

EARLY YEARS LITERACY (READING) SCREENERS: IDENTIFYING AT-RISK STUDENTS



Introduction

The use of screeners is not a new concept; they have been in use for many years in various disciplines, including education. Early years reading screeners are quick, informal, evidence-based tools that can provide information about possible student reading difficulties. Brief assessments (screeners) have been used to identify students who need extra support. Early childhood education (i.e., kindergarten to Grades 3 or 4) is an important period for children's development of social, emotional and behavioural, as well as early academic skills. If a child displays deficits in particular skills, this may result in negative outcomes in their future lives; therefore, early identification is critically important in order to provide the child with appropriate support. "Assessing students in their early years provides essential information to teachers, schools, parents... about potential student learning issues and needs and ensures students at risk get the help they need early in their education."¹ The approach to screening for reading skills varies by jurisdiction. This article is meant to provide a high-level understanding of screening practices for literacy (reading) in Canada and selected other jurisdictions.

Screening Practices in Canada

Universal screening is not mandatory in most provinces/territories (jurisdictions). Currently, Alberta, New Brunswick, and Ontario are the only jurisdictions that have implemented mandatory universal screening of children in their early years. While screening is not yet mandatory in most provinces/territories, some school boards, recognizing the benefits, have implemented universal screening independently. Assessment practices may vary by jurisdiction, school board/school. For instance,

jurisdictions may purchase specific screeners and/or provide lists of approved screening tools should school boards/schools choose to use them, and some school boards/schools may also use assessment instruments developed in-house. Many early reading screeners are available, and they tend to be quite similar. Generally, they assess universal skills in reading, and usually they are not tied to a specific curriculum. Among the commercially available Canadian resources, the Early Development Instrument (EDI), developed by the Offord Centre² and Early Years Evaluation-Teacher Assessment (EYE-TA), Early Years Evaluation-Direct Assessment (EYE-DA) and Phonics Advantage Reading Assessment (PARA), developed by the Learning Bar³ are widely used. Another example of an interesting and valuable Canadian resource is Curriculum-Based Dynamic Assessment (CBDA), developed by Tricoast Education.⁴ The CBDA elicits children's storytelling to assess their learning potential, helping identify their strengths and risk level for Developmental Language Disorder, enabling educators and clinicians to tailor support both in and out of the classroom.

Following are high-level descriptions of literacy (reading) screening initiatives implemented in Alberta, New Brunswick, and Ontario, as well as screening practices in selected other jurisdictions.

Alberta⁵

In 2022-2023, universal literacy (reading) screening for children in Grades 1 to 3 became mandatory in Alberta. For the 2024-2025 school year, school authorities are required to conduct literacy screening with all students in their primary language of instruction (English or French) in kindergarten through Grade 3. Mandatory screening is required in September and January for all students in Grades 1 to 3. Mandatory screening for all kindergarten

¹ Alberta Education. (2024). Early Years Screening Assessments: Information about literacy and numeracy screening assessments for all students in Grades 1 to 3. Retrieved January 9, 2024 from: <https://www.alberta.ca/early-years-assessments#:~:text=Assessing%20students%20in%20their%20early,need%20early%20in%20their%20education.>

² <https://edi.offordcentre.com>.

³ <https://thelearningbar.com>.

⁴ <https://tricoasteducation.com>.

⁵ Information in this section was derived from the following sources:

Alberta Education. (June, 2023). Alberta Education Approved Literacy and Numeracy Assessments Grades 1-3. Retrieved January 9, 2024 from: <https://www.alberta.ca/system/files/educ-approved-literacy-and-numeracy-assessments.pdf>.

Alberta Education. (2024). Early Years Screening Assessments. Retrieved January 9, 2024 from: <https://www.alberta.ca/early-years-assessments#:~:text=In%202022%2F23%20literacy%20and,on%20New.LearnAlberta.ca>.

