



# ASSESSING AGENCY LEADERSHIP AND CAPACITY FOR PRESCHOOL POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

National Institute for Early Education Research  
June 2021

## About This Tool

<b>User:</b>	Administrators, Advocates
<b>Tool Description:</b>	This suite of tools is designed to support advocates and state systems leaders in examining the capacity of the lead agency and early learning staff to effectively implement preschool policy. Leaders can use this suite of tools to create a reflective process for systematically assessing key aspects of the agency and staff capacity that are critical to equitable and sustainable high-quality preschool.
<b>Tool Parts:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. State Capacity for Equitable Preschool Policy Development</li><li>2. Implications for Equitable Implementation of Preschool Policy</li><li>3. Resource Guide: Considerations for Implementation of Preschool Program standards</li><li>4. Action Plan Templates</li></ol>

## Introduction

In many states, early childhood advocates in partnership with state early childhood administrators have been highly successful in engineering and supporting preschool policies that improve access and quality and advance equity. To ensure that the policies are designed and implemented as intended, advocates and administrators need to consider the policies, resources and staff capacity necessary. NIEER has developed tools to assist in these efforts.





**[Tool 1—State Capacity for Equitable Preschool Policy Development](#)** poses a series of questions to assist State Teams in developing policies while thinking through the impacts on the organizational structure, authority and capacity of the State Early Learning System (SELS) and the Office of Early Learning (OEL).<sup>1</sup>

**[Tool 2—Implications for Equitable Implementation of Preschool Policy](#)** poses a series of questions to help users determine what is needed to implement the proposed preschool policies effectively and equitably.

Tools 1 and 2 can be used, separately or together, in whole or in part, to guide discussion among State Teams of diverse stakeholders including advocates, staff of the SELS or OEL, other partner State Agencies, community-based providers, Head Start, parents, special education, and higher education. The tools are meant to be used among partners with established and trusting relationships. State teams may want to engage a facilitator to help them work through the questions in the tool and to come to consensus over priorities, needs and next steps. The tools are very comprehensive to address the complexity of equitable policy implementation so will likely require multiple meetings of the team over a period of time. **Appendix A** includes a **[Resource Guide: Considerations for Implementation of Preschool Program Standards to Improve Quality](#)**. The Guide helps advocates work with others to consider and prepare for adoption of a particular set of rigorous program standards derived from the [NIEER Preschool Yearbook benchmarks to support quality and the Essential Elements of High Quality Preschool](#).

## Keys to Success in Using the Tools:

- ***Equity is Imperative:*** One of the primary purposes of using these tools is to ensure equitable access to quality early care and education programs. President Biden’s recent [Executive Order on Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities](#) may impact many of the federal funding streams supporting early childhood programs. Tool 1 includes an equity impact component, and all of the tools embed questions in each section to dig deeper into issues of equity. Stakeholders may want to engage in more intensive and systematic racial impact equity assessments. For example, Colorado has developed a [Universal Preschool Policy Discussion Guide](#) with a specific focus on equity. Additional resources on equity impact assessments are included at the end of this document.

***Relationships Matter:*** Ideally, a team of external stakeholders led by advocacy organizations would work with the leadership of the OEL to consider the questions that are relevant to the state context and agenda. The tool can be used as a joint-planning document by the identified group to help to increase understanding of each other’s perspectives and find common ground. The [Policy Development Process Guide](#) may be a useful resource in co-constructing the process to develop, revise or implement the policy.

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<sup>1</sup> The term Office of Early Learning (OEL) is used throughout this document to mean the state office(s) that have responsibility for early learning programs and initiatives for children aged birth-five, regardless of agency in which the office is located.



