THE CONNECTICUT DOCUMENTATION & OBSERVATION FOR TEACHING SYSTEM (CT DOTS):

FIELD TEST REPORT
AND BIRTH TO AGE ONE EXPANSION

The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood
October 2018

Background Information

The Connecticut Documentation and Observation for Teaching System (CT DOTS) is a framework to guide early care and education providers in a process of monitoring children's progress on the skills, abilities and behaviors in the Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards (CT ELDS). CT DOTS was conceptualized and designed by the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (OEC) in partnership with the University of Connecticut and an advisory group between 2016 and 2018. *The Connecticut Documentation and Observation for Teaching System Instrument Development and Pilot Report* (Goldstein, 2017) outlines the development of CT DOTS, including the piloting of an initial version of this tool and recommendations for next steps. The OEC acted upon the recommendations from the pilot and embarked on two efforts as next steps in development: an expansion of the age bands between birth and one year of age to include two additional age bands and a field test. This report details these steps in the development and refinement of CT DOTS.

Birth to Age One Expansion

During the spring 2017 pilot of CT DOTS, it was found that the piloted version of CT DOTS did not provide sufficient information about the rapid learning and developmental changes that occur during infancy (specifically between birth and one year of age) to be valuable for the intended purpose (Goldstein, 2017). The CT DOTS Advisory Committee decided that CT DOTS should be expanded from two age bands covering the birth to age one range (zero to six months and six to twelve months) to four age bands (zero to three months, three to six months, six to nine months, and nine to twelve months). The process for this expansion mirrored the development of the rest of the CT DOTS content and included the following steps.

1. Draft content (including descriptions, examples, and guidance for naturalistic observations, planned experiences and family input) was developed by Office of Early Childhood staff.
2. The initial draft was reviewed by in-state experts and revisions were made based upon the feedback provided.
3. The revised draft was reviewed by an additional set of experts and further revisions were made based upon the feedback provided.

Experts providing input

- Cindy Jackson, Children's Therapy Services
- Lynn Johnson, Sacred Heart University
- Elsa Jones, Post University
- Robert Kiernan, retired Birth to Three/CT Office of Early Childhood staff
- Donna Notti, Cheshire Public Schools
- Catherine O'Brien, Brazelton Touchpoints Center
- University of Connecticut Child Development Labs (organized by Anne Bladen, Executive Director)

Field Test

Field Test Participants

Early care and education programs were recruited for participation in the CT DOTS Field Test in fall of 2017. While training was provided to individual teachers and administrators, recruitment and enrollment in the field test was done at the program level. Sixty-six (66) programs participated in the field test. Field test programs were encouraged to choose a process of implementation that best fit with program resources and needs. This flexible method of implementation mirrors the approach to the broader roll out of CT DOTS and ensured that the training and support developed and refined during the field test would be flexible enough to meet different implementation approaches. Because of the flexible implementation, the number of classrooms/teachers who participated varied by site.

The field test did not include Birth to Three early intervention programs because the work on expanding the birth to one age bands was still in process. A future field test specific to Birth to Three early intervention will be planned in order to develop guidance and support specific to this service. Early care and education programs participating in this field test chose whether to include their infant and toddler programs but recruitment focused on programs known to include preschool-age students.

Head Start programs were not recruited for the field test because the current amount and type of evidence of validity and reliability for CT DOTS does not meet federal Head Start requirements. Further studies to gather evidence about the validity and reliability of CT DOTS, including the field test, were planned and separate reports about these studies will be released.

Information about the programs that participated in the pilot is provided in the Tables 1-4 below.

Table 1: County

County	Number of Programs
Fairfield	27
Hartford	7
Litchfield	3
Middlesex	1
New Haven	16
New London	6
Tolland	2
Windham	2

Table 2: Early Care and Education Setting

Setting	Number of Programs
Public School	21
Community-based Center	38
Other	5

Table 3: Funding Sources

Funding Source	Number of Programs
Birth to Three	3
School Readiness	36
Smart Start	10
Full Tuition	28
Preschool Special Education (IDEA 619)	9
Board of Education Funding	3
Care for Kids	4
Child Day Care Contracts	5
Head Start	3
Family Resource Center Grant	3
Preschool Development Grant	8
Magnet School	2

*Programs often have more than one funding source. Teachers participating in the pilot may or may not have provided services under these specific funding sources.

