

Well Begun is Half Done: Helping Children Succeed in School

Samuel J. Meisels

Erikson Institute

smeisels@erikson.edu



**What Does Quality
Look Like in Early
Care and Education?**

Quality in Early Care and Education

Parameters of quality include the following:

- **Low child/staff ratios**
- **Training in early childhood development**
- **Continuing professional development**
- **Developmentally appropriate practices**
- **Continuity in caregivers**
- **Safe, caring environment and strong parent involvement**

Impact of Quality on Development

- ***Structural Attributes:***

Turnover, wages, education, prof. development, group size, ratios

- ***Dynamic Attributes:***

Staff continuity, verbal environment, emotional support and cognitive enrichment, staff responsiveness, developmentally appropriate practice

The Domains of Early Childhood Pedagogy

Cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development are complementary, mutually supportive areas of growth all requiring active attention in the preschool years. . . All are therefore related to early learning and later academic achievement. . .

Eager to Learn, p. 307

Heart Start

Characteristics of Children Who Are Ready To Learn



- **Confidence**
- **Curiosity**
- **Intentionality**
- **Self-control**
- **Relatedness**
- **Capacity to communicate**
- **Cooperativeness**



**Does High-Stakes
Testing in Early
Childhood Improve
Quality?**

Tests are not perfect
A test score is not an
exact measure of a
student's knowledge or
skills.

High Stakes (National Research Council, 1999, p. 3)

Purpose of the National Reporting System

- To enhance local aggregation of child outcome data and local program self-assessment efforts;
- To enable the Head Start Bureau and ACF Regional Offices to plan training and technical assistance efforts;
- To incorporate child outcome information into future Head Start program monitoring reviews.

“The National Reporting System is a key process in establishing a practical quality assurance system for Head Start.”

**-- Craig Ramey, Chair, NRS
Technical Work Group**

“What we are trying to bring to Head Start is not different from what you encounter when you buy a car....”

**-- Craig Ramey, Chair, NRS
Technical Work Group**

**“If schools were
factories, America
would have solved the
education problem a
century ago.”**

-- Malcolm Gladwell, *The New Yorker*

***High-Stakes: Testing For Tracking,
Promotion, and Graduation***
(National Academy of Sciences, 1999)

- **In general, large-scale assessments should not be used to make high-stakes decisions about students who are less than 8 years old or enrolled below grade 3.**