Alberta Education. (2024). General Information Bulletin 2024-2025: Literacy and Numeracy Screening Assessments. Retrieved September 27, 2024 from: <https://www.alberta.ca/system/files/educ-general-information-bulletin-literacy-and-numeracy-screening-assessments.pdf>.

students is required in January, beginning in January 2025. Educators are required to re-assess all Grades 1 to 3 students, identified as being at-risk, in January. Students deemed to be at-risk in January are re-assessed at the end of the school year (May/June). Students determined to be not at risk in January are not re-assessed at the end of the year. School authorities must administer either government-provided or government-approved screeners. Alberta Education provides the following literacy screening tools to all of the province's school authorities free of charge for their use. These literacy tools were developed separately for use by English, French immersion, and francophone students:

- Phonological Awareness Screening Test (PAST)
- Rapid Automatized Naming (RAN) Test
- Letter Name-Sound (LeNS) Test
- Castles and Coltheart 3 (CC3)

To further complement the government-provided literacy screening assessments, the following additional tools are also available:

- Word Chains
- Sentence Picture Matching

Alberta, in partnership with academics from Australia's Macquarie University (who have subsequently founded the Australian Centre for the Advancement of Literacy at the Australian Catholic University), adopted, then adapted, the Castles and Coltheart Reading Test 2 (CC2) and the Letter-Sound Test (LeST) to become the Castles and Coltheart Reading Test 3 (CC3) and the Letter Name and Sound Test (LeNS). The CC3 is a word reading assessment that tests "the functioning of the key processes in single-word reading – phonological decoding and whole word recognition. In this way, CC3 is designed to identify the nature of a child's reading difficulties and provide directions for instruction and intervention... The LeNS...assesses the child's knowledge of the names of letters, the sounds of letters and common multi-letter graphemes. ...It is designed to make sure that the child has the foundational phonics skills to develop into an independent reader."⁶ Since language acquisition processes vary by language, Alberta Education engaged an external

consultant from the University of Ottawa to adapt the English-language instruments for use in French. Consequently, although the English and French screeners are similar, they are not identical. The Australian Centre for the Advancement of Literacy, Australian Catholic University holds the copyright for the English-language screeners; Alberta Education owns the rights to the French-language version.

A list of government-approved literacy screening assessments is available if a school authority chooses to use them instead of the government-provided tools. These screeners are recognized by the province as providing valid, reliable scores for screening children. Any costs associated with the use of the government-approved tools are the responsibility of the school authority. Current early years government-approved literacy assessments include the following tools by grade level:

Administration for Kindergarten (January) and Grade 1 (September):

- Early Years Evaluation-Pre-Reading Assessment (EYE-PR)
- Acadience Reading K-6 (English)
- L'Acadience Reading Français (French)

Administration for Grade 1 (January) to Grade 3:

- Acadience Reading K-6 (English)
- Test of Silent Reading Efficiency and Comprehension® (TOSREC)
- Test of Word Reading Efficiency-Second Edition (TOWRE-2)
- Wechsler Individual Achievement Test®-Third Edition (WIAT-111) (for literacy and numeracy)
- Wide Range Achievement Test-Fifth Edition (WRATS5™) (for literacy and numeracy)

School authorities that choose to use the government-provided screeners have the advantage that teachers can access an Alberta-developed custom portal to upload their students' data. The province's data team psychometrically analyzes the data and generates reports that are provided for individual students, classes, schools and school authorities. (At this time, the Ministry does not report overall provincial results.) As part of

⁶ Kilpatrick, D., Georgiou, G., & Parrila, R., Castles, A., & Kohnen, S. (2024). Alberta Government-Provided Kindergarten to Grade 3 Literacy Screening Assessments, p. 2. Retrieved September 28, 2024 from: https://www.alberta.ca/system/files/custom_downloaded_images/edc-lens-cc3-interpretation-guide.pdf.

its modernization initiative, the province of Alberta plans to work with its assessment technology partner, [Vretta](#), to digitize and modernize the data collection, analysis, and reporting, thereby making the provincial early years screening processes more efficient and effective.

