

Pathways to Quality

Minnesota Executive Function Scale (MEFS)



► Project Description

One of the promising results from the Year 2 report of Think Small's Pathways to Quality (P2Q) project stemmed from a small pilot measuring children's executive functions using the Minnesota Executive Function Scale (MEFS). Executive functioning represents a broad set of skills that enable individuals to meet adaptive goals. These skills are necessary for academic success. To be successful academically, children must be able to do things like concentrate, follow directions from teachers, get along with other children, and control their impulses.

In the P2Q pilot, Think Small, in partnership with Reflection Sciences, collected data on 42 children. The data collected showed improvement on these executive functioning scores after their early childhood education providers received quality supports. This change was statistically significant.

These results were slightly better than the national average on the MEFS and encouraged Think Small to expand the pilot to see if the results would apply more broadly across the state. We are well aware that Minnesota currently has no statewide kindergarten readiness assessment. The expansion of the project presents an opportunity to understand a key component of kindergarten readiness of children throughout the state.

Think Small hopes to examine the relationship between the quality of early childhood education programs and executive functioning. A new two-part study sampled early childhood education providers in diverse communities throughout the state. A total of 149 eligible children being served by these providers were recruited through primary caregivers to participate. Children's executive function scores were measured twice during the 2018–19 academic year, once in August 2018 and once in May 2019. The study will be complete in fall 2019.



► Impact

The original pilot study of 42 children from a handful of providers in Minneapolis and St. Paul showed that children in high-quality programs with enhanced quality supports performed better on the MEFS than the national average. Our theory is that quality programs increase executive functioning skills. In lieu of a statewide kindergarten readiness assessment, we are conducting the larger study to determine if the MEFS could be a good proxy for school readiness. The implementation of MEFS is a simple, cost-effective measure that child care programs can use to document child outcomes.

The purpose of the second study is to compare the executive functioning scores of children in high-quality programs to children that are in programs not rated in Parent Aware. This study includes 149 children from providers around the state.

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▶ Ability to Scale

Using MEFS as a measure of an important aspect of kindergarten readiness is a scalable effort. With a simple training, programs can easily implement the assessment in their programs as a way to complement curriculum-based assessments. Similarly, school systems and state departments of education could incorporate the assessment as a way to monitor the impact of early childhood initiatives.



▶ Next Steps

Think Small believes MEFS has the potential to support individual child care programs' intentional practices that improve children's executive function skills. In addition, MEFS also has the potential to inform early childhood policy in the area of kindergarten readiness. To bring this to scale, there would need to be funding at the systems level.

To learn more about Pathways to Quality, visit ThinkSmall.org/pathways