Table 4: Selected Implementation Plan

Method of Implementation	Number of Programs
Primary (full implementation of CT DOTS as the primary method of ongoing assessment)	34
Partial (gradual exploration and implementation while continuing current assessment practices)	24

Implementation Support for Field Test Programs

Programs participating in the field test received the following supports:

- Copies of materials
- Two half-day trainings for staff, with assigned program work between sessions
- Half-day administrator training
- Online learning management system for sharing forms, resources, and asking questions related to use of CT DOTS
- Some programs accessed ongoing support from consultants and trainers, using individual or community resources

Ongoing Feedback Process

During the field test, several processes were embedded in the support structure in order to continually gather feedback and make improvements to trainings and materials. The following ongoing feedback processes were employed:

1. Questions and reflection cycles during the Field Test Trainings: question and response opportunities and small group work and large group report-out opportunities occurred during CT DOTS Field Test Trainings.

2. Training evaluations: participants in the field test training completed evaluations after each session. While the information gathered in the training evaluations was consistent, after each session the training was refined in order to better meet the needs of participants.
3. Regional implementation with co-trainers: OEC staff presented at each session but partnered with staff from the Regional Education Service Centers (RESCs). Many RESC staff supported program staff in CT DOTS implementation through their other roles with programs and were able to provide input to OEC regarding challenges and suggested improvements. In addition, the RESC staff participated in final training revisions based upon observations and informal feedback process at the trainings.
4. Online professional learning community: An online learning management system was employed so that programs could ask questions, provide input, and share ideas and resources.

Formal Feedback Opportunities

Focus Groups

Two focus group opportunities were offered in order to gain detailed feedback on the implementation guidance and training for CT DOTS. Individuals participating in the focus groups had the opportunity to participate in any number of topics related to improving the written guidance and forms for use with CT DOTS. Focus groups were held on April 2, 2018 in Hartford, CT and on April 12, 2018 in Trumbull, CT. The topics included The CT DOTS User's Manual, data collection and tracking forms, and summary forms.   The focus group format was unstructured and participants had questions in addition to providing input on the various topics. Notes were taken at the focus group sessions and the following decisions and/or changes were made based upon feedback and questions during the focus groups:

Forms

- Revised format of Child Summary met with general approval
- Space on child summary forms for attendance information was added
- Directions were added to the Class/Group Summary and keys were added to all forms

User's Manual

- Expanded sections on Diverse Learners and section title "Ensuring Effective Assessment Practices" was added
- Process graphic was refined to reflect language about refining focus which was introduced during the trainings
- Language about CT ELDS added throughout the document
- Section on making decisions about reporting cycles added

Observation Progression Book

- Row labels added to the left side page of each Observation Progression
- Added page with CT ELDS Learning Progressions not addressed in CT DOTS

Field Test Survey

Following completion of the 2018-2019 field test a survey was shared with field test program contacts. A total of 29 responses were gathered. Because programs and not individuals were recruited to participate in the field test, and surveys were shared with program contacts, it is not possible to

determine an overall completion rate for the survey. The low overall number of responses is likely due to the timing of the survey which was shared late summer and again at the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year. This timing was intentional in order to ensure that programs with different operating schedules all had an opportunity to complete the survey after completing their use of CT DOTS but likely affected the overall response rate.

While the purpose of the field test was to refine the supports for implementing CT DOTS, the field test survey asked questions regarding the utility of the tool which mirror the focus of the CT DOTS pilot. In addition, questions regarding future implementation supports were included.

Survey respondents were asked to provide information about their role and setting. The percentage of respondents across categories is included below:

- Role: 45% were classroom teachers, 55% were program administrators
- Setting: 79% of respondents were center-based early care and education program, 21% were public school based programs
- Ages served: 34% of the programs served infants/toddlers, 97% served preschools
- Funding sources: There was an overall mix of funding sources across respondents, with the most commonly reported funding being School Readiness (70% of respondents reported this as a funding source)

Programs were allowed flexibility in how they implemented CT DOTS during the field test period. Information was gathered on the survey regarding the extent of implementation.

- 41% of respondents reported using CT DOTS as their primary ongoing assessment tool during the field test
- 34% used a small portion of CT DOTS while continuing other assessment tools/processes
- 24% explored the use of CT DOTS in their program

Tables 5 includes responses regarding the use of CT DOTS data during the field test. The majority of respondents reported using CT DOTS to summarize information about children's learning and development and as a formative tool to guide planning and curriculum. A slightly lower percentage, but still a majority of respondents, reported using CT DOTS to share information with families. Ten percent of programs reported using CT DOTS to develop standards-based IEPS while 28% reported using CT DOTS to communicate with other professionals.