New Brunswick⁷

The New Brunswick Department of Education is structured into two distinct sectors, Anglophone and Francophone, with each sector operating independently within the *Education Act* and Department policy parameters. Early grades screening and progress monitoring is conducted somewhat differently for each language sector. For instance, the Anglophone Sector administers the EYE-DA in October of the year prior to students' entry into kindergarten. In addition to the EYE-DA, a mandatory early grades progress monitoring and formative assessment instrument (designed for all English-language students in kindergarten to Grade 2, as well as French Immersion (FI) students in Grades 1 to 3) was developed in-house with support from educational researchers. This assessment instrument was pilot tested in classrooms during the 2022-2023 school year. The Early Grades Literacy Assessment (EGLA) supports teachers in evaluating and tracking the acquisition of the five foundational skills of reading: phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. The structure and content of the EGLA has been aligned with the province's new *K-2 English Language Arts Holistic Curriculum Framework and the French Immersion Language Arts Holistic Curriculum Framework for Grades 1-3*. EGLA for FI was developed based on research regarding second language acquisition; it is not a translation. The tool was designed to support educators in monitoring student reading progress. Due to EGLA's standardized materials and administration process, aggregation of student results at the school, school district and provincial levels is made possible for improvement and accountability reporting purposes. User feedback during the pilot year provided information to support enhancements to the assessment, which was implemented in 2023-2024. Provincial literacy leaders, department

specialists and educational researchers continue to be consulted on the development of the EGLA.

Teachers enter their results into *ESS Connect*. *ESS Connect* is a component of *PowerSchool*, a K-12 student information system that allows for the transfer and tracking of student data from grade to grade as students and educators work through more than 80 reading skills monitored via the EGLA. The assessment is a formative classroom tool, intended to be used on an ongoing basis. Since this is the second year of implementation, the Department continues to be focused on monitoring data to ensure the proper use of the assessment tool and systems, augmenting resources developed to help teachers use the tools appropriately, and supporting educators to integrate early years screening into their daily classroom practice. EGLA is the only mandatory screening tool for early literacy in the Anglophone sector.

The Francophone Sector does not administer a French-Language version of the EGLA. Instead, the Learning Bar's EYE-DA is the early years screening tool used for kindergarten readiness, and EYE-TA is used to monitor student progress once the student is in kindergarten. A pre-evaluation of EYE-TA is administered annually to kindergarten students during the period mid-October to early December; post evaluations are administered during the month of May. Screeners are only used in kindergarten; provincial reading assessments are administered in Grades 2 and 3.

Ontario

In October, 2019, the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) announced a public inquiry into human rights issues that affect students with reading disabilities in Ontario's public education system. Among other things, the inquiry found that the province did not administer universal, systematic and evidence-based early years screening for literacy to identify at-risk students. Furthermore, the inquiry found that screening practices varied by boards, schools and individual teachers.⁸

In response to the public inquiry's final report, in July, 2023, the Ontario Ministry of Education released

⁷ Much of the information in this section was derived from the following source:

Jones, R.M. (2024, March). Early Years Screening Assessments in Canada. Article published online at <https://rmjassessment.com/2024/03/13/early-years-screening-assessments-in-canada/>.

⁸ Ontario Human Rights Commission. (February 28, 2022). Right to Read: Public inquiry into human rights issues affecting students with reading disabilities. Retrieved September 13, 2024 from: <https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/right-to-read-inquiry-report/early-screening>.

Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) 168 to address the findings.⁹ Regarding the quality of screeners, PPM 168 states that “According to contemporary research, an evidence-based early reading screening tool is one that identifies students who may have future difficulties with reading. Effective early reading screening tools are comprehensive and will assess each foundational reading skill against a benchmark, have good psychometric properties (i.e., reliability and validity), aggregate student data, and provide immediate information so it can be used by teachers to inform instruction.”

