



Screen all students for potential reading problems at the beginning of the year and again in the middle of the year; regularly monitor the progress of students who are at elevated risk for developing reading disabilities



Educator teams should set up a universal screening system, using effective screening measures, to address reading and reading-related skills appropriate for each grade level. These screenings will help determine the appropriate level of the response to intervention (RTI) / multitiered support system (MTSS) program for each student. Most programs will have three tiers:

- Tier 1 instruction is generally defined as reading instruction provided to all students in a class.
- Tier 2 interventions are provided only to students who demonstrate problems based on screening measures or weak progress from regular classroom instruction. These students receive supplemental, small-group reading instruction aimed at building foundational reading skills.
- Tier 3 (and above for MTSS) interventions are provided to students who do not progress after a reasonable amount of time with the tier 2 intervention and usually entail one-on-one tutoring with a mix of instructional interventions.

How to carry out the recommendation

1. Create a building-level team to facilitate the implementation of universal screening and progress monitoring.
2. Select a set of efficient screening measures that identify children at risk for poor reading outcomes with reasonable accuracy.
3. Use benchmarks or growth rates (or a combination of the two) to identify children at low, moderate, or high risk for developing reading difficulties.

Potential roadblocks

1. It is too hard to establish district-specific benchmarks.
2. Universal screening falsely identifies too many students.
3. Some students might get “stuck” in a particular tier.
4. Some teachers place students in tutoring when they are only one point below the benchmark.

Reference: Gersten, R., Compton, D., Connor, C. M., Dimino, J., Santoro, L., Linan-Thompson, S., & Tilly, W. D. (2008). *Assisting students struggling with reading: Response to Intervention and multi-tier intervention for reading in the primary grades* (NCEE 2009-4045). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/3>



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How to carry out the recommendation

1. Create a building-level team to facilitate the implementation of universal screening and progress monitoring.

The team may consist of administrators, teachers, specialists such as special education or literacy staff, and para professionals. This team will not only administer the assessments but also monitor progress. This team should also assist with substantive issues, such as setting appropriate benchmarks. Although schools can develop their own benchmarks, preferably they should begin with guidelines from national databases.

2. Select a set of efficient screening measures that identify children at risk for poor reading outcomes with reasonable accuracy.

As children develop, different aspects of reading or reading-related skills become most appropriate to use as screening measures (see table below). Research isn't clear about precisely which one skill is best to assess at each grade level so the recommendation is to use two screening measures at each screening point. The measures below do not need to be stand-alone and can be subtests of larger tests. Note that no vocabulary measures are included because none were found to be research validated.

Measure	Recommended grade levels	Proficiencies assessed	Purpose	Limitations
Letter naming fluency	K–1	Letter name identification and the ability to rapidly retrieve abstract information	Screening	Poor for progress monitoring since students learn to associate letters with sounds; not valid for English learners in kindergarten, but seems valid for grade 1
Phoneme Segmentation	K–1	Phonemic awareness	Screening and progress monitoring	Problematic for measuring progress in the second semester of grade 1; as students learn to read, they seem to focus less on phonemic skills and more on decoding strategies
Nonsense word fluency	1	Proficiency and automaticity with basic phonics rule	Screening and progress monitoring	Limited to very simple words and does not tap ability to read irregular or multisyllabic words
Word identification	1–2	Word reading	Screening and progress monitoring	Addresses many of the limitations of nonsense word fluency by including multisyllabic and irregular words
Oral reading fluency (also called passage reading fluency)	1–2	Reading connected text accurately and fluently	Screening and progress monitoring	Cannot give a full picture of reading proficiency despite moderately strong criterion-related validity; many students will score close to zero at the beginning of grade 1, but it is a reasonable predictor of end-of-year reading performance

Note. Adapted from page 13 of the practice guide referenced on the first page of this document.

Page 14 of the practice guide provides guidance on reliability and validity considerations for selected measures. Additionally, schools should consider cost, both in time and personnel.

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- 3. Use benchmarks or growth rates (or a combination of the two) to identify children at low, moderate, or high risk for developing reading difficulties.** Use cut-points, based on predictive validity studies or create your own using guidance from national databases, to distinguish between students likely to obtain satisfactory and unsatisfactory reading proficiency at the end of the year without additional assistance. The RTI/MTSS team will then use the benchmarks to assign students to a tier for a determined period of time, before assessing progress.

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Potential roadblocks and how to address them

Roadblock	Suggested Approach
<i>It is too hard to establish district-specific benchmarks.</i>	Utilize national benchmarks. These have been standardized on large samples and therefore are appropriate for use. Over time, a district may decide to adapt these for the local context, but it should not “start from scratch.”
<i>Universal screening falsely identifies too many students.</i>	Cut-points that accurately identify 100 percent of the children at risk also may include a sizeable group of children who will develop normal reading skills. Use universal screening measures to liberally identify a pool of children that, through progress monitoring methods, can be further refined to those most at risk. Frequent progress checks will quickly move students who are doing well out of the support system.
<i>Some students might get “stuck” in a particular tier.</i>	Use decision rules and frequently reassess so that students move fluidly and receive the correct intensity of instruction. Some students may need to remain at a given tier for longer than others because they need that level of instruction and not necessarily because they are “stuck.”
<i>Some teachers place students in tutoring when they are only one point below the benchmark.</i>	No measure is perfectly reliable, so when a student’s score falls slightly below or above a cutoff score, districts and schools should review the assessment’s technical manual to determine the confidence interval for each benchmark score. If a student’s score falls within the confidence interval, either conduct an additional assessment of that student or monitor his or her progress for a period of six weeks to determine the need for additional assistance.



For more information on the research evidence and references to support this recommendation, or for more detailed explanation from the What Works Clearinghouse committee who developed this recommendation, please refer to the practice guide cited at the bottom of the first page of this document.