NHSA
NATIONAL HEAD START ASSOCIATION

Our mission is to coalesce, inspire, and support the Head Start field as a leader in early childhood development and education.

Better, Simpler Assessment Challenge

Good assessment and screening tools are essential to effective Head Start and other early childhood programs. To improve outcomes for children, NHSA seeks ways to make early childhood assessment tools better and simpler, meaning more useful, less burdensome, more actionable, and more affordable.

A number of characteristics, explored below, can make assessment tools more or less useful. Trade-offs across these attributes are inevitable. While validity, objectivity, reliability, and privacy are of paramount concern, Head Start providers need tools that improve on all of these quality dimensions over time.

Features to Maximize	
Validity	Tools have the right metrics to accurately measure both what it claims to measure and what is useful, important, and relevant to measure to gauge child progress and needs
Objectivity	Assessments are not subjective, meaning it provides similar results regardless of who does the assessing
Reliability	Results of an assessment are consistent under different test conditions, be it different examiners carrying out the test or the test being carried out at a different time or place
Ease of Use	Tools are simple to be trained to use and the simplicity of administering the assessment itself.
Accessibility	Information is easy to find and access, including generating no- or low-cost reports that identify patterns at all levels from the individual child on up to and across classrooms and beyond and noting exceptions, warnings, and patterns/relationships/outliers
Timeliness	Information and reports are available immediately
Frequency	Assessments allow for frequent feedback on children's development, including updating near- and long-term goals and identifying time-linked patterns and relationships
Interoperability	Data can connect with other data or systems
Protection	Tools protect subject privacy in accordance with well-established, vetted governance rules while not prohibiting analysis that could support the subject

Features to Minimize	
Time	The amount of time required of children and assessment administrators to conduct the assessment
Cost	The monetary cost of an assessment
Stress	The extent to which an assessment may be the source of stress for the child being assessed or the administrator conducting it

More Information

- NHSA's Data Design Initiative, which builds off of the Moneyball for Head Start report, aims to improve outcomes at all levels of Head Start. Visit NHSA's website to learn more.

- The Data Analytics Playbook is live, offering Head Start practitioners examples of data visualizations used by their colleagues to support and improve their work with children and families.

- NHSA encourages current vendors to find ways to improve the performance of their assessment tools on all of these dimensions, and invites new vendors to understand and meet Head Start assessment requirements.

- For more information, email: vjones@nhsa.org