

SECTION IV

Universal Screening

Purpose

The main purpose of a screening instrument is to identify students whose performance on the measure warrants further investigation. Screening is only intended to predict which students are likely to fail to reach grade level expectations given their current progress. It does not directly result in diagnosis of student needs. Due to measurement error, it is important to cast a rather wide net to capture potentially at-risk students and then to look further to determine their needs for additional instructional assistance.

–National Research Center on Learning Disabilities

School and district teams should collaboratively select universal screening tools for each academic or behavior area and train school personnel in consistent administration, scoring, and interpretation of results.

Characteristics of Universal Screening

Screening measures should be:

- **Reliable.** Tests are constructed to obtain consistent results; administration and scoring is standardized to increase reliability.
- **Valid.** Universal screening should have high predictive validity: they accurately predict which students are likely to fail to obtain grade level expectations without intervention to spoil these predictions of progress.
- **Easy to administer, score, and interpret** so that results are obtained quickly. Since the purpose of screening is to determine which students warrant further investigation and to provide responsive instruction, screening tools must provide results quickly so that additional assessment to diagnose academic strengths and needs can proceed in a timely manner.
- **Triangulated with data from other sources**, such as teacher observations, school-level assessments, and district-level assessments.

Uses of Universal Screening Data

It is important that the limitations of universal screening data are well-understood by school and district teams in order to determine appropriate use of these data. If a quick-to-administer-and-score instrument is chosen purely for its predictive characteristics, the RTI team must be careful not to over-interpret results. Most universal screenings are not intended to be diagnostic, nor are they constructed to reflect curriculum or detect slight changes in performance. Universal screening is merely the first step in determining who is likely to need additional assistance to reach grade level performance expectations.

By administering a universal screening in fall, midyear and winter, the team should be able to determine the following:

- approximate rates of growth from fall to winter, winter to spring, and fall to spring for individual students, classes, and grade levels;
- which students may need further assessment; and
- general progress toward goals for teachers, grade levels, schools, and district.

Data gathered from universal screening should be depicted in graph and/or narrative forms that are easily interpreted by the following:

- teachers for classroom and student performance,
- principals for classroom, grade, and school performance,
- district RTI leadership team members for district performance, and
- parents for individual student performance.

The following information provides recommended steps, considerations, and guidelines for completing effective universal screening within the RTI framework.

District and School Leadership Team Decisions

Establish an RTI District and School-based Leadership Team to review, select, and plan for the use of Universal Screening Measures:

- The team should consist of members who represent various positions and types of expertise across subject areas.
- The district-level team may elect to require certain fixed measures across all schools in order to have comparison data that are consistent for students who transfer within district.
- The school-level team may consider using additional measures specific to its school's needs.
- Selected universal screening tools need to reflect state and district academic standards and be appropriate for selected grade levels and subjects to be assessed.

Resources

The National Center on Response to Intervention provides an array of resources for planning and implementing an RTI system. The Center recently added a Screening Tools Chart to provide information for use in reviewing and selecting universal screening. The chart can be found at http://www.rti4success.org/tools_charts/screening.php. The Center's mission is to provide technical assistance to states and districts and to build the capacity of states to assist districts in implementing proven models for Response to Intervention and Early Intervention Services.

The National Research Center on Learning Disabilities is another good resource for information about universal screening. In particular, Sections 1 and 5 from their RTI Manual will be helpful to school teams in selecting and using universal screening tools. These are available at the following web addresses: http://www.nrcl.org/rti_manual/pages/RTIManualSection1.pdf http://www.nrcl.org/rti_manual/pages/RTIManualSection5.pdf

The What Works Clearinghouse was established in 2002 by the [Institute of Education Sciences](#) at the U.S. Department of Education to provide educators, policymakers, researchers, and the public with a central and trusted source of scientific evidence about "what works" in education. The WWC offers a range of publications on a array of topics including beginning reading, early childhood education, adolescent literacy, English Language Learners, students with learning disabilities, and elementary, middle, and high school math.

The WWC has evaluated beginning reading interventions for students in grades K-3 that meet their strict evidence standards. For reviews of interventions for beginning reading designed to improve alphabetic, fluency, comprehension, and general reading achievement, see <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/Topicarea.aspx?tid=01>. Note that the WWC limits their reviews to empirical studies conducted by third parties using quantitative methods and inferential statistical analysis that take the form of a randomized controlled trial, or use a regression-discontinuity design, a quasi-experimental design, or a single-subject design. Studies are required to focus on student outcomes, and include at least one relevant outcome that demonstrates adequate face validity or reliability. For a full explanation of their review criteria, see <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/references/idocviewer/Doc.aspx?docId=27&tocId=2#studies>.

Professional Development

- The school team responsible for administration of the universal screening measures throughout the year will attend formal training provided at the school or district level. This will ensure reliability of administration.
- Members who will analyze data need specific training at the school or district level in order to make decisions and effectively communicate results.
- The school and/or district should provide ongoing professional development and consultation regarding universal screening measures and analysis throughout the year.

