













Assessment

Oregon K-12 Literacy Framework

A reliable and valid assessment system in reading for K-12 is linked explicitly to reading goals.

	 Goals	 Assessment	 Instruction	 Leadership	 Professional Development	 Commitment
 Schools						
 Districts						
 State						

Characteristics of a Reading Assessment System:

- ★ An assessment system relies on measures of reading that are reliable and valid for the purpose they are being used.
- ★ Reading assessments and measures are linked explicitly to reading goals.
- ★ An assessment system is used for four purposes: (a) to screen students for reading problems, (b) to systematically monitor progress over time, (c) to determine students' level of reading proficiency and whether they have met grade-level reading goals, and (d) to determine or diagnose potential sources of reading difficulty for students not making adequate progress despite the use of intense intervention.
- ★ Data from reading assessments are used to make instructional decisions about groups of students and individual students.

The Oregon K-12 Literacy Framework is aligned to Response to Intervention (RTI)

Assessment in education is commonly defined as “the process of collecting data for the purpose of making decisions...”¹ This definition highlights a key principle of the Oregon K-12 Literacy Framework. **Data are collected for the purpose of making specific educational decisions.** Two initial comments are important about assessments in the Oregon K-12 Literacy Framework. First, the term “assessment” is used narrowly in the framework to refer to student reading assessments. Other assessments are critical in education, including assessments of student behavior, assessments of instructional materials, assessments of classroom instruction, and assessments of professional development quality. The focus in this chapter is on the assessment of student reading proficiency.

Second, the term “student reading assessments” is used narrowly in the framework to refer to assessments conducted in a **systematic and standardized** manner, a point that warrants clarification. Teachers make hundreds of decisions each day in response to student behavior. Many of these decisions occur within the flow of dynamic instructional interactions between teachers and students. When teachers pose academic questions, listen to responses, and pose new questions on the basis of those responses, they are engaging in an assessment process. They hear how students respond, conduct quick, real-time assessments of those responses, and make a decision about what to do next instructionally. These interactions include important student assessments, but in contrast to systematic, standardized assessments, these assessments can be described as unsystematic and informal in nature. This does not mean informal assessments are not important or lack purpose. In fact, they are extremely important and have great purpose. It does not mean they are haphazard. Teachers may have highly specific strategies for how they engage in these interactions. However, the assessment procedures that are part of these interactions are very different from the types of systematic and standardized assessment procedures that are the focus here. **The reading assessments referred to in this chapter and throughout the Oregon K-12 Literacy Framework are standardized and validated assessments necessary for determining students’ instructional needs.**

Alignment of K-12 Reading Goals and Assessment

A comprehensive assessment system is foundational to a successful K-12 school-wide reading system.² An assessment system for K-12 should be explicitly linked to **summative goals**—overall grade-level reading proficiency—as well as to **formative reading goals** related to phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary (see [Goals](#) chapter, 9-11). Student assessments should be administered from the time students enter kindergarten through their high school years. In Oregon, standardized state assessments of reading begin in grade 3 with the Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS) in Reading/Literature. This assessment is a major component of a comprehensive assessment system in grades 3 through high school. However, **schools also need a comprehensive assessment system before grade 3.**³

¹ Salvia & Ysseldyke, 2001

² Consortium of Reading Excellence, 2008; Kamil et al., 2008; No Child Left Behind, 2002; National Reading Panel Report, 2000; NASDSE, 2006; Torgesen & Miller, 2009

³ Gersten et al., 2009

Reading Assessments in K-2

The recommendation to administer reading assessments in **grades K-2** is based on research on the **prevention and early remediation of reading problems**. Reading problems can be prevented, and early problems remediated, through early identification. Early identification through assessment allows interventions to be implemented effectively as soon as possible. The following table summarizes three empirical findings that support the use of grade K-2 reading assessments.

Three Research-Based Reasons to Use Grade K-2 Reading Assessments

1. Patterns of reading development are established early and are stable over time unless interventions are implemented to increase student progress.⁴
2. Without intense interventions, struggling readers do not eventually “catch up” to their average performing peers—in fact, the gap between strong and weak readers increases over time.⁵
3. Reading interventions that begin in grade 3 and extend beyond are likely to be **less successful and less cost-effective** than interventions that begin in the earlier grades. The later interventions begin, the longer they take to work, the longer they need to be implemented each day, and the less likely they are to produce desired effects.⁶

Purposes of Assessment and the School Assessment Plan

Reading assessments should be administered for four specific purposes.^{i ii iii} These purposes answer four fundamental questions.