PPM 168 (which came into effect on September 1, 2023 and required full, mandatory implementation beginning September, 2024) requires school boards to screen all students in the publicly funded school system in Year 2 of kindergarten, Grade 1 and Grade 2 for early reading using a Ministry-approved, evidence-based screening tool. Mandatory screening is required twice in a school year, with the second screening optional for students who meet the benchmark in the first screening. Early screening ensures that students who require further support in reading are identified early and are supported within the classroom by receiving appropriate, targeted instructional support needed to prevent or address difficulties with reading. The Policy/Program Memorandum also states that screening should be used in conjunction with classroom-based assessments, including observations of and conversations with students about their learning. Furthermore, it states that “Teachers maintain ongoing, regular and meaningful communication with parents/guardians to provide a clear explanation of students’ strengths and areas of need, discuss classroom strategies and share examples of growth and progress over time.” PPM 168 also outlines a requirement for school boards to allocate protected time in Grades 1 to 3 for explicit and systematic instruction in foundational reading for a minimum of 150 minutes per five-day cycle.

School boards are required to use Ministry-approved tools for mandatory early reading screening. The following Ministry-approved screening tools are available to school boards via the Ontario Education Collaborative Marketplace (OECM) Vendor of

Record (VOR) arrangement for the Early Reading Screening Tools Agreement:

English Language:

- Acadience Learning Inc. (Acadience Reading tool)
- NCS Pearson Inc. (AimsWebplus tool)
- Nelson Education Ltd. (easyCBM tool)

French Language:

- Acadience Learning Inc. (Acadience Reading Français)

For the 2024-25 school year, the Ministry continues to fund evidence-based early reading screening for Senior Kindergarten, Grade 1 and Grade 2 students by investing in reading intervention support licenses and for reading screening tools. This investment will provide school boards with the funds to purchase licenses, resources and professional learning to support the provision of systematic, evidence-based reading programs and interventions for struggling readers, including but not limited to students with reading disabilities. The Ministry also continues to provide funding for additional teachers with specialized expertise in evidence-based, systematic and explicit instruction focused on foundational reading skills to support students in kindergarten to Grade 3. School boards will receive funding for these additional teachers, who can work one-on-one or in small groups with students in kindergarten to Grade 3 who would benefit from more support in reading. Further information on funding for these initiatives can be found in the April 26, 2024 news release.¹⁰

Screening Practices in Selected Countries

United Kingdom (U.K.)

Year 1 Phonics Screening

The U.K. has required universal screening for several years. In 2012, the country passed a law

⁹ Ontario Ministry of Education. (July 23, 2023). Policy/Program Memorandum 168: Reading Instruction and Early Reading Screening. Retrieved September 30, 2024 from: <https://www.ontario.ca/document/education-ontario-policy-and-program-direction/policyprogram-memorandum-168>.

¹⁰ Ontario Ministry of Education. (April 26, 2024). Ontario Increasing Funding to Boost Reading, Writing and Math. Retrieved October 15, 2024 from: <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1004488/ontario-increasing-funding-to-boost-reading-writing-and-math>.

that requires phonics screening for all children in Year 1 (equivalent to Senior Kindergarten in Canada). Students who do not meet the expected age-appropriate standard are screened again in Year 2 (equivalent to Grade 1 in Canada); those who do not meet the standard are provided with interventions and support. The Year 1 phonics screening check was pilot tested in approximately 300 schools in June 2011, and each school in the pilot administered a version of the screener to their children in Year 1.

The phonics screening pilot was independently evaluated by academics at Sheffield Hallam University, a public research university in England. The evaluation considered all aspects of the screener, including the administration processes (whether the assessment was manageable for schools and appropriate for Year 1 children) and the extent to which the tool provided evidence of providing valid and reliable results. The screening tool exists within the context of a national curriculum that explicitly outlines the components of word-reading instruction: decoding, word-reading skills and phonics instruction.

The UK also mandates specific reporting requirements to keep parents/guardians informed about their children's learning progress. This includes information about results relative to students of the same age in their school, as well as at the national level. The UK also compiles national data on the percentage of students who met the expected phonics standard disaggregated by demographic classifications such as income level, ethnic background, special education needs, and first language other than English.