Considerations

1. Universal screening requires organization of materials and personnel. To increase efficiency, administrators should assign a staff member to manage screening three times yearly.
2. Universal screening measures may be administered by teachers or a team of school personnel (e.g., guidance counselors, administrators, curriculum coaches, school psychologists, etc.). When teachers administer the measures, they are more likely to increase their understandings and participation in collaborative decision-making, problem-solving, and communication. In addition, students who are familiar with test administrators often perform more reliably than they do with someone they do not know.
3. Schools should consider the materials required to complete assessments including copying, timers, clipboards, desks/chairs, areas for screening, etc.
4. The school team should define a uniform period for testing (e.g., a two-week window of opportunity) for each test administration. This ensures that school-wide screening is completed within a consistent time frame and affords more reliable results and comparisons.

5. Universal screening data should be collected and managed. Usually this is accomplished electronically by entering data into a spreadsheet or a commercially-available program.
6. Parental permission is not required for universal screenings; however, schools may want to consider sharing student performance with parents if this data is helpful.
7. Parents should be notified if their child is recommended for Tier II or III instruction. Families should be included in the RTI process on an ongoing basis. The school should ensure that processes are in place to communicate with parents regularly and should provide help and suggestions for parents for ways they can support and encourage their students at home.

Analyze Data from Universal Screening Measures

School- and/or district-level leadership teams will need to define criteria and decision rules regarding identification of at-risk students in one of the following methods:

1. Norm-based measures compare a student's performance to a normalized sample using standardized scores such as percentiles or National Curve Equivalent (NCE) scores. For norm-based measures, the school team should set cut scores to identify at-risk students as those below a particular percentile score or NCE.
2. Criterion-based measures provide specific cut scores to determine at-risk skills. For example, a student reading below x number of words per minute in the fall would be identified as at-risk.

For more information regarding universal screening decisions, standards, tools and case examples consult the following sites:

http://www.nrcl.org/rti_manual/pages/RTIManualSection1.pdf

http://www.nrcl.org/rti_manual/pages/RTIManualSection5.pdf

Screening measures should never be used in isolation to identify at-risk students, as any tool provides only an estimate of student performance. No measurement tool is free of error, so an individual's performance is easily over- or under-estimated. For this reason, universal screening data should serve only as a starting place in determining whether additional intervention is indicated.

When screening indicates a group of students who are likely to be unsuccessful in reaching grade level expectations, further assessment is required to confirm and extend these results. Additional assessments should be chosen to gather information about each student's particular strengths and needs in order to determine how to select from among possible courses of action and to appropriately match the student with an intervention likely to be effective in changing the current trajectory of progress. Triangulating multiple (at least three) sources of data (e.g., teacher observations, student work samples, formative and diagnostic assessments, or screening tools built into intervention programs) improves the reliability of decision-making regarding the identification of at-risk students.

Based on fall screening, the school will identify students in need or substantial intervention, less intensive intervention, and in many cases, differentiated supplemental instruction in the regular classroom. Universal screening allows the school to determine which students need more careful monitoring. Students significantly below grade level will require more frequent progress monitoring, while students less far behind may be monitored only once every 4 weeks. Students right at grade level should be monitored to ensure that they continue to make progress sufficient to stay on grade level.

Grouping for Supplemental Instruction in Tiers I, II, and III

Screening data should never be used alone either to identify students or to determine instructional groupings of students for supplemental instruction in Tiers I, II, or III. These decisions require triangulation with more finely-tuned assessments to determine student strengths and needs and to determine groupings that will allow teachers to select instructional foci, materials for instruction, and approaches that will meet the needs of everyone in the group. Interventions should always be tailored to and matched to the needs of students.

Screening Tools

Below is a list describing various types of universal screening tools. The South Carolina Department of Education does not mandate the use of a particular measure and the following list is not exhaustive.

Edcheckup

The site offers an assessment system for screening student performance and measuring student progress toward goals in reading. These generic passages, which are independent from any particular basal reading series, also may be used to evaluate the effectiveness of reading instruction through the graphing of student reading data. Browsers must pay to view materials from this site.

<http://www.edcheckup.com>

EdProgress

EdProgress focuses on assessment, large-scale testing and accountability, and systemic reform. With research-proven training materials, measurement tools, reporting systems, and teacher training interventions, EdProgress helps teachers become more focused on teaching and learning for all students. Browsers must pay to view materials from this site.

<http://www.edprogress.com/index.htm>

Evidence-Based Progress Monitoring and Improvement System

AIMS web(R) is a formative assessment system that informs the teaching and learning process by providing continuous student performance data and reporting improvement to students, parents, teachers, and administrators to enable evidence-based evaluation and data-driven instruction. Browsers must pay to view materials from this site. Measures are available in reading, writing, and math for grades K – 8.

<http://www.aimsweb.com>

Dominie Reading and Writing Assessment Portfolio

Based on National Reading and Writing Standards and Best Practices Research, the *Dominie Reading & Writing Assessment Portfolios* feature original fiction and nonfiction stories, leveled books, rubrics for story writing and reading fluency, case studies, essential phonics and spelling components, convenient reproducible assessment forms, and a scoring guide for spelling accuracy that is based on an analysis of developmental spelling tests. The *Dominie Reading & Writing Assessment Portfolios* assess comprehension of fiction and nonfiction as well as phonics, phonemic awareness, writing, and spelling. It provides both oral and written assessments and includes stanines.