- **Flexibility is Key:** Users can select any part of the either tool or revise it as is most applicable to the policy proposal. You do not have to go through each element or each question. Use the tools in the way that best fits your needs. Tool 1 is best suited for the start of a process of identifying policy priorities to understand the issue and Tool 2 may be helpful to then come back to it again once the policy has moved forward. Users will likely engage with the tools over the course of 4-6 weeks with the help of a facilitator to guide the discussion.
- **Common Understanding is the Goal:** The tools are meant to facilitate a deeper understanding of the context and conditions that will impact the success of the policy proposal (e.g., there are no right or wrong answers) and facilitate a discussion of the strengths, opportunities, concerns and needs that might help to support the proposal.
- **Moving Forward Together:** This discussion will illuminate a series of action steps to identify what needs to be built into the policy proposal to facilitate effective implementation. As you develop the action plan you will want to focus on the actions that will have the biggest impact and consider short- mid- and long term strategies. In addition, it will be important to develop strategies to measure the impact of the policy to demonstrate results.

## Steps to Use the Tools

### Step One: Questions to Consider

- For each tool, the first section identifies “Questions to Consider” to elicit discussion among your state team. The questions posed are not exhaustive but are intended to raise awareness of some of the key issues to be considered regarding the proposed policy.

### Step Two: Assessing Current Status

- Next, your team will use the box to note key points as your team engages in discussion related to the current context, including strengths and opportunities, and concerns and needs.
- The final box within each component, “Action Steps,” provides space for your team to write initial action steps for each tool.

### Step Three: Long Term Action Plans

- State teams can then use the “Twelve Month Action Plan” provided to establish annual goals and a “Quarterly Action Plan Template” provided to set incremental steps to reach the annual plan goal.

**Appendix A Resource Guide:** Consideration for Implementation of Preschool Program Standards to Improve Quality. The guide can be used to supplement the discussion either during the use of tools or as a stand-alone resource to identify high-quality program standards, why they are important and potential issues for adoption. State teams can determine how they will address those potential issues.



## **Tool 1: State Capacity for Equitable Preschool Policy Development**

The State Capacity for Equitable Preschool Policy Development compiles a set of questions that early childhood leaders can use in determining whether current resources are adequate for the State Early Learning System (SELS) and the Office of Early Learning (OEL) to effectively implement a proposed preschool policy. The elements of a State Early Learning System vary by state context but typically include the state agency which will have primary authority to implement the proposal (e.g., the Department of Education) and other offices and state officials that oversee programs or funding which may influence the implementation of the policy (e.g., 619 Coordinator, Head Start Collaboration Director, Child Care Administrator, Child and Adult Care Food Program, Labor, Higher Education).

**Considering the Impact of Policy on the Public Agency System:** Below we identify four components of the SELS that should be considered in proposing policies that will rely on public agencies to be administered/managed. These are: (A) governance and authority; (B) racial equity; (C) commitment and alignment; (D) resources and capacity.

### **Questions for Discussion:**

#### **A. Governance and Authority - Consider the Following:**

- Does the person identified as the leader for implementation of the policy have the authority to make the necessary decisions?
- Will regulations or policy guidance be needed to implement this policy? Does the regulation change require approval or action at the state legislature or federal level?
- Are the structures in place at the state level for the following?
  - Shared governance and coordinated administration
  - Co-mingling of funds
  - Stakeholder advisory group

#### **B. Racial Equity - Consider the Following:<sup>2</sup>**

- What does the data say about how different racial and ethnic groups may be impacted by this policy?
  - How are there communities of color represented in the policy?
  - How are disparate outcomes for children of color and their families considered or impacted in the policy?

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<sup>2</sup> The questions in this section are adapted from the Race Equity Impact Assessment by the Center for the Study of Social Policy. Retrieved from <https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Race-Equity-Impact-Assessment-Tool.pdf>



- Are all racial and ethnic groups that are affected by the policy at the table? If not,
  - How are you engaging racial and ethnic minorities that will be impacted by this policy or practice change?
  - How are you engaging diverse representation from families, foster parents, service providers, and community members?
- How is the policy being developed in a way that is transparent and inclusive to a diverse array of stakeholders, including those not typically engaged? <sup>3</sup>

**C. Commitment and Alignment - Consider the Following:**

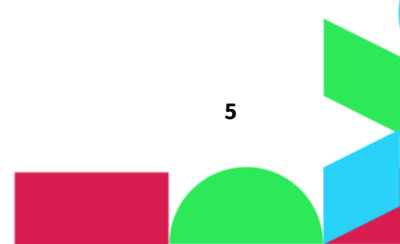
- Are leadership from all relevant state agencies supportive of this proposal?
- How do you know if relevant constituent groups (e.g. parents, program providers, community groups) are supportive of this proposal?
- How are Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) representatives included in these constituent groups?
- How does the proposal align with current state agencies and OEL goals and priorities?
- How might other initiatives enhance or compete with the proposed one?

