September 30, 2016

Assessment Alternatives for Literacy Fundamentals
Beginning with the 2016-17 school year, districts can choose to continue using PALS as their assessment of reading readiness for 4K through second grade or select alternative tools. Districts will be able to select one tool to use across the 4K-2nd grade ranges or use different tools at different levels. According to the October 2015 DPI memo, the tool(s) must:

- be administered at least annually;
- assess phonemic awareness and alphabet (letter-sound) knowledge;
- be an appropriate, valid, and reliable assessment of literacy fundamentals;
- include children receiving special education; and
- provide data that can be reported/shared with parents/guardians.

While districts may elect to continue to use PALS or to utilize another literacy-based tool, this is also an opportunity for districts to consider how to implement literacy assessment in the framework of a more comprehensive system for assessment in the early years. Many of the current evidence-based assessment tools would meet the criteria for literacy assessment.

Programs that are engaged in gathering on-going, whole child data and periodically anchoring it to a valid and reliable tool may already be meeting the assessment of literacy fundamentals requirements as stated above. Programs are encouraged to review the specific learning objectives that data is collected on to ensure early literacy fundamentals are included and used to guide instruction and monitor progress.

Due to the interrelatedness of child development as described in the Wisconsin Early Learning Standards (physical/motor; social-emotional; language/literacy; approaches to learning; and cognition and general knowledge), best practice suggests early childhood assessment take a "whole child" focus in an on-going data collection process. Data collected by familiar adults on children while they are engaged in familiar activities within their daily schedules and routines yields a more reliable view of the child's learning and development than the traditional direct assessment approach. Observation, anecdotal notes, photos, video/audio recordings, and work samples are typical methods used to gather this *authentic* data in an on-going assessment process. To guide instruction and measure progress, it is essential to periodically anchor this data to a valid and reliable tool to determine the child's status in relation to local and/or research-based expectations.

Resources on comprehensive screening and assessment can be found at:
http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/curriculum-assessment-child-assessment.php
http://dpi.wi.gov/strategic-assessment/formative
http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/pscape.pdf
http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/documents/Healthy_Children_Blueprint_9_22_16F.pdf
http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/wmels-about.php

For more information on comprehensive early childhood screening and assessment contact:
Jill Haglund, Early Childhood Consultant, WI Department of Public Instruction, jill.haglund@dpi.wi.gov or
Jennifer Kalis, RtI Early Childhood Coordinator, CESA 4, jkalis@cesa4.org.