<http://www.pearsonschool.com/index.cfm?locator=PSZu68&PMDBSUBCATEGORYID=&PMDBSITEID=2781&PMDBSUBSOLUTIONID=&PMDBSOLUTIONID=6724&PMDBSUBJECTAREAID=&PMDBCATEGORYID=3289&PMDBProgramId=19381>

The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS)

The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) are a set of standardized, individually administered measures of early literacy development. They are designed to be short (one minute) fluency measures used to regularly monitor the development of pre-reading and early reading skills.

<http://dibels.uoregon.edu/>

Intervention Central

This web site offers free tools and resources to help school staff and parents promote positive classroom behaviors and foster effective learning for all children and youth. The web site was created by Jim Wright, a school psychologist from Syracuse, N.Y. Materials on this site are free.

<http://www.interventioncentral.org>

Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)

The Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) is a national non-profit organization dedicated to helping all children learn. NWEA provides research-based assessments, professional training, and consulting services to improve teaching and learning.

Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) tests are based on a grade-independent and stable scale; educators get an indication of student growth. Educators use this information to identify trends at student, class, grade, program, and school levels. The measurement scale is based on the same test theory that informs the SAT, Graduate Record Exam, and Law School Admission Test. The test theory is that it aligns student achievement levels with item difficulties on the same scale.

<http://nwea.org>

Monitoring Basic Skills Progress (MBSP)

This is a computer program for automatically conducting curriculum-based measurement and for monitoring student progress in reading, math computation, and math concepts and applications. The computer program provides immediate feedback to students about their progress and provides individual and class-wide reports to teachers to help them plan more effective instruction. Browsers must order and pay for materials from this site.

http://www.proedinc.com/store/index.php?mode=product_detail&id=0840

National Center for Learning Disabilities

NCLD works to ensure that the nation's 15 million children, adolescents, and adults with learning disabilities have every opportunity to succeed in school, work, and life. Materials on this site are free.

<http://www.nclld.org/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=571>

National Center on Student Progress Monitoring

<http://www.studentprogress.org>

This center's mission is to provide technical assistance to states and districts and disseminate information about progress monitoring practices proven to work in different academic content areas (grades K-5). Materials on this site are free.

Reading Success Lab

The Reading Success Lab provides software solutions for identifying reading problems and improving reading skills. Some screening materials on this site are free but some of the other materials require an order and payment.

<http://www.readingsuccesslab.com>

Winter and Spring Screening: Data and Decisions

By midyear, the school has had a full semester to provide tiered instruction, and has gathered ongoing progress monitoring data for students below grade level. The school team has been active in guiding teachers in the use of progress monitoring data to inform and adjust instruction to help students achieve their learning goals, and, if the plan has been successful, helping these students to accelerate their progress toward that goal. Given that the purpose of universal screening is only to predict which students are likely to fail to reach grade level given their present trajectories, winter screening can provide the team with a snapshot of how the school's overall plan is working. Midyear screening will likely identify additional students who may need intervention, as well as students whose intervention plans may need to be adjusted and students who can be cycled out of Tiers II or III.

It is important that the school team fully understand the limitations of the instruments chosen for universal screening. For example, quick-to-administer-and-score assessments of the speed of reading lists of words and non-words are useful for predicting reading failure, but caution should be exercised in using these assessments to make decisions concerning what to teach. Improvements in the percentages of students scoring at or above grade level may or may not indicate that the school's comprehensive plan is working effectively. If, for example, teachers have made a concerted effort to teach what the screening measure assesses rather than teaching the wider range of skills and strategies required for reading text with fluency, comprehension, and accuracy, scores may indicate only that students have gotten better at word recognition.

Some schools select screening instruments that are much more comprehensive but also take longer to administer and score. These measures often provide data for both screening and progress monitoring and are intended to do more than provide predictions about which students are likely to need additional help. For example, districts and schools that require running records of text reading three to four times a year using any of a number of published programs (i.e., *The Developmental Reading Assessment 2*, *The Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment*, or *The Dominic Reading and Writing Assessment Portfolio*) can use these data to make valid determinations about the effectiveness of their overall plan. If a significant number (e.g., 80%) of students are meeting proficiency levels, or if the percentage of students reaching grade level is steadily increasing over time as measured by these more comprehensive tools, instruction in Tiers I and II can be considered effective. If the percentage of students reaching grade level is not steadily increasing, the data may indicate that the overall plan is not working or that instruction in Tiers I and II need to be improved and made more effective for the students in the school.

As appropriate, universal screening data can be used to analyze

- growth rates from fall to winter,
- progress toward pre-set goals within classrooms, grades, schools, and the district,

- differential growth rates across students, teachers and schools within district, and
- consistent implementation of Tier I and Tier II instruction (analyzed by classroom observations and review of lesson plans).

School and grade level teams should investigate implementation issues in Tier I and II classrooms, helping teachers to analyze their own practices, materials, and use of time to bring these in line with the research on high-progress literacy classrooms.