

NC Early Learning Inventory

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

This Frequently Asked Questions document is intended to be a “living document.” It will be periodically updated with more current information, additions, and clarifications as the Read to Achieve implementation process moves forward. The Office of Early Learning welcomes additional questions. Please use [this form](#) to submit your questions.

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General Information																														
Questions	Answers																													
What is the NC Early Learning Inventory (NC ELI)?	The North Carolina Early Learning Inventory (NC ELI) is the kindergarten entry assessment formerly known as the North Carolina Kindergarten Entry Assessment (NC KEA). NC ELI is a formative assessment based on a set of developmental progressions across the 5 domains of learning and development (language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge, approaches toward learning, physical well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development) as required in GS 115C-83.5. Teachers document student's learning and development with evidence within an online platform (SmartTeach™) to substantiate a child's skill attainment along the developmental progressions and utilize this information to personalize instruction for students.																													
What dimensions are required and how can documentation be collected for each?	The NC ELI covers sixteen developmental progressions that support whole-child learning and development. All documentation can be gathered through anecdotal notes, videos, and work samples. An optional feature includes game-based assessments through the tablet-based Finch™ app. See the chart below for more information. <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th><th></th><th>Dimensions</th><th>Game-Based Assessment Available (Finch)</th><th>Observation Only</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td rowspan="6">30-Day</td><td rowspan="2">Language</td><td>8b: Follows directions</td><td></td><td>X</td></tr> <tr> <td>9d: Tells about another time and place</td><td></td><td>X</td></tr> <tr> <td rowspan="4">Literacy</td><td>15a: Notices and discriminates rhyme</td><td>X</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>15b: Notices and discriminate alliteration</td><td>X</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>17a: Uses and appreciates books and other texts</td><td></td><td>X</td></tr> <tr> <td>17b: Uses</td><td>X</td><td></td></tr> </tbody> </table>						Dimensions	Game-Based Assessment Available (Finch)	Observation Only	30-Day	Language	8b: Follows directions		X	9d: Tells about another time and place		X	Literacy	15a: Notices and discriminates rhyme	X		15b: Notices and discriminate alliteration	X		17a: Uses and appreciates books and other texts		X	17b: Uses	X	
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			print concepts		
	Mathematics	20a: Counts	X		
		20b: Quantifies	X		
		20c: Connects numerals with their quantities	X		
	60-Day	Social-Emotional	1a: Manage Feelings		X
			1b: Follows limits and expectations		X
			2b: Responds to emotional cues	X	
			2c: Interacts with peers		X
			3b: Solves social problems		X
		Physical	7a: Uses fingers and hands		X
		Cognitive	11a: Attends and engages		X
Who is required to assess kindergarten students with the NC ELI?	All LEA teachers with at least one enrolled kindergarten student are required to assess students with the NC ELI. This includes teachers in Exceptional Children and DL/I classrooms.				
How does the NC ELI affect whether other assessments will continue to be used?	Districts should continue to use all assessments required by NC DPI. However, to prevent duplication, individual districts may choose to decrease or eliminate any locally-selected assessments that provide information similar to what is gathered through the NC ELI.				
Who sees the NC ELI data, and how will it be used?	The primary use of the documentation collected for the NC ELI is to help teachers understand where their students are along the developmental progressions and use the information to personalize				

	learning for their students. School administrators may wish to use the data as a basis for conversations with teachers about the types of support teachers need to successfully engage in this process as well to identify additional supports for children.
Does the NC ELI align with NC standards?	It is necessary that assessment be aligned with standards. NC ELI is aligned with both the North Carolina Foundations for Early Learning and Development , which are the standards for children starting at birth through age five, and the North Carolina Standard Course of Study .
Can teachers collect information for Objectives & Dimensions other than those that are required?	Individual teachers are not able to select optional developmental progressions in the Teaching Strategies® online platform (SmartTeach™). This functionality is only available to school or district administrators. If a school or district decides that teachers will observe students for optional developmental progressions, these items will be required for all teachers in the school or district.

