

This document provides a summary of Recommendation 1 from the WWC practice guide *Effective Literacy and English Language Instruction for English Learners in the Elementary Grades*. Full reference at the bottom of this page.



Screen for reading problems and monitor progress



Districts should administer early reading formative assessments, in English, to English learners, regardless of the learner's English oral proficiency. Assessments should measure phonological processing, letter knowledge, and word and text reading. Districts should use the assessment data to better identify English learners who may require additional support in gaining reading proficiency.

How to carry out the recommendation

1. Districts should establish procedures for—and provide training for—schools to screen English learners for reading problems. The same measures and assessment approaches can be used with English learners and native English speakers.
2. Depending on resources, districts should consider collecting progress monitoring data more than three times a year for English learners at risk for reading problems.
3. Data from screening and progress monitoring assessments should be used to make decisions about the instructional support English learners need to learn to read.
4. Schools with performance benchmarks in reading in the early grades can use the same standards for English learners and for native English speakers to make adjustments in instruction when progress is insufficient.
5. Provide training on how teachers are to use formative assessment data to guide instruction.

Potential roadblocks

1. Some teachers believe that reading problems may resolve themselves once English learners develop proficiency in oral English. So, they are hesitant to refer these students for additional assistance or to provide intensive instruction in foundational areas of beginning reading.
2. Some teachers may feel that it is unfair to test a child in a language that she or he does not understand.
3. Some teachers may feel that native language assessments are more valid than English language measures for this group of students.
4. Districts should anticipate that schools will have a tendency to view data collection as the terminal goal of conducting formative assessments, especially early in the process.
5. In districts that have the same early reading goals and standards for English learners and non-English learners, it is likely that the current performance of many English learners will be below these standards.
6. Teachers may focus too much on what is tested—phonemic skills, decoding ability, and oral reading fluency—and neglect instruction in comprehension and vocabulary.



Reference: Gersten, R., Baker, S. K., Shanahan, T., Linan-Thompson, S., Collins, P., & Scarcella, R. (2007). *Effective literacy and English language instruction for English learners in the elementary grades* (NCEE 2007-4011). 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/6>



How to carry out the recommendation

- 1. Districts should establish procedures for—and provide training for—schools to screen English learners for reading problems. The same measures and assessment approaches can be used with English learners and native English speakers.**

Districts should have a process for screening all English learners to ensure they are making adequate progress in reading. Early reading assessments, administered in English, can be used to effectively screen English learners for reading problems, regardless of the students' level of oral proficiency in English. Assessing foundational areas of early reading—such as phonological processing, alphabet knowledge, phonics, and word reading skills—at the middle or end of kindergarten can predict later reading performance in all areas, including word reading, oral reading fluency, and reading comprehension.

- 2. Depending on resources, districts should consider collecting progress monitoring data more than three times a year for English learners at risk for reading problems. The severity of the problem should dictate how often progress is monitored—weekly or bi-weekly for students at high risk of reading problems.**

- 3. Data from screening and progress monitoring assessments should be used to make decisions about the instructional support English learners need to learn to read.**

Data from formative assessments should be used to customize the reading and English language development (or ESL) interventions students receive. Interventions should align with the core reading program.

- 4. Schools with performance benchmarks in reading in the early grades can use the same standards for English learners and for native English speakers to make adjustments in instruction when progress is insufficient. It is the opinion of the panel that schools should not consider below-grade-level performance in reading as “normal” or something that will resolve itself when oral language proficiency in English improves.**

Using identical standards to assess English learners and native English speakers may result in a higher percentage of English learners being identified as having difficulty in reading. These results do not indicate that these students have disabilities but do recognize that English learners may need extra support in reading because they are also learning a new language. Additional reading supports should be aligned directly with the student's needs as indicated through a valid and reliable diagnostic assessment. Formative and diagnostic tools are available online or from commercial developers.

- 5. Provide training on how teachers are to use formative assessment data to guide instruction.**

Formative assessment data should be used to determine which students are not making sufficient progress. The data can then be used to modify reading instruction. A school team of teachers should be trained to examine data, identify which students are at risk, and develop a customized support plan for each student. Where available, reading coaches should play a key role when developing customized support plans.

Potential roadblocks and how to address them

Roadblock	Suggested Approach
<p><i>Some teachers believe that reading problems may resolve themselves once English learners develop proficiency in oral English. So, they are hesitant to refer these students for additional assistance or to provide intensive instruction in foundational areas of beginning reading.</i></p>	<p>Districts should develop and distribute materials stating that English oral language proficiency has no direct correlation with difficulty reading. Reviewing local data may help support research findings.</p>
<p><i>Some teachers may feel that it is unfair to test a child in a language that she or he does not understand.</i></p>	<p>Phonological awareness does not require students to know the meaning of words, only the letter sounds used to build the words. Offering the opportunity to practice words from other languages can demonstrate transferability of this skill.</p> <p>Students must understand what they are being asked to do. Therefore, provide ample opportunities for students to complete practice questions. When possible, provide administrative instructions in the child’s native language.</p>
<p><i>Some teachers may feel that native language assessments are more valid than English language measures for this group of students.</i></p>	<p>Formative early reading assessments are valid when used with English learners because they focus on foundational skills, such as phonological awareness, which is a skill common to all languages. If available, data from additional testing in a child’s native language could result in a deeper understanding of the student’s overall reading skills.</p>
<p><i>Districts should anticipate that schools will have a tendency to view data collection as the terminal goal of conducting formative assessments, especially early in the process.</i></p>	<p>Remember the goal of data collection is to identify students who need additional support to gain reading proficiency. Ongoing diagnostic assessments are used to develop intervention plans and monitor student progress.</p>
<p><i>In districts that have the same early reading goals and standards for English learners and non-English learners, it is likely that the current performance of many English learners will be below these standards.</i></p>	<p>A high number does not indicate a concern about student disability. Rather, it acknowledges that these students may need extra support in reading because they are also learning a new language.</p>
<p><i>Teachers may focus too much on what is tested—phonemic skills, decoding ability, and oral reading fluency— and neglect instruction in comprehension and vocabulary.</i></p>	<p>Be purposeful when building reading supports and curriculum to prioritize both foundational skills and overall comprehension.</p>



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.