Pennsylvania
Department of Education

Universal Screeners for Evidence-Based Reading Instruction Guidance

Article XV-N of the School Code specifies that the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), in consultation with the PDE Reading Leadership Council (RLC), will develop and maintain a list of approved reading universal screeners that meet the following requirements:

- Aligned with the essential components of evidence-based reading instruction
- Includes phonemic awareness, the alphabetic principle, decoding, encoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension
- Administered to all students in early elementary (Grades K-3) to determine if a student is at risk for developing reading difficulties and in need of further diagnostic assessment and targeted intervention
- Used as part of a tiered support system such as Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS)
- Measures students' reading knowledge and skills against national norms

Additional considerations for selecting a universal reading screener:

- Time required to conduct the screening to minimize impact on instruction time
- Timeliness in reporting screening results to teachers, administrators, and parents
- Feedback identifying specific diagnostic data needed to develop targeted intervention

What is Evidence-Based Reading Instruction?

Evidence-based reading instruction (EBRI) is a program of structured literacy aligned with the Science of Reading, including explicit and systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, the alphabetic principle, decoding, encoding, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension and building content knowledge. EBRI MAY NOT include three-cueing, which is a model of teaching students to read based on meaning, structure, syntax, and visual cues (MSV).

What is a Reading Universal Screener?

This guidance document and the Reading Universal Screener List include lists of assessments that are designed to identify risk for reading difficulties to allow for early intervention.

Reading universal screeners are assessment tools given to all students to determine if students are at risk for developing reading difficulties. These screeners are designed to be used multiple times a year as part of a tiered system of support (e.g., MTSS) to determine whether a student is at risk for reading difficulties and in need of intervention.

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Intended Use for School Entities

This guidance document is designed to support school entities in interpreting the information on the PDE Universal Screeners for Evidence-Based Reading Instruction list to assist school entities in making informed decisions about the selection and use of reading universal screeners.

Considerations

When selecting a reading universal screener, school entities are encouraged to consider a range of factors including cost, training, sustainability, technology needs and capabilities, evidence base, and usability and inclusivity.

Table 1. Cost, Training, and Sustainability

Consideration	Guiding Questions	Notes
Pricing and pricing model	• How much does the tool cost? • Is it per-student, subscription, or site license?	
Total costs	• What are the rollout costs? • Are implementation and long-term costs sustainable?	
Hidden costs	• Are there extra costs for professional development, reporting, technology, or infrastructure?	
Training	• How much initial training is needed? • How much ongoing training is needed?	

Table 2. Technology Needs and Capabilities

Consideration	Guiding Questions	Notes
Technology requirements	• What devices or other technology infrastructure are needed?	
Technology options	• Does the tool have online and offline options?	
Technical support	• Is technical support available?	

Table 3. Evidence Base

Consideration	Guiding Questions	Notes
Evidence base	• Was the tool developed and revised recently? • How transparent is the tool's evidence base and norming process? • Does the tool include evidence linking its screening to long-term success? • Does the tool cite any published peer-reviewed studies of its effectiveness? • What sample size and demographics does the tool use to establish norms? Was norming accomplished inclusively (i.e., normed using a diverse population of students)?	

Table 4. Usability and Inclusivity

Consideration	Guiding Questions	Notes
Usability	• Is the tool easy to use? What are the resource requirements for its use? • Are results clear and easy to interpret for educators, administrators, and parents? • Is technical support available? • Can the tool also be used to measure for progress monitoring? • Does the tool communicate alignment with research-based interventions?	
Inclusivity	• Is the tool inclusive of the needs of all learners, including multilingual learners and other culturally and linguistically diverse children? • Does the tool support differentiation, including small-group and one-to-one applications?	

Additional Resources

Universal Screeners for Evidence-Based Reading Instruction List

Universal Screeners for Evidence-Based Reading Instruction Rubric