritizing predictive and face validity. Specifically for predictive validity, focus on the relationship of social and emotional development to later outcomes, such as academic achievement and long-term (adult) productivity.
4. Measures must be appropriate for a diverse population of children that differ by age, developmental stage, disability status, cultural and language diversity, gender, temperament, environmental factors, tribe, and urbanicity.
5. Consideration of the age group that is the best suited for measurement of social and emotional development for the purposes of the data collection and reporting objectives of the Forum?
 - Presenters' review of project materials identified numerous measures that cut across the 0 to 5 years of age, allowing for the collection of data at different points in development.
 - Researchers Bierman, Domitrovich, and Atkins-Burnett suggested measuring at 5 years old. It was noted that measurement at kindergarten controls for context and demands of the setting. Scott-Little provided the state policy perspective relating our work to state kindergarten entry assessment and early learning standards initiatives.
6. Re-reviewing measures in the paper according to the importance of the criteria applied (for example, validity vs. availability of translations)?

Longer Term Considerations

1. **Other important domains of development in early childhood:** In addition to the constructs of social and emotional development in early childhood investigated by the project, other key aspects of development identified include: *language, general ability to communicate, relationships, attachment, and approaches to learning*. Key constructs of interest may differ depending on the age of the child and what outcomes are predicted.
2. **Optimal reporter:** Observer-rated direct assessment was strongly encouraged for this age group, as well as assessor reports. Problems were identified related to teacher report (classroom environment effects; different teachers every year), yet teacher ratings are more predictive than parent ratings of later outcomes. However, parent reports have value since parents experience their children across all settings and across time.
3. **Measures for various study designs** (longitudinal as well as cross-sectional surveys): Note that there are measures designed to assess children longitudinally, but there may be more interest, for indicators, in measures that are appropriate for each age group in a cross-sectional survey.
4. **Effect of moderators:** Moderators such as the child's environment, other regulatory constructs, and contextual factors, as well as the stability of measures will have a relationship to child level measures of social and emotional development.
5. **Sensitivity to intervention:** Prioritize measures shown to be sensitive to change during an intervention and/or across development

See also "Key Points from Culminating Activity by Session" for a summary of each presenter's remarks.

Produced for the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics by Child Trends under CDC contract# 200-2012-F-51426.

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