High-Stakes Testing In Early Childhood

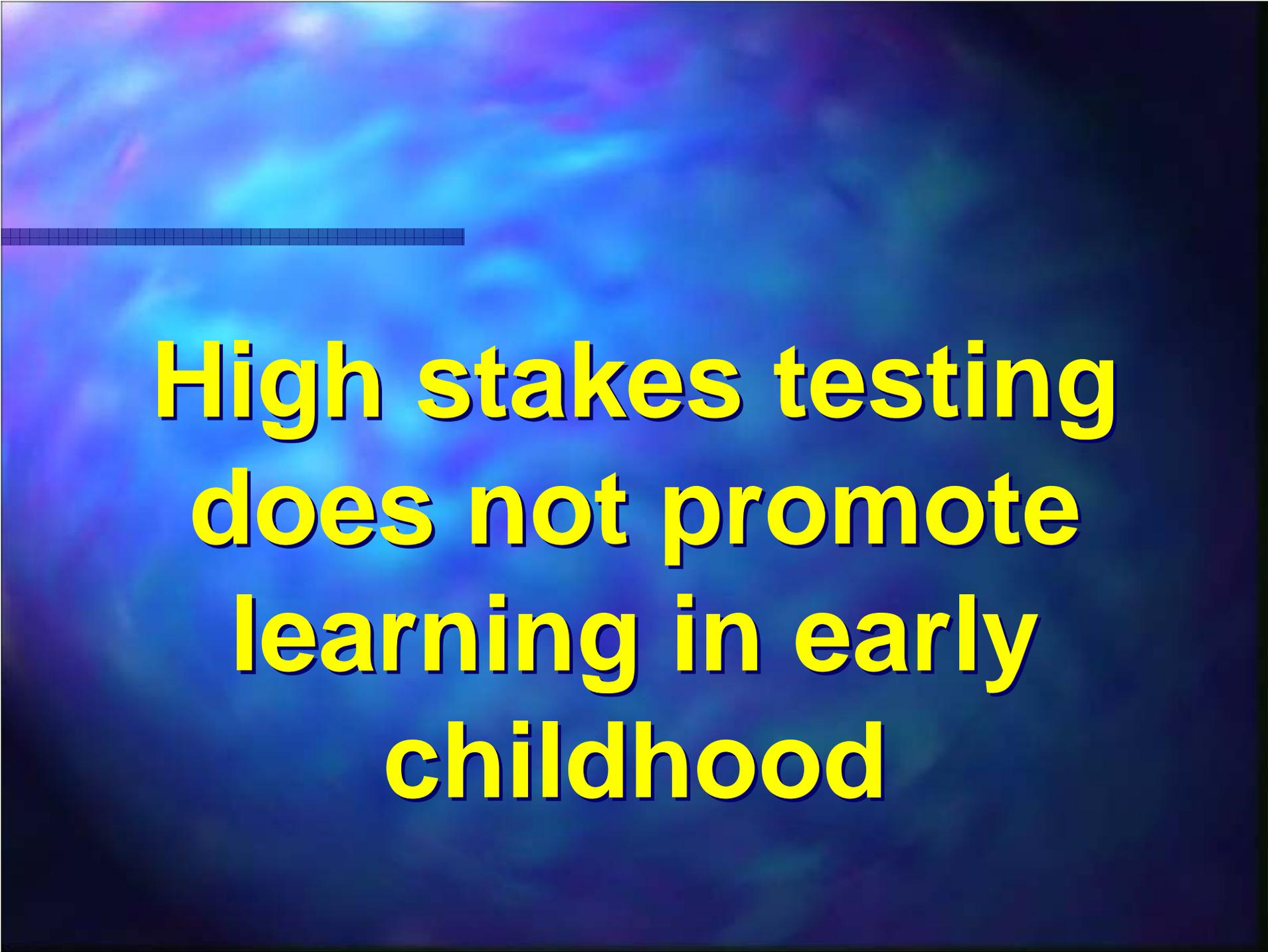
(Eager To Learn, 2001)

- **Assessments used for purposes external to the classroom, rather than to improve practice, place a heavy burden on the assessments and the adults responsible for them.**
- **Tests used for high-stakes purposes must not be mistaken for statements about the learning trajectory of individual children.**

Right of Parents to Refuse Permission for NRS

“If parents do not want their 4 or 5 year old child to participate [in the NRS] then the child will not participate. However, parents should be well informed and understand that the individual names of children will NOT be used and that individual results of children will not be reported.”