**D. Resources and Capacity - Consider the Following:**

- What resources and infrastructure are necessary to support implementation of this policy? Examples to consider:
  - Is there sufficient workforce capacity/pipeline to implement this proposal?
  - Does the workforce adequately represent the population of children to be served (e.g., race, languages spoken)?
  - Are facilities and space adequate?
  - Is the data system capable of adding new data elements related to this policy?
- What other resources are necessary to support implementation of this policy at the state or local level?
  - Is there a well-established strategy to support continuous improvement at the local level?
  - Will this initiative require technical assistance to local recipients (providers)?
  - If yes, does the state agency need more staff or funding to contract for oversight and technical assistance?

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<sup>3</sup> Further information on racial equity impact assessments can be found in the Additional Tools box at the end of the document.





- How does the state collect data relevant to this proposal (e.g., on need, impact, access, equity, cost)?
  - Is there capacity for analyzing the data to track implementation and impacts on intended goals?
  - How will data be disaggregated by population sub-groups to monitor equitable access and population-specific services?

## **Tool 1: Current Status and Action Step Template**

Use this section to assess the strengths and opportunities that will affect the development of preschool policy. These might include gubernatorial support for preschool, additional state or federal funding that supports preschool expansion, strong relationships with key partners, and/or recent needs assessments that pinpoint specific needs related to preschool policy. Users can also identify areas of need, for example, need for more data on parents' preferences for preschool auspice or data on the workforce diversity or capacity. Concerns may include change in leadership that may not be invested in preschool program expansion or quality; insufficient compensation; and strategies to support the workforce.

Based on your review of the context and current status, the team can identify immediate and mid-term action steps. These will be utilized when developing the Twelve Month Action Plan in the final section of this document.

<b>CURRENT STATUS</b>	
<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>
<b>Needs</b>	<b>Concerns</b>
<b>ACTION STEPS: Given your responses to the questions posed, what action steps are indicated?</b>	



**ACTION STEPS:**

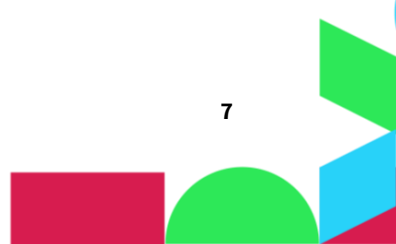
## **Tool 2—Implications for Implementation of Preschool Policy**

Tool 2 helps users discuss what is needed to implement and scale the proposal in a way that supports high quality programs that are equitable, efficient, and aligned/coherent across the early learning system. It can be considered a companion to the “State Capacity for Equitable Preschool Policy Implementation Review” to provide a deeper understanding of what is needed to effectively implement a proposed preschool policy. The elements of a State Early Learning System vary by state context but typically include the state agency which will have primary authority to implement the proposal (e.g., the Department of Education) and other offices and state officials that oversee programs or funding impact or influence the implementation of the policy (e.g., 619 Coordinator, Head Start Collaboration Director, Child Care Administrator, Child and Adult Care Food Program, Labor, Higher Education).

**Considering the Impact on Policy Implementation:** Below we identify four foundational functions of the early learning systems that are critical for successful policy implementation. These are: (A) Standards Program and Instructional Quality; (B) Resources to Ensure Teacher Competence; (C) Practices that Strengthen the Continuum of Learning; and (D) Systems to Equitably Manage Public Resources.