Training	
Questions	Answers
Who is required to be trained?	All LEA teachers with at least one enrolled kindergarten student and are new to kindergarten or have not previously used NC ELI in the classroom are required to complete the training. Building leaders and instructional support staff who work with these teachers and students are encouraged to take the course as well.
What is included in the training and how can the training be accessed?	The training covers effective practices in conducting formative assessment with young learners and tutorials on navigating the Teaching Strategies® online platform (SmartTeach™). The NC ELI formative assessment training is a self-paced course in NCEES. NCEES Course #26815 Title: Formative Assessment for Young Learners (approximately 6 hours) The OEL training flier can be shared as needed.
What if there are teachers who would like a refresher of NC ELI?	OEL Early Learning Consultants are able to provide support with questions regarding additional district training needs or implementation.
What training is available for the	In the Develop area, search “Finch.” Teachers and administrators can enroll in the Getting Started With Finch™ Formative Games. This course

Finch™ game-based assessments?	will cover how to conduct Finch™ Formative Games in your classroom and how to use Finch™ assessment data in GOLD® to support children's individualized growth and development. See Finch™ Formative Games User Guide on the SmartTeach Support Portal for more information.
Are districts allowed to create asynchronous learning modules to disseminate the NC ELI training for kindergarten teachers?	No. Based on the Teaching Strategies® Terms of Use and contractual agreements, districts may not create modules to disseminate NC ELI training for teachers. Please see the Teaching Strategies® Terms of Use for more information.

The First 30 Days/ KEA Ratings	
Questions	Answers
What is the requirement for the first 30 days?	As part of the NC ELI, teachers observe, document, and assign preliminary levels on children's development and learning in early language, literacy, and math skills during the first 30 school days. Language: • 8b Follows directions • 9a Tells about another time and place Literacy: • 15a Notices and discriminates rhyme • 15b Notices and discriminates alliteration • 17a Uses and appreciates books and other texts • 17b Uses print concepts Mathematics: • 20a Counts • 20b Quantifies • 20c Connects numerals and quantities Teachers will indicate a KEA Rating based on documentation collected in the first 30 school days. The KEA Rating will populate when completing 60-day checkpoints. Teachers have the opportunity to confirm this rating for the 60-day checkpoint rating or update the rating based on additional documentation.

	This 30-day requirement is met by assigning the KEA ratings in SmartTeach™. In the left navigation bar, click Assess and then KEA. For each child, click the + sign for each of the dimensions for language, literacy, and math. Another option is to complete KEA by class. If Finch™ Formative Games are being utilized, data from the games will autopopulate with preliminary levels from the tablet-based app. While teachers are placing a focus on the seven language, literacy, and math developmental progressions during the first 30 school days, they should observe and collect documentation for all required NC ELI dimensions for the whole-child assessment for the duration of the first 60 days of school. Tip: Add the KEA Sequence for daily Intentional Teaching Experiences that support student engagement and documentation related to the language, literacy, and mathematics.
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Preliminary Levels	
Questions	Answers
What is a preliminary level?	A teacher enters a preliminary level for each piece of documentation, indicating the skills a student demonstrates on a developmental progression anytime during the 60-day checkpoint period within Teaching Strategies® platform (SmartTeach™). While adding documentation, preliminary levels are entered in a dark grey row that appears to the right of each selected child's name under each progression. When engaging in Finch™ formative assessment games, preliminary levels are automatically selected based on each child's individual responses. Preliminary levels are used to inform daily instructional planning and considered when setting the 60-day checkpoint rating. Entering preliminary levels are necessary to connect to the "Intentional Teaching Experiences" within the online platform (SmartTeach™). Additionally, preliminary levels inform the Smart Suggestions checkpoint ratings which reduces the time it takes teachers to complete checkpoint ratings near the 60th day.
If a preliminary level changes over time, will the previous preliminary level	Yes, the user will be able to see each preliminary level selected by viewing previous documentation. This will help the user see the developmental progress of students over time.

still be visible to the user?	
If a child's preliminary level is identified as beyond the range of widely held expectations for kindergarten, is documentation still needed?	Yes, documentation is always needed to support a placement on the developmental progression. This will support the next instructional steps. Because the Teaching Strategies GOLD® developmental progressions used in NC ELI range from birth through Grade 3, teachers are better able to individualize instruction for all of their students who transition into kindergarten at different levels of development and learning.
If a preliminary level is selected, must there be documentation in the online platform (SmartTeach™) to support that designation?	Yes, in order to determine a preliminary level, a teacher will need to base that decision on documentation collected. Documentation is required to substantiate a child's skill attainment along the developmental progressions for both preliminary levels and the completion of a checkpoint.