Reception Baseline Assessment

Administration of the reception baseline assessment (RBA) became a statutory requirement in September, 2021. (In Canada, reception is the initial year of

kindergarten, when students are usually four- or five-years- old.) Whereas the Year 1 phonics screening focuses on the individual student, the RBA is an assessment tool that provides an on-entry assessment of children's attainment that can be used as a baseline from which cohort-level progress can be measured to the end of key stage 2. (The approximate Canadian equivalent of key stage 2 includes students who are seven to eleven years of age in Grades two to five.) The RBA is a short, task-based assessment that is administered within the first six weeks of reception (the first year of primary school in the academic year they turn five years of age) and assesses students' starting points in language, communications and literacy, as well as mathematics. The assessment is not intended to provide detailed, diagnostic information to be used for student learning improvement. Instead, results/data are used to compile school-level progress measures. Teachers, however, receive brief narrative descriptions of student performance that can be used to inform instructional practice.

In addition to the statutory assessments mentioned above, the Department for Education's Standards & Testing Agency develops and provides materials and guidance for optional end of key stage 1 tests, including English reading, English grammar, punctuation and spelling, as well as mathematics. (The approximate Canadian equivalent of key stage 1 includes students who are five to seven years of age in Senior Kindergarten to Grade 2.) The purpose of these tests is to provide schools with instruments that can measure students' achievement and provide information about where they may need additional support as they move on into key stage 2. Although not mandatory, the government encourages schools to administer the optional assessments, but there is no requirement to report results (e.g., to parents/guardians, local authorities).¹¹

¹¹ Information in this section was derived from the following sources:
Ontario Human Rights Commission. (February 28, 2022). Right to Read: Public inquiry into human rights issues affecting students with reading disabilities. Retrieved September 13, 2024 from: <https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/right-to-read-inquiry-report/early-screening>.
Department for Education, Standards & Testing Agency. (February, 2012). Assessment framework for the development of the year 1 phonics screening check. Retrieved October 2, 2024 from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/assessment-framework-for-the-development-of-the-year-1-phonics-screening-check/assessment-framework-for-the-development-of-the-year-1-phonics-screening-check>.
Department for Education, Standards & Testing Agency. (February, 2020). Assessment Framework: Reception Baseline Assessment. Retrieved October 2, 2024 from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5e550579e90e074dcf842ab3/2020_Assessment_Framework_Reception_Baseline_Assessment.pdf.

Australia

Australia comprises six states (New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania) and two territories (the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory [ACT], which includes the country's capital, Canberra). Most jurisdictions have introduced mandatory literacy screening in year 1. In 2017, the South Australia Department of Education conducted a pilot of the U.K.'s phonics screener check and subsequently mandated its use for all year 1 students. Teachers and school leaders were provided with training, and the check was made available for use by educators and families. In 2021, New South Wales also mandated the screening tool for all year 1 students,¹² and subsequently, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia announced that mandatory screening would begin in 2023. The phonics screening tool is a short (5-7-minute) assessment in which students read aloud up to 40 real and made-up words. The assessment, conducted with individual students and carried out by the classroom teacher, informs educators how students are progressing in phonics. Results are available immediately, and after analyzing the results, teachers can plan for any additional support the students might require. Other literacy (reading) screening tools and instructional initiatives are in use on a statutory or voluntary basis in Australian states/territories. For instance, in Tasmania, in addition to mandated year 1 phonics check, the state is trialling the Grammar and Phonological Screen

(GAPS), a tool designed to identify children, early in their education, who are at risk for developmental language and/or literacy disorders. Furthermore, from Preparation (kindergarten) through year 8, by 2026, all Government schools will be adopting a screening tool known as DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) to assess student progress in the reading subskills of phonics, fluency and comprehension.¹³

In addition to the state-run initiatives, the Government of Australia has developed a free, voluntary phonics check for use with first-grade students. In addition to the screener, an online literacy hub is available to teachers and school leaders, which provides professional learning and resources to support children to develop their literacy skills. The hub also provides families with access to a phonics and reading awareness check that can be taken at home, and many other resources are also available.¹⁴

United States (U.S.)