### **A. Standards for Program and Instructional Quality - Consider the Following:**

- How does this policy align with current program quality program standards, assessment requirements, and accountability systems for programs (e.g., accreditation, QRIS)?
  - How are differential impacts on children by race, ethnicity and ability being considered?
- How does this policy help to examine and use program and instructional quality to advance equity?
- How will supports for implementation of the program and instructional quality system consider differential needs of children, providers and communities?
- How does the policy support districts and providers to implement high quality curriculum for all young learners, birth to grade 3?
- How does this policy support the use of assessment tools for learning and program improvement? (e.g., including KEA, formative and other assessments of children, pre-K to grade 3)





**B. Resources to Support Teacher Competence and Compensation - Consider the Following:**

- How does this policy ensure a qualified teaching and leadership workforce in a supportive work environment?
- How does this policy ensure equitable opportunities to enhance the diversity of teachers and leaders?
- How does the policy support ensuring that requirements for teacher and leader credentials for preschool are consistently implemented across sectors?
- How does the policy support compensation parity for all teachers and leaders?
- How does the policy support access to high quality professional learning for all teachers and leaders, especially focusing on anti-bias teaching?
- How does the policy provide in-class and other supports to assist teacher improvement with specialized support for diverse needs of students?

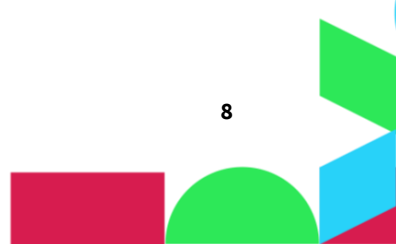
**C. Practices that Strengthen the Continuum of Learning – Consider the Following:**

- How does this policy foster a coherent system of learning across age and setting?
- How does this policy support the engagement of all, especially diverse and under-represented families in children’s learning with differentiated support based on family characteristics, strengths, needs and goals?
- How does this policy strengthen alignment across ages/grades, and sectors?
- How are cross-sector stakeholders (Head Start, child care, special education, etc.) who represent the community engaged in developing policy guidance and resources for implementation of this policy?

**D. Systems to Equitably Distribute Public Resources - Consider the Following:**

- How does the policy support equitable distribution of funding across all programs with special considerations for populations of students from low-income families, students of color, dual language learners and students with disabilities?
- How does the distribution of funds ensure adequate and equitable investment in communities of color?
- How does the funding set aside sustainable funds for adequate administrative supports (e.g., internal human resources and fiscal management support)?

How does the policy allow for or facilitate leveraging of existing resources, staff capacity or funding (blending/braiding)?







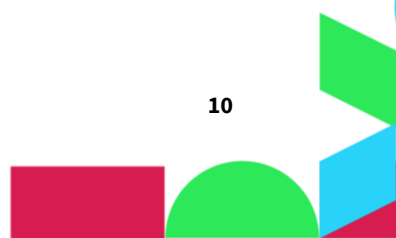
## Tool 2: Current Status and Action Step Template

- Use this section to assess the strengths and opportunities that will impact the development of preschool policy. These might include gubernatorial support for preschool, additional state or federal funding that supports preschool expansion, strong relationships with key partners, and/or recent needs assessments that pinpoint specific needs related to preschool policy. Users can also identify areas of need, for example, need for more data on parents' preferences for preschool auspice or data on the workforce diversity or capacity. Concerns may include change in leadership that may not be invested in preschool program expansion or quality; insufficient compensation; and strategies to support the workforce.
- Based on your review of the context and current status, the team can identify immediate and mid-term action steps. These will be utilized when developing the Twelve Month Action Plan in the final section of this document.

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<b>ACTION STEPS: Given your responses to the questions posed, what action steps are indicated?</b>	



**ACTION STEPS:**





## What's Next: Twelve Month Action Plan

Congratulations! You have invested a significant amount of time to thoughtfully and comprehensively understand the context and conditions upon which the proposed policy will be implemented. The next step is to consider what you have learned and prioritize your actions over the next twelve months (or more). Below, we offer two options to use as an action planning template.

**Looking over the data in the chart above to develop a Twelve Month Action Plan. Consider the following as you develop your action plan.**

What is the issue we are trying to resolve?

- What action steps need to be completed?
- Who will be responsible?
- What resources or information are needed to be successful?
- What strategies will you employ to mitigate the barriers or risks to successful implementation?
- How will you know if you are successful?

See below for an Action Plan Template.