Collecting Documentation	
Questions	Answers
What types of documentation can I collect?	Teachers collect documentation in various ways including, writing observational notes, annotated photos, videos, student work samples, Finch™ Formative Games and talking with families, to learn where students are currently in their learning and development.
How much documentation should I collect?	It takes more than one piece of evidence (observational and game-based) to be confident that a child can demonstrate ALL aspects of the indicator consistently and independently . This requires a level of professional judgement.
In which ways can I collect/enter documentation?	Teachers collect and enter documentation using the SmartTeach™ App or the SmartTeach™ web portal, both of which are secure platforms for capturing and storing student data. Note: The Teacher app (blue icon) has been rebranded to SmartTeach™. If the Teacher app is already downloaded, update the app rather than deleting the old app. Documentation is also generated when using the Finch™ Formative Games on the tablet-based app. Getting Started with the SmartTeach App

	Adding Documentation in the SmartTeach App Log in using the Single Sign On (SSO) option. Code: NC
How do I get started with Finch™ Formative Games?	Finch App Overview (include device requirements, touchscreen chromebooks launched since 2019 that also feature Android App support are compatible) Log in using the Single Sign On (SSO) option. Code: NC If you are unable to download the Finch™ app from the app store, ask your PSU technology administrator to provide access to your kindergarten teachers' devices. Adding the KEA Recommended Sequence (Note: NC kindergarten teachers do not have access to Creative Curriculum Cloud)
What types of files are supported in the online platform?	Many types of files are supported, including text, JPEG, MP3, MP4, AVI, Word, PDF, Windows Media and TIFF. The easiest way to enter text and upload pictures, videos, and audio clips is by using the SmartTeach™. You may also enter these through the web portal. Uploaded files can be up to 750MB for videos and 5MB for other files. The video files may not be longer than one minute.
Is there a need to obscure students' faces if you upload video documentation with multiple children?	Please refer to the student privacy and data policies of your district.
Do I have to enter documentation into the online platform?	Documentation is collected in various ways including anecdotal notes, work samples, photographs, checklists and stored in the SmartTeach™ online portfolio. Documentation can also be collected by using Finch™ Formative Games.
Can one piece of documentation be used for an entire class?	No, this would not be considered best practice. It is very difficult to accurately determine the skill level of every child in a classroom with a single piece of documentation. If multiple children complete a similar task, a generic note can be written and then a teacher can individualize documentation.
If one piece of documentation is used for more than one student and one of the students moves to another kindergarten classroom in the	Yes, documentation will remain with both the transferring student and the remaining student(s) if one transfers from teacher to teacher, school to school, and/or district to district.

school, district, or state, will the documentation stay connected with both students' platforms?	
Should a teacher complete all steps of the process when adding documentation, or can he/she add documentation and then come back later to assign a preliminary level?	Yes, it is possible to add documentation and come back later to assign a preliminary level. However, the SmartTeach™ App allows teachers to make preliminary levels as they collect documentation, thus eliminating the additional step, and time, of going back to the online portal to complete this step later. It is considered best practice to assign a preliminary level while collecting documentation.
Why might teachers need to back-date documentation?	There may be times when teachers capture documentation and are not able to enter it into the system right away or a teacher may decide to collect evidence over the course of several days before entering it. Under these circumstances, when the documentation is uploaded, the teacher will want to use the date that identifies when the documentation was captured rather than the date when it was uploaded.
If teachers share students (e.g., team teaching), are they able to add documentation?	In situations where teachers share students, the students will be automatically added to the class of the teacher coded as their ELA 1050 teacher in the online platform via the Infinite Campus import. The teacher sharing the same student(s) may be granted access to the ELA teacher's class as a co-teacher by the principal and/or the NC ELI district administrator within the online platform. For additional information, please refer to the NC ELI Infinite Campus Data Integration Guide .
Can NC ELI documentation be used when Student Assistance Teams develop learning support plans or for other official uses?	The purpose of the NC ELI is to inform teaching and learning. Any documentation or data generated from the process should not be used to make high-stakes decisions about students, teachers, programs or schools but instead may be used to inform instructional decisions.
Do parents/family members have a choice regarding the use and storage of	Most districts provide a Media Use and Release Permission Form by which parents indicate their preference regarding having their child's photograph taken and used for any media purposes. Districts do not need to create a separate form or process for this purpose. Rather, they may use their existing process to capture parent preferences on this