More than 30 states in the U.S. have enacted legislation that mandates screening of students for dyslexia in their early years of education. Many jurisdictions provide recommended/approved lists of literacy (reading) screeners or provide guidance to inform selection of them, while others mandate the use of specific screening tools.¹⁵ For example, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) requires that at least twice per school year, schools and school

¹² Ontario Human Rights Commission. (February 28, 2022). Right to Read: Public inquiry into human rights issues affecting students with reading disabilities. Retrieved September 13, 2024 from: <https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/right-to-read-inquiry-report/early-screening>.

¹³ Information in this section was derived from the following sources:
Department for Education, South Australia. (April, 2024). Phonics Screening Check for Students Understanding of Letters and Sounds. Retrieved October 4, 2024 from: <https://www.education.sa.gov.au/parents-and-families/curriculum-and-learning/literacy-and-numeracy/phonics-screening-check-student-understanding-letters-and-sounds>.

New South Wales Education Department. (September, 2024). Year 1 Phonics Screening Check. Retrieved October 4, 2024 from: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/literacy-and-numeracy/assessment-resources/phonics-screening-check>.

Tasmanian Government. ((September, 2024). New Literacy Screening Helps Students with Reading. Retrieved October 4, 2024 from: <https://www.premier.tas.gov.au/latest-news/2024/september/new-literacy-screening-helps-students-with-reading>.

Carey, A. (September 13, 2022). The Age. Phonics skills test to be mandated for Victorian grade 1 students. Retrieved October 4, 2024 from: <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/phonics-skills-test-to-be-mandated-for-victorian-grade-1-students-20220913-p5bhlb.html>.

Fogarty EDvance. (May 24, 2022). New phonics test for year 1 students in WA. Retrieved October 4, 2024 from: <https://fogartyedvance.au/new-phonics-test-for-year-1-students-in-wa/>.

¹⁴ Department of Education, Australian Government. (May, 2023). Year 1 Phonics Check. Retrieved October 7, 2024 from: <https://www.education.gov.au/australian-curriculum/year-1-phonics-check>.

¹⁵ Ontario Human Rights Commission. (February 28, 2022). Right to Read: Public inquiry into human rights issues affecting students with reading disabilities. Retrieved September 13, 2024 from: <https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/right-to-read-inquiry-report/early-screening>.

districts assess each student's reading ability from kindergarten through at least third grade. Valid, developmentally appropriate DESE-approved literacy screening tools must be used; those selected by DESE include:

- Amira Dyslexia Screener
- DIBELS 8th Edition Literacy Assessment
- EarlyBird
- mCLASS
- Acadience Reading k-6
- FastBridge
- i-Ready Dyslexia Screener
- MAP Reading Fluency
- STAR (Early Literacy, Reading & Curriculum-Based Measurement)¹⁶

Over the past decade, the approach to early literacy screening in the state of Wisconsin has evolved. From 2012-13 to 2015-16, the Department of Public Instruction required that all 5-year-old kindergarten students, and then eventually all 4-year-old kindergarten, as well as first- and second-grade students, be administered the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS). ("PALS is a research based screening, diagnostic, and progress monitoring tool. Wisconsin teachers used PALS to identify students at risk of developing reading difficulties, diagnose students' knowledge of literacy fundamentals, monitor progress, and plan instruction that targeted students' needs.")¹⁷ Beginning with the 2016-17 school year, schools

and school districts were no longer required to administer PALS; instead, districts were permitted to choose the screener they wished to administer. However, in June 2024, the Wisconsin Department of Administration announced that beginning in the 2024-25 school year, NCS Pearson's aimswebPlus reading-readiness screener would be delivered statewide to students four years of age in kindergarten through third grade. The screener is to be administered to students at multiple points during the school year.¹⁸ In addition to the universal reading screener, the state approves additional diagnostic assessments for early literacy.¹⁹