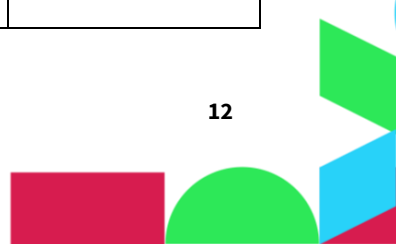


## Action Plan Template

**Lead and Team Member Names:**

**Project Period:**

Timeline	Action Steps	Who is responsible?	Resources or information needed?	Strategies to mitigate barriers or risks to implementation?	How will you know you were successful?
Q1 – within 3 months					
Q2 – within 6 months					
Q3 – within 9 months					





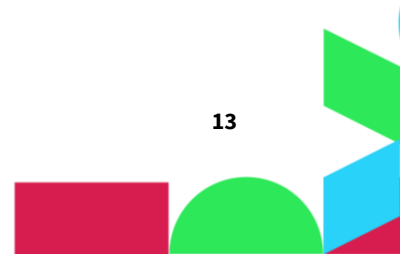
Q4 – within 12 months					

## Appendix A: Resource Guide: Considerations for Implementation of Preschool Program Standards to Improve Quality

The chart below helps advocates work with others to consider and prepare for adoption of a particular set of rigorous program standards. The program standards below are derived from the [NIEER Preschool Yearbook benchmarks to support quality](#) and the [Essential Elements of High Quality Preschool](#).

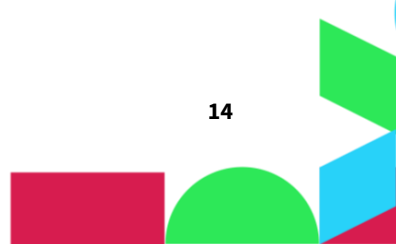
To use the tool, advocates should work with state agency ECE leadership to assess current and proposed program standards, discuss potential areas for strengthening the standards, and decide on a course of action. Often the major barrier to adopting rigorous standards is lack of political will especially since many of these require greater resources. Establishing consensus across a broad range of diverse stakeholders in advance can help ensure that the policies reflect broad and varied views of success by elevating the voices of marginalized communities.

Program Standard	Why It Matters	Potential Challenges to Adoption
Comprehensive early learning and development standards (ELDS) to guide teaching and assessment.	Programs need clear and appropriate goals explaining what children are expected to know and be able to do when they complete preschool. Curriculum, teaching and assessment should be closely aligned to ensure children make progress toward the standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- K-12 standards are strictly academic, making alignment difficult.</li> <li>-The process for establishing consensus among developmental experts, teachers , parents and representatives of all populations served takes time and resources.</li> <li>-Assessment tools are not well-articulated to the standards, are not psychometrically valid or are not valid for population served.</li> </ul>



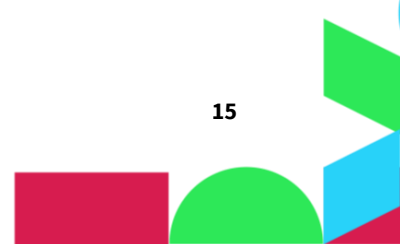


<p>Supports and guidance for choosing and using content-rich curriculum.</p>	<p>Programs should use curriculum designed to support young learners to meet ELDS across all domains and that are expressly developed to be appropriate for children from all of the populations served.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Few preschool programs implement appropriate curriculum resulting in inconsistent quality of teaching and learning across domains.</li> <li>-The process for establishing criteria for curriculum selection and ensuring that all populations served are reflected in the criteria will take time and resources.</li> </ul>
<p>Class size is limited to 20 or fewer with at least two adults</p>	<p>Effective preschool programs have small classes, enabling teachers to understand and address each child’s interests, needs and capabilities. Working with small groups allows teachers to offer more individualized attention, which results in better outcomes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Class size and ratio in child care licensing standards exceeds 20 and 1:10 ratio.</li> <li>-Meeting the policy would increase costs of the program.</li> <li>-Meeting the policy would create facilities and teacher shortages.</li> </ul>
<p>Lead teachers have a bachelor’s degree and specialized training for teaching preschool</p>	<p>Effective programs have teachers with higher education levels because they better understand how to teach young children in ways that are consistent with a child’s learning and development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Funding is insufficient to provide adequate pay and to support current teachers in obtaining credentials.</li> <li>-Concerns about maintaining and growing diversity in the teacher workforce.</li> <li>-The teacher licensure program does not provide adequate specialized knowledge of ECE.</li> <li>-Capacity of current higher education and professional development system to prepare enough teachers.</li> <li>-Data on the teacher pipeline is insufficient especially regarding teacher race, ethnicity and language facility.</li> </ul>
<p>Assistant teacher has a formalized entry level credential, such as the Child Development Associates</p>	<p>All members of a teaching team influence classroom quality, so assistants should hold at least an entry-level qualification for teaching young children.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Funding is insufficient to provide adequate pay and to support current assistant teachers in obtaining credentials.</li> <li>-Concerns about maintaining and growing diversity in the teacher workforce.</li> <li>-Capacity of the current system to prepare enough assistant teachers.</li> </ul>