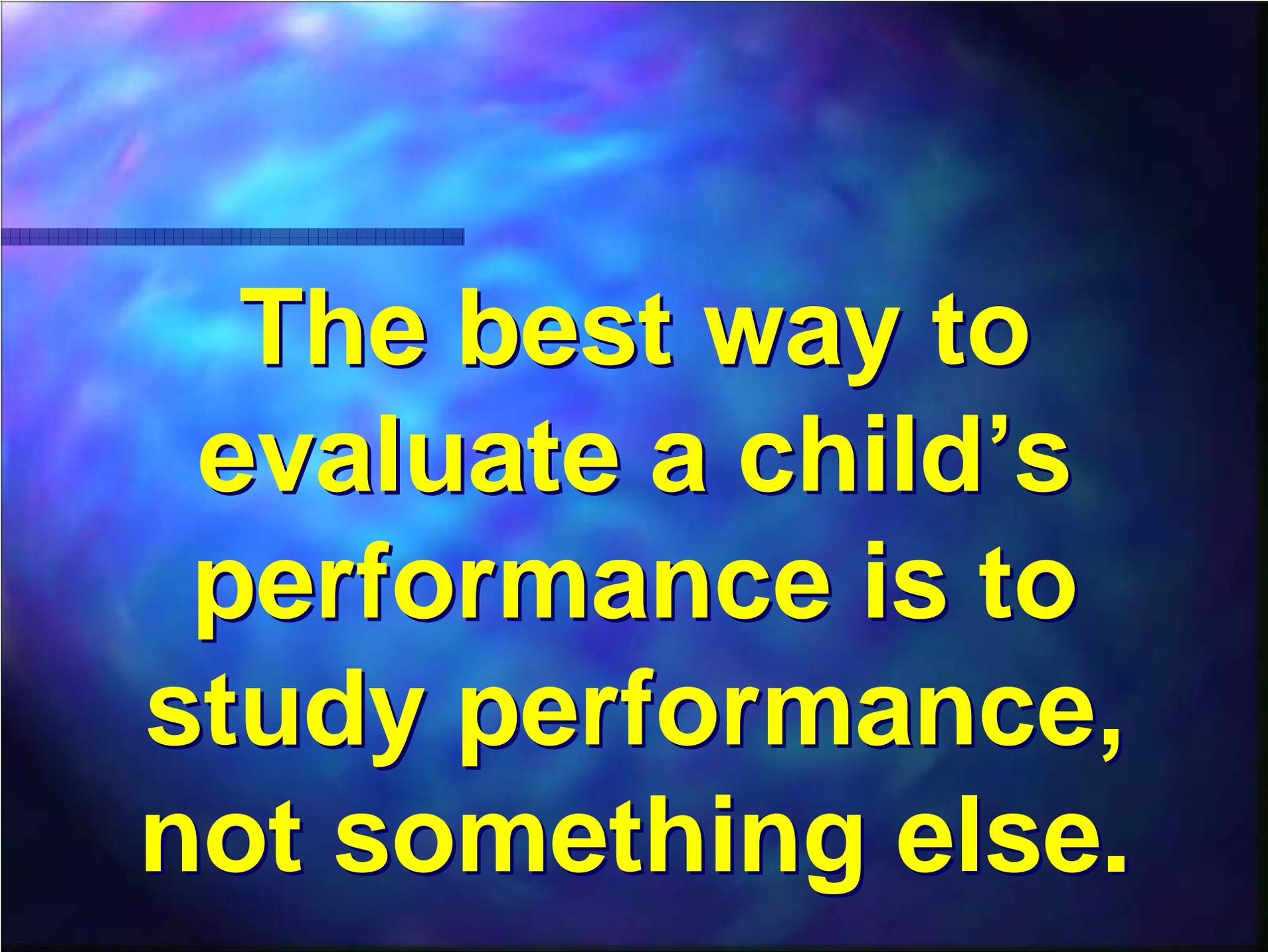
ACF, June 23, 2003



**High stakes testing
does not promote
learning in early
childhood**

Problems with School Readiness Tests

- **Early development is episodic and uneven**
- **Social knowledge components are typically culturally-biased**
- **The concept of “readiness” is relative**
- **Test items often imply teaching**
- **Content is inconsistent with teachers’ views of school success**
- **Validity of the tests is poor**



**The best way to
evaluate a child's
performance is to
study performance,
not something else.**

Assessment Defined

The process of obtaining information for the purpose of making evaluative decisions