photographs and videos taken of their child in the Teaching Strategies GOLD® platform?	matter. It may be necessary for districts to distinguish between the use of photographs for public purposes (e.g., school or class website) and those used for educational purposes and stored in a manner that complies with FERPA (e.g., the SmartTeach™ online platform) on their media release form. In either instance, parents may choose not to have photos/videos taken and stored if they wish. All state and federal laws governing student privacy and secure record keeping should be followed just as with a student's IEP and cumulative record. SmartTeach™ maintains compliance with state and federal laws designed to protect such information.
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60-Day Checkpoint	
Questions	Answers
What is a checkpoint rating?	A checkpoint rating is a point on a developmental progression that best describes the student's current skill level on or near the 60th school day. This level is determined by analyzing the preliminary levels indicated on observational documentation and game-based assessment throughout the first 60 school days. 10 Tips for Successfully Completing Your GOLD Checkpoint
I have a student who recently enrolled in my kindergarten classroom. Since I don't have any documentation, I am unable to make a checkpoint. What should I do?	At times, teachers will have unusual circumstances that prevent them from determining a checkpoint level for a student. For example, a student may have just enrolled in the school from another state or may have had chronic absences. Thus, the teacher has not collected any documentation or indicated any preliminary levels that may inform a checkpoint. For these unique circumstances, a teacher can activate the "Not Observed" option: 1. When marking a checkpoint (either by child or by class), click on the child's name to activate the "Not Observed" option. 2. From the drop-down menu that appears, either select the reason why evidence for this child was not observed from the list provided or click "other" to type the justification.
When marking a checkpoint, will teachers see all of the documentation entered?	Yes, when marking a checkpoint, teachers will see a file folder containing any documentation collected and the preliminary levels noted.
Can you change the checkpoint after the 60 days	The checkpoint represents a period of time. After the first 60 school days, a new checkpoint period begins and teachers may continue to support students' growth and development through observing,

as students progress further?	documenting student's learning and development within the online platform, and personalizing instruction for students.
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Exceptional Children	
Questions	Answers
I serve students with severe or profound cognitive disabilities. Should I also assess my students using the NC ELI?	Yes, the general statute (GS 115C.83.5) requires, "that every student entering kindergarten shall complete a kindergarten entry assessment within 60 days of enrollment." As such, for any child registered as a kindergartener, their teacher is required to formatively assess that child with the NC ELI. All kindergarten students, including EC children must be enrolled in an ELA 1050 class to be included in the SmartTeach™ online platform. The Teaching Strategies GOLD® developmental progressions used for the NC ELI are strength-based and because they span a range of skills from birth through Grade 3, teachers are able to identify emergent skills that are precursors to what is typical for children of a particular age group. It focuses on what a child can do within a broad range of concepts, skills, and behaviors, which helps teachers identify the next steps in a child's development. Therefore, teachers are better able to individualize instruction for all of their students by accommodating each child's developmental level. There is a way to indicate "not yet" if the documentation collected by the teachers shows evidence that the child falls before the first indicator level on the color coded progressions. What is the difference between "Not Yet" and "Not Observed"?
What are acceptable accommodations for the NC ELI?	The NC ELI is part of daily instruction rather than an isolated testing situation. Therefore, accommodations that are provided during daily instruction as written in the IEP are appropriate for the NC Early Learning Inventory.
Are we allowed to accept a child counting and saying the total number of objects without actually pointing one to one if their physical	Students with physical disabilities and nonverbal students should use whatever method they use for expression during instruction (point, count, indicate an answer). For example, many students use eye gaze to count the number of objects and indicate the total number. Nonverbal students often use communication boards or augmentative and alternative communication devices and should use these means to indicate the quantity.

disabilities keep them from pointing to objects?	
Can a teacher simply mark 'not yet' as the preliminary level and write an anecdotal note indicating that the student's disability prevents him or her from demonstrating what they know?	The NC ELI is an observation-based, ongoing, formative assessment. In contrast to direct assessment, observation-based, ongoing, formative assessment occurs during moments throughout the school day and is not an assessment event that takes away from instructional time. As an EC teacher is addressing the Extend Content Standards, a student's current abilities can be observed and documented and preliminary levels made within the SmartTeach™ online platform. Preliminary levels made along the developmental progressions help the teacher identify what the child can do rather than what the child cannot do. For example, it might be noted that the child smiled, made eye contact with the teacher, or gazed back and forth between the teacher and an object. This documentation could be used to determine the student's preliminary level on a color-coded progression or as evidence that a student has "not yet" exhibited the first skill on a progression. All state and federal laws governing student privacy and secure record keeping should be followed just as with a student's IEP and cumulative record. SmartTeach™ maintains compliance with state and federal laws designed to protect such information.

