

# Why are Universal Reading Screeners Important



## What is a universal reading screener?

Screeners are typically brief assessments of particular skills or abilities that are highly predictive of a later outcome. In Kansas, we will screen kindergarten students on their early reading skills of letter naming fluency, letter sound fluency, phoneme segmentation (the ability to take a word and break it into its individual sounds), and nonsense word fluency. We will screen first-graders in letter sound fluency, phoneme segmentation, nonsense word fluency, and oral reading fluency. Second-graders will be screened in non-sense word fluency and oral reading fluency. Students in grades 2–5 will be screened in oral reading fluency. Students in grades 6–12 will be screened using a reading comprehension assessment. Those students falling below grade level on the comprehension assessment will be given an oral reading fluency assessment to help determine which skills may need additional support.

## What is the purpose of a universal reading screener?

Universal screening of students for potential reading difficulties including, but not limited to characteristics of dyslexia, allows schools to identify these students early and intervene quickly. We know that early intervention is our best response to characteristics of dyslexia and identifying essential skills which allow schools to quickly and efficiently identify needs and respond instructionally.

## What are the positive effects of administering a universal screener?

Extensive evidence exists that supports the fact that early interventions for young readers are critical. Struggling readers who do not receive early intervention tend to fall further behind their peers (Stanovich, 1986). Since research has shown that the rapid growth of the brain and its response to instruction in the primary years make the time from birth to age eight a critical period for literacy development (Nevills & Wolfe, 2009), it is essential to identify the instructional needs of struggling students as soon as possible. It is imperative to “catch them before they fall” (Torgesen, 1998).

## Why are Kansas schools conducting universal reading screeners?

The Kansas State Board of Education approved recommendations from the Legislative Task Force on Dyslexia. Part of these recommendations include that every accredited school district must screen and identify students

at risk of dyslexia or demonstrating characteristics of dyslexia in accordance with universal screening evidenced-based practices. Universal screening evidence-based practices include:

- Beginning of the year testing
- All students are screened
- Measures are scientifically reliable, efficient, and valid for risk of reading difficulties.
- Once risk is identified and immediate and effective interventions begins to ensure adequate progress continues.



## How does administering a universal screener support a child's reading development?

While state assessments and other achievement measures look at overall growth, screeners are designed to be quick, easy to administer assessments that evaluate current learning. In other words, they should provide a teacher with practical information that allows for rapid response in the form of instructional adjustments. Once a reading deficiency is discovered through the screening, teachers can develop an immediate response with intervention in the general education classroom. This allows children to continually have exposure to grade level reading content, while working on skill-based interventions at the same time. The goal of timely intervention, through the screening process, is critical for reading success.

## What happens if a child does not pass the screener?

If your child does not pass a portion of the universal reading screener it DOES NOT MEAN that your child has dyslexia. The screening data allows teachers to respond immediately with evidence-based interventions that address the reading deficits.

## What should a family member do if they have a question about the universal reading screener?

Talk to your child's teacher about the screener. Find out which specific areas your child is being screened and what the school will do to support them. You can also find information about dyslexia screeners at this link. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/15JG1rpqknAVjg2FWkCbHLLjNBc\\_eHe9z/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/15JG1rpqknAVjg2FWkCbHLLjNBc_eHe9z/view?usp=sharing)



Nevills, P., & Wolfe, P. (2009). Building the reading brain, PreK–3 (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Stanovich, K. E. (1986). Matthew effects in reading: Some consequences of individual differences in the acquisition of literacy. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 21(4), 360–406.

Torgesen, J. K. (1998). Catch them before they fall: Identification and assessment to prevent reading failure in young children. *American Educator*, 22, 32–39.



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