Our Challenge

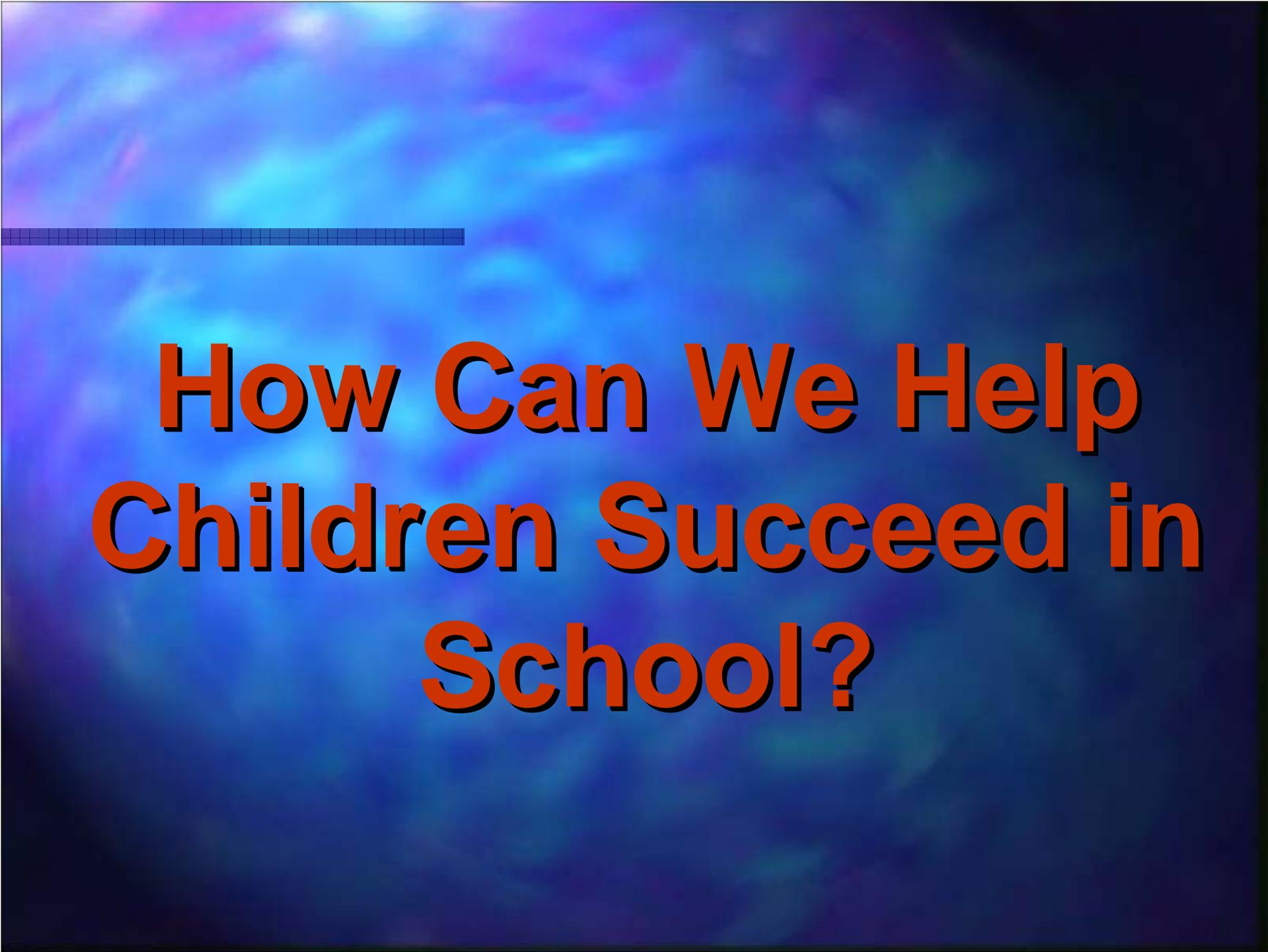
**To transform
assessment information
into meaningful
intervention and
instruction**

Observational Assessment

Assessments based on systematic observations of children performing tasks that are part of their daily experience.