Table 5: Use of CT DOTS Data during the Field Test

Data Use/Purpose	Percentage of Respondents Reporting this Use of CT DOTS Data
As a formative tool to guide our planning and curriculum	72%
To summarize information about children's learning and development	76%
To share information with families	62%
To develop standards-based IEPS	10%
To communicate with other professionals	28%

Survey respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed with specific statements about the utility of CT DOTS. Table 6 provides the frequency of responses for each statement and the percentage of overall respondents selecting each response.

Table 6: Utility of CT DOTS

Utility Statement	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat agree,	Agree
CT DOTS is a useful tool for monitoring children's progress on the skills, abilities, and behaviors in the CT ELDS.	0	3 (11%)	0	11 (39%)	14 (50%)
CT DOTS provides guidance that helps me to intentionally plan how I will observe children's skills and behaviors.	0	1 (4%)	1 (4%)	13 (46%)	13 (46%)
CT DOTS provides information that is useful for planning curriculum, environment, or learning experiences.	0	1 (4%)	2 (7%)	10 (36%)	15 (54%)
CT DOTS provides information that is useful for planning supports for individual children.	0	1 (4%)	2 (7%)	10 (36%)	15 (54%)
CT DOTS is a useful tool for summarizing evidence of children's learning and development.	0	3 (11%)	3 (11%)	9 (32%)	12 (43%)
CT DOTS is a useful tool for communicating with families about children's learning and development.	1 (4%)	3 (11%)	3 (11%)	9 (32%)	12 (43%)
CT DOTS provides guidance that helps me to intentionally plan how the children's skills and behaviors will be observed.	0	4 (14%)	0	11 (39%)	13 (46%)
CT DOTS provides useful guidance for communicating with families on an ongoing basis about children's learning and development.	0	4 (14%)	4 (14%)	10 (36%)	10 (36%)
Implementing CT DOTS will be manageable.	1 (4%)	1 (4%)	5 (18%)	13 (46%)	8 (29%)

For all statements about the utility of CT DOTS, a large majority of respondents agreed or somewhat agreed with the sentiment. This pattern of responses supports the overall validity of the tool for the purposes for which it was designed. The items for which there was a higher frequency of disagreement

or neutrality included statements that implementing CT DOTS would be manageable, that CT DOTS was a useful tool for communicating with families, and that CT DOTS provided useful guidance around communicating with families. These survey responses indicate that it will be important to provide support to programs and providers as they implement CT DOTS with a particular focus on the family input portion of the tool. It will also be important to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation supports and to work to continue to refine guidance and professional development.

Future Implementation of CT DOTS

Survey respondents were asked to indicate their program plans regarding potential implementation of CT DOTS. Responses to this question are summarized below.

- 50% of those responding to this question indicated that their program was fully implementing CT DOTS and would continue to do so.
- 31% indicated that their program would be planning to transition to CT DOTS over the source of the coming year.
- 19% indicated they would plan to transition to full implementation over the course of several years.
- No respondents indicated that they were not planning to use CT DOTS

Summary and Conclusions

The CT DOTS field test provided valuable data that helped to guide the refinement of various supports for implementation including the User's Manual, reporting forms, and professional development design. In addition, data from specific survey questions provided additional evidence regarding the validity of the tool for the intended purposes. Data will continue to be collected regarding the effectiveness of the CT DOTS trainings and the need for additional guidance so that adjustments or additions can be made to written documents and/or professional development.

Additional input and ideas for reporting forms and implementation guidance will also be solicited through an ongoing professional learning community for CT DOTS trainers and coaches. While including families in the assessment process is a practice which is supported by research, this field test showed that for many providers this is a shift in practice. Greater guidance and professional development focused on gathering family input may be needed in order for CT DOTS to be utilized effectively. One example of an additional resource that emerged through the informal feedback loops used during the field test are the CT DOTS family input booklets that support information sharing in a family friendly format. A separate field test of these supplementary materials will be conducted once the content of these booklets is developed.

This field test focused on center and school-based early care and education settings. The use of CT DOTS in other settings and the need for specific guidance will be considered as implementation continues. The OEC anticipates field testing CT DOTS in Birth to Three programs in 2019 and is collaborating with the Connecticut State Department of Education on supplementary guidance and professional development specific to implementation of CT DOTS with students receiving preschool special education services.

References

Goldstein, J. (2017). The Connecticut Documentation and Observation for Teaching System (CT DOTS):
    Instrument development and pilot report. Connecticut Office of Early Childhood.