English Language Learners	
Questions	Answers
What considerations should be made when assessing English Language Learners with the NC ELI?	As teachers score a child across all objectives, they should consider the child's performance in both their preferred native language and English. The teacher should focus on the content of each progression/indicator and score the child with their highest acquisition of content in any language used. Remember, the child must demonstrate all aspects of the indicator consistently and independently. The Language and Literacy dimensions (8b, 9d, 15a, and 15b) may be more difficult to assess when a child is a non or limited English speaker. When possible, teachers should collaborate with other staff and family members to collect authentic documentation of the child's skills and abilities in their native language. In circumstances where the child's abilities can not be authentically assessed in English or their native language by the checkpoint due date,

	selecting “Not Observed” and indicating “ELL” will be the most appropriate option. What is the difference between “Not Yet” and “Not Observed”?
When teaching in a Dual Language/ Immersion Program, how do we assess literacy skills that are a focus in the English language but not in the target language?	Dual Language/Immersion (DL/I) programs instructing in Spanish (or other target languages) implementing 80/20 or 90/10 instructional time are not required, but may choose to assess the NC ELI dimensions 15a. Notices and discriminates rhyme and 15b. Notices and discriminates alliteration. If an 80/20 or 90/10 DL/I program chooses not to assess these two literacy dimensions, the teacher should indicate “Not Observed” when completing a checkpoint for Dimensions 15a. and 15b. and indicate that the child is enrolled in a DL/I program.

Accessing the NC Early Learning Inventory

Questions	Answers
How do I get access to the NC ELI?	SmartTeach™ accounts for elementary school principals and kindergarten teachers are created via a nightly integration with Infinite Campus. If you are not a kindergarten teacher, an EC teacher serving kindergarten students, or an elementary school principal and support the implementation of the NC ELI, please contact your district administrator to request access.
How do I sign-in to NC ELI via SmartTeach™?	You will access the NC ELI via SmartTeach™ using NCEdCloud IAM at https://my.ncedcloud.org/. Use the following steps to access the platform: • Go to https://my.ncedcloud.org • Enter your NCEdCloud username; select Go • Enter your NCEdCloud password; select Go • Select the NC ELI icon to access the platform • Click “Log in with your NCEdCloud IAM Service Account”

Reports

Questions	Answers
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What reports are available for teachers and for administrators?	Below you will find names and hyperlinked explanations of many useful reports available. Other reports can be found in the Reports area of the platform. Class Profile (teacher & administrator) KEA Report (first 30 days) Report Card (teacher & administrator) Development and Learning (teacher & administrator) Snapshot (teacher & administrator) Snapshot by Dimension (teacher & administrator) Administrator Assessment Status Data Export
How long will I have access to NC ELI data from the current school year?	Districts have access to NC ELI data until the end of the current school year. Districts are encouraged to develop a data reporting process to ensure they have downloaded and saved all necessary reports to support their needs. After the end of the school year, the current year's data will no longer be accessible.

Teacher and Student Data Integration	
Questions	Answers
How are teachers, students, and principals enrolled into the NC ELI Formative online platform?	See NC ELI Infinite Campus Data Integration Guide .
How often are teacher, student, and class data loaded from Infinite Campus into the NC ELI Formative Assessment Online Platform?	Infinite Campus teacher, student, and class data are loaded into the NC ELI online platform nightly. Therefore, updates and changes made in Infinite Campus should appear on the platform the next day.
If a student moves, will he or she be transferred from class to class, school to school, or	Yes, Infinite Campus is the authoritative source of student records. If Infinite Campus is updated to reflect that a student has moved from one school to another school in the same district or in a different NC school district, the platform will reflect the change with the next scheduled integration with Infinite Campus. Usually, if there is an issue with a transfer, it is local data entry related.

district to district within the NC ELI?	
Does student information in Infinite Campus follow the child when he/she transfers either from school to school within the same district or from district to district within the state?	Yes, individual student evidence and other data in the system will remain with the student in the online platform even if the student moves/transfers or becomes associated with another ELA 1050 class or another NC LEA.
Does PreK student data in Teaching Strategies GOLD® transfer in the platform to the receiving kindergarten teacher's account?	Pre-K data is transferred from prekindergarten teacher to kindergarten teacher via the Transition Report. Only students who attended a publicly funded pre-kindergarten classroom will have Transition Reports.
How do teacher and student data in the platform remain private and secure?	The NC DPI works diligently in collaboration with Teaching Strategies® to ensure that the NC ELI platform maintains compliance with state and federal laws designed to protect user and student data. Additionally, Teaching Strategies® maintains company-wide policies and procedures to protect this data. For more information about the Teaching Strategies Inc. privacy policy, please click Teaching Strategies® Privacy Policy .

Additional Resources	
Questions	Answers
Where can I find additional resources for support and self-guided tutorials?	Additional information is located within Teaching Strategies GOLD® online platform under the blue question mark icon and within the Develop which can be accessed via the navigation tool on the left side of the platform. Administrators can find more information about navigating the Manage experience via the Quick Start Guide for Admins. The SmartTeach™ Support Portal is a great resource as well.