<p>Ongoing professional learning (PL) for teachers and assistant teachers</p>	<p>Professional learning (PL), including coaching and other classroom support connected to curriculum implementation and informed by child and classroom assessments, produces effective learning experiences for children.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-No coordinated system to support professional learning over time exists.</li> <li>-PL is inconsistent across programs.</li> <li>- Funding is insufficient to staff in-class supports and other PL.</li> <li>- Qualified PL providers are not available.</li> <li>-Teachers do not have time in their day for PL and resources are not available to pay them.</li> </ul>
<p>Specialized supports are provided for teachers serving dual language learners and children with special needs.</p>	<p>Even highly qualified teachers and assistant teachers who receive substantive professional learning opportunities are often less knowledgeable and effective in serving dual language learners and children with disabilities. When teachers are provided with specialized supports, they learn to infuse their teaching and interactions with effective methods.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-There is often a lack of expertise and experience throughout the ECE system which makes focusing on these populations more difficult.</li> <li>-Teachers and assistants with specialized qualifications may be hard to identify, recruit and retain.</li> <li>- Limited data are available about the expertise of current teachers.</li> <li>-Specialized PL and coaches are scarce and additional resources are not available.</li> </ul>
<p>Screenings for vision, hearing, health and development concerns with referrals to services or further assessment.</p>	<p>Screening for health and development issues helps ensure the health, development and well-being of children and prevents later costly services for some.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Providers lack access to specialists qualified in some screening tools, lack access to the results of some screenings or lack training to conduct and act on screening information.</li> <li>-Screening information may be collected, but referrals are not always provided.</li> <li>-Screening tools are not psychometrically sound or are not valid for the populations served.</li> </ul>
<p>Continuous quality improvement system</p>	<p>System to assess program quality used at the classroom, site, agency and state level to guide improvement and inform program practices and state policies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The QRIS is seen as the comprehensive CQI but is not used system-wide and is not designed to assess Pre-K standards. Current QRIS system does not demonstrate long-term impact.</li> <li>- A comprehensive CQI is costly to develop, implement, analyze and use.</li> </ul>





<p>Periodic or annual program evaluation</p>	<p>Well-designed program evaluations provide both formative and summative information for critical audiences, including teachers, administrators, elected officials, parents and the public at large. Designed correctly, the evaluation can provide insight on when and how the program is effective and for whom, leading to increased political and public will and equitable, effective programs for all subgroups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Lack of funding and prevailing belief that all funding should go to direct service.</li><li>-Concerns about the validity of many existing measures for the population being assessed.</li><li>-Lack of expertise in sound research design.</li><li>-Concerns about the evaluation being “high-stakes” leading to programs losing funding.</li><li>- Comprehensive data on program sites and children served are limited or not available for informing the research design.</li></ul>
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## ADDITIONAL TOOLS

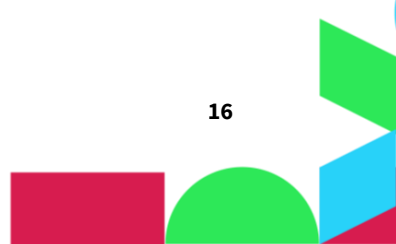
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