

Essential Components of a Comprehensive Schoolwide Reading Assessment System

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Abstract

Over the last 10 years, some of the most important and exciting scientific advances in beginning reading have been in the area of assessment. For example, researchers have made significant strides in their ability to accurately and reliably assess young children's early literacy skills. Because literacy skills acquired in the primary grade serve as the foundation for the development of subsequent reading skills and strategies, our increased ability to assess these skills has provided administrators, teachers, and parents access to critical information about the development of students' skills and instructional needs.

However, the capacity to assess literacy skills in and of itself does not necessarily lead to improved reading outcomes for students. An old adage reminds us that "weighing cows won't make them fatter." We can just as easily say that "testing students won't make them better readers." Assessment practices only contribute to higher levels of reading achievement when they: (a) answer important questions for teachers and schools; and (b) enable informed, data-based instructional decision making.

This module describes how assessment of early literacy skills can help administrators and instructional leaders promote beginning reading success for all children, including children placed at risk, by improving instruction and intervention through early identification and monitoring response to intervention efforts. The module presents a conceptual framework for thinking about early literacy assessment across four distinct purposes: (a) screening; (b) diagnosis; (c) progress monitoring; and (d) measuring student outcomes. The module describes how developing a coordinated schoolwide system to assess students' early literacy skills across each of these four purposes can facilitate informed and ongoing instructional decision making at the school, grade, and individual student level.