Curriculum-Embedded Assessments

**Assessments based on
children's typical
classroom performance.**



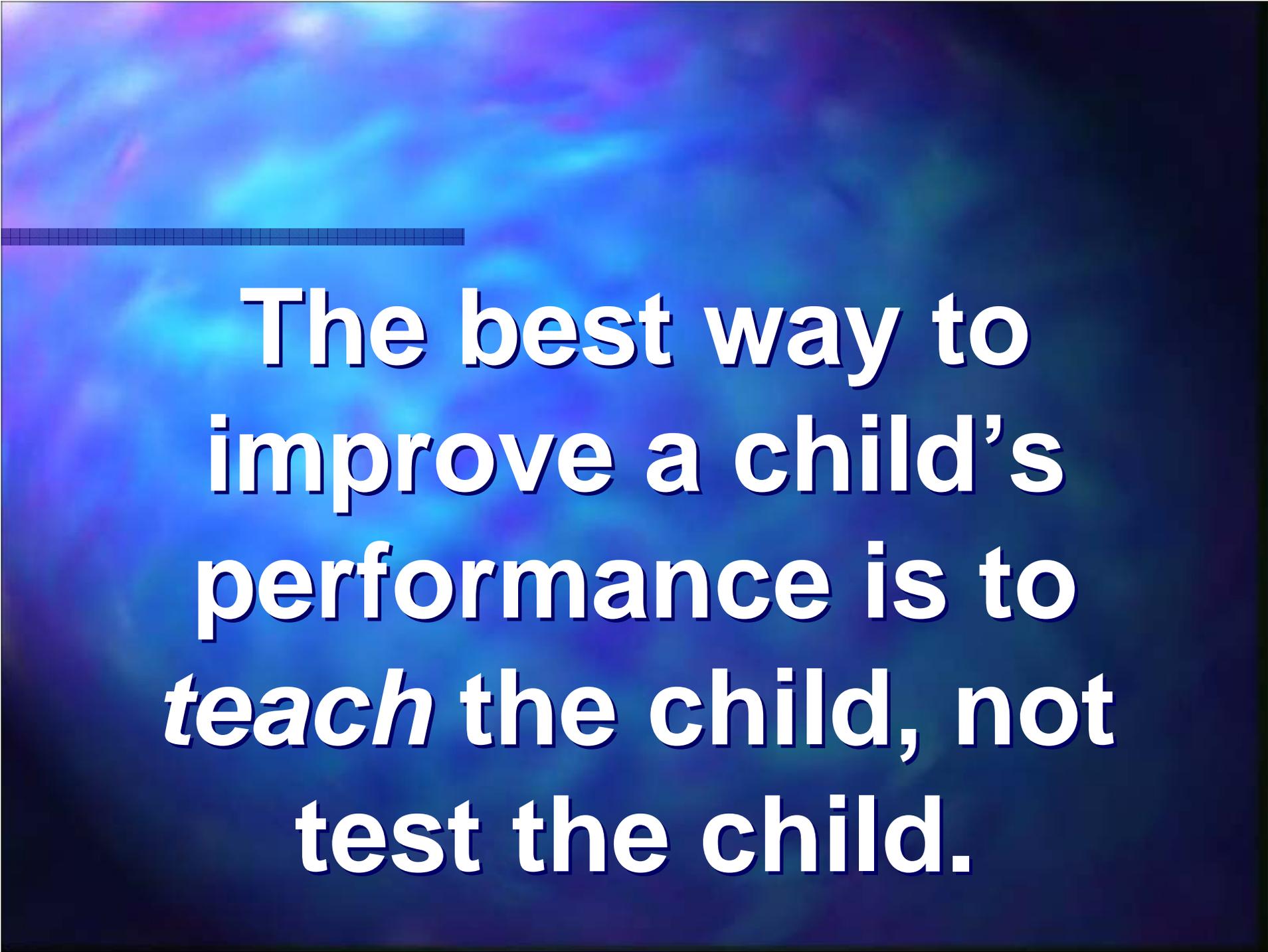
**How Can We Help
Children Succeed in
School?**