All states have policies and programs that support/promote students' reading skills; however, some have not adopted brief, universal early literacy (reading) screeners. For example, Ohio's schools and school boards have the option of using state-approved or the state-developed reading diagnostic assessments, which must be administered during the first 20 days of instruction for kindergarten students and by September 30 for those in Grades 1 through 3.²⁰ Three times per school year, Michigan schools and school boards are expected to administer "benchmark" assessments, such as the state's Early Literacy and Mathematics Benchmark Assessment (or another approved/qualified assessment), to students in kindergarten through Grade 2. The fall administration is a pre-test, and the winter and spring sessions are administered to gauge learning progress and to derive information to support student learning.²¹

¹⁶ Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (June, 2024). Early Literacy Universal Screening Assessments: Early Literacy Screening Guidance. Retrieved October 9, 2024 from: <https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/screening-assessments.html>.

¹⁷ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. (July, 2024). PALS Early Literacy Screener. Retrieved October 9, 2024 from: <https://dpi.wi.gov/assessment/historical/pals>.

¹⁸ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. (July, 2024). Wisconsin DOA selects vendor for statewide fundamental skills and universal reading screener assessments. Retrieved October 9, 2024 from: <https://dpi.wi.gov/news/releases/2024/reading-screener-wisconsin-act-20>.

¹⁹ Note that universal screeners are brief assessments that identify whether children may be at-risk in reading and the supports they may need. Diagnostic assessments, on the other hand, are more extensive and identify how students are performing in specific skill areas.

²⁰ Ohio Department of Education & Workforce. (July, 2024). Third Grade Reading Guarantee Guidance. Retrieved October 9, 2024 from: <https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Learning-in-Ohio/Literacy/Third-Grade-Reading-Guarantee>.

²¹ Michigan Department of Education. (August, 2024). Benchmark Assessments: Early Literacy & Mathematics, 2024-2025 Test Administration Manual (TAM). Retrieved October 9, 2024 from: https://www.michigan.gov/mde/-/media/Project/Websites/mde/OEAA/Early-Literacy-and-Mathematics/Early_Literacy_and_Mathematics_TAM.pdf?rev=9a71a6f7485e45ff82ba07e077b281aa&hash=3C6C7A97A127916F45C682ECEA49934F.

Conclusion

All jurisdictions recognize the importance of and have policies and programs that support/promote the development of students' literacy (reading) skills. This article demonstrates that a variety of approaches are taken by jurisdictions to support students' early reading development. Some jurisdictions mandate the use of reading screeners or encourage their use (and provide lists of approved/qualified assessment tools). Others mandate the use of diagnostic tests and progress-monitoring instruments. It is critically important to be able to identify students who are at risk of reading difficulties as early as possible, and reading screeners have a key role to play. It is the author's opinion that universal literacy (reading) screening should be mandatory, beginning in kindergarten, so that children don't fall through the cracks with their language development. Early identification and intervention are key.

About the Author

Dr. Richard Jones has extensive experience in the fields of large-scale educational assessment and program evaluation and has worked in the assessment and evaluation field for more than 35 years. Prior to founding RMJ Assessment, he held senior leadership positions with the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) in Ontario, as well as the Saskatchewan and British Columbia Ministries of Education. In these roles, he was responsible for initiatives related to student, program and curriculum evaluation; education quality indicators; school and school board improvement planning; school accreditation; and provincial, national and international testing.

Richard began his career as an educator at the elementary, secondary and post-secondary levels. Subsequently, he was a researcher and senior manager for an American-based, multinational corporation delivering consulting services in the Middle East.

Feel free to reach out to Richard "Rick" at richard.jones@rmjassessment.com (or via [LinkedIn](#)) to inquire about best practices in large-scale assessment and/or program evaluation.

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