How the Outcomes Framework Can Help Children Succeed - 1

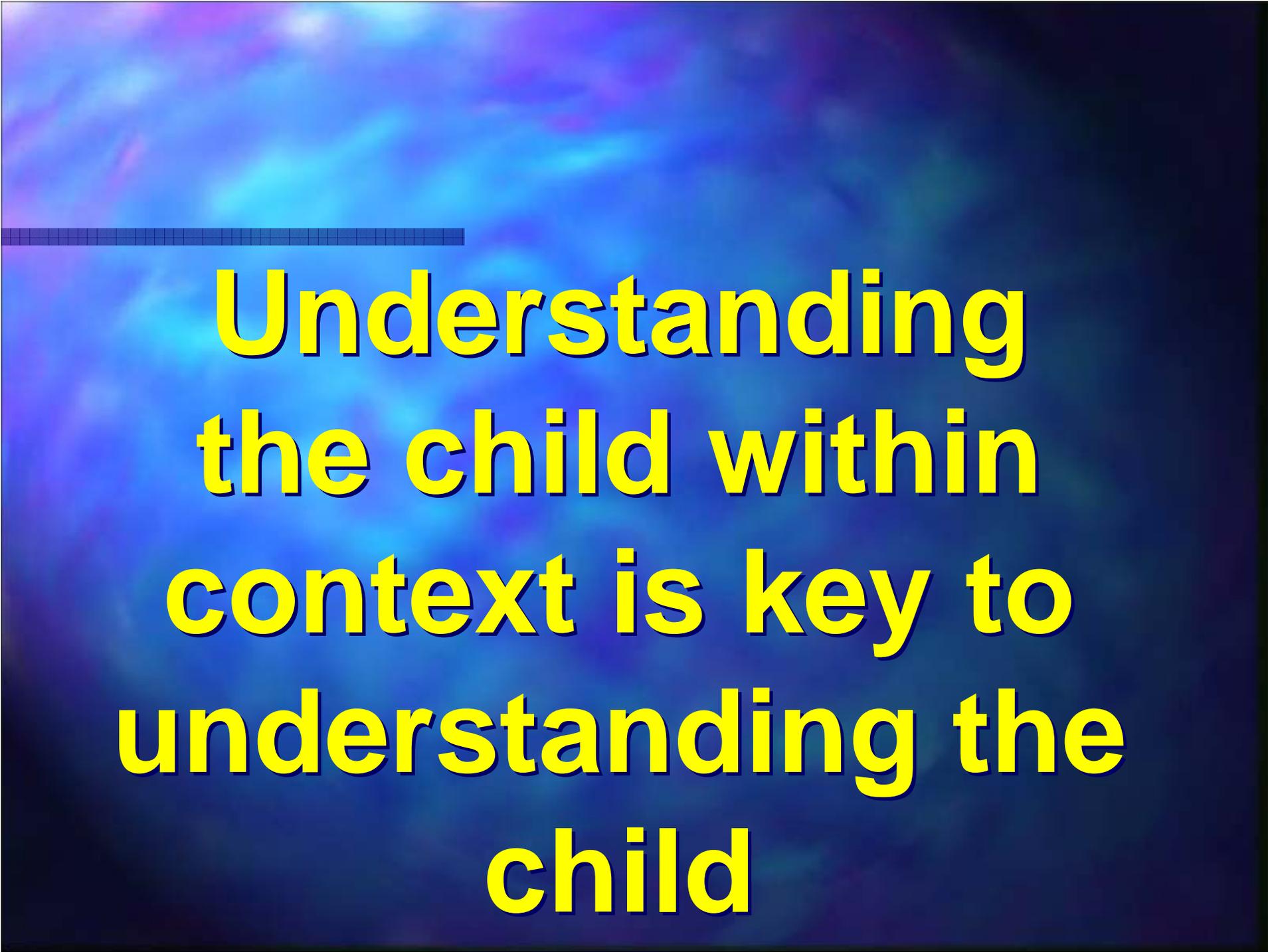
- **Focuses on all areas of development including socio-emotional, in addition to cognition;**
- **Suggests instructional approaches that are varied, balanced, and meet the needs of individual children;**

How the Outcomes Framework Can Help Children Succeed - 2

- **Based on assumption that “Readiness for School” applies to the child, family, school, and community—
—not only to the child;**
- **Represents an approach to assessment that has the potential to enhance teaching and improve learning.**



**The best way to
improve a child's
performance is to
teach the child, not
test the child.**



**Understanding
the child within
context is key to
understanding the
child**

Well Begun is Half Done

The importance of early childhood for the intellectual, social, and emotional growth of human beings is probably . . . one of the most revolutionary discoveries of modern times. . . . where emotional and mental growth are concerned, well begun is indeed half done.

Jerome Bruner, 1980