1. **Is the student at risk for not meeting formative and summative grade-level reading goals?** Assessments **screen** students for reading problems, and the data help determine the level of reading risk students face.
2. **Is the student on track—that is, is the student meeting formative reading goals and thereby making enough progress to be able to meet summative reading goals?** Frequent reading assessments **monitor the progress** students are making incrementally in meeting formative reading goals that increase the likelihood they will meet overall summative reading goals.
3. **Is the student meeting grade-level summative reading goals? Summative or outcome assessments** determine whether or not students have met grade-level reading goals. The OAKS in Reading/Literature is a summative assessment for grades 3 through high school.

The later interventions begin, the longer they take to work, the longer they need to be implemented each day, and the less likely they are to produce desired effects.

⁴ Torgesen, 2000, 2001; Juel, 1988; Shaywitz, Escobar, Shaywitz, Fletcher, & Makuch, 1992; Good, et al., 2001

⁵ Torgesen, 2000, 2001

⁶ Torgesen, 2000, 2001; Stanovich, 1986; Adams, 1991; National Research Council, 1998; Good, Simmons & Kame'enui, 2001

4. **For students not making adequate reading progress toward meeting grade-level reading goals, despite intense intervention, what additional intervention approaches have the best chance of improving the rate of reading progress? Diagnostic assessments** provide detailed information about students' reading skills for the purpose of developing and implementing individualized interventions for students.

Assessments are needed to answer each of these four questions, and the information is used to make specific educational decisions.⁷ Sometimes, an assessment measure a school uses for one purpose can also be used for additional purposes. In particular, the same assessment measure, administered at different points in time, can frequently be used to screen students for reading problems, monitor reading progress over time, and determine whether students have met important reading outcomes. In the following sections, we provide further information on each of the four assessment purposes.

Screening Assessments

The purpose of a screening assessment in reading is to identify those students at risk for reading difficulties and those students on track for successful reading outcomes. Screening data are used to make decisions about the level of instructional support students need. Students at high risk—that is, students well below grade-level reading expectations—should receive more instructional support than students who are on track for meeting grade-level reading expectations.^{iii iv}

Being at risk for reading problems is influenced by a number of factors including the quality of a student's ongoing instruction. Even very strong readers in grade 3 will have reading problems in grade 8 if reading instruction stops, or if students stop reading in school or on their own. Thus, the term “**low risk**” is used for even very strong readers to underscore the fact they face some level of reading risk. At the other extreme, students who are well below grade-level expectations are described as being at “**high risk**” for reading problems. In the middle are students who are below grade level but are not well below grade level. These students are described as being at “**moderate risk**” for reading problems.

Schools should provide at least **three levels of instructional support** for students based on whether or not they are reading at grade level. If they are not reading at grade level, determining how far below grade level they are reading is essential information; identifying the level of risk these students face is key to providing them with appropriate and effective instruction so they may learn the skills needed to be grade-level readers.

1. Grade-level support for students reading at or above grade level (**low risk for reading problems**)—these students meet or exceed reading expectations
2. Moderate additional support for students reading somewhat below grade-level expectations (**moderate risk for reading problems**)—these students nearly meet reading expectations
3. Intense additional support for students reading well below grade-level expectations (**at high risk for reading problems**)—these students are well below reading expectations

In **grades K-2** and prior to when the OAKS is administered at the end of grade 3, the risk categories are based largely on **formative goals** set by the school (see [Goals](#) chapter, 9-11). To identify the level of instructional support students need, schools can also use **normative information** (information based on how large numbers of students have done in the past), **benchmark recommendations**

⁷ No Child Left Behind, 2002; Consortium of Reading Excellence, 2008; Kamil et al., 2008

(recommendations based on what levels of performance students should meet to be on track for reading at grade-level), or **local norms** (information on “local” students in a state, district, or school in which performance is divided into (a) top, (b) near the top, (c) below the top, or (d) well below the top categories, or some other similar type of performance breakdown).^v vi

At grades 3 through high school, students who meet or exceed achievement standards on the OAKS in Reading/Literature read at **grade level or higher**. Students who are one to two years below grade level read at somewhat **below grade level**. Those who are two or more years below grade level read at **well-below grade level**.

In terms of **screening** students for reading problems, the recommendation is that a screening assessment should be administered to all students in **grades K-8** at least three times per year (beginning, middle, and end of the school year).⁸ In **grades 9-12** the recommendation is that a screening assessment should be administered at the beginning of the year in grade 9.⁹ Regarding more frequent screening assessments in grade 9, and screening assessments in **grades 10-12**, the recommendation is that schools consider administering a screening assessment to some students, particularly to students who are not yet reading at grade-level.¹⁰

The first screening assessment of the school year should be administered as early as possible (within two weeks to one month of the start of school) so that the information can be used immediately. The need to collect screening data early in the school year, and the need to collect it frequently in most grades and with all students, means that screening assessments should be efficient to administer.^{vii} Fortunately, there are screening measures available that are efficient to use and that provide strong information about the level of student reading risk. Screening assessments directly measure students’ proficiency on the essential elements of reading.

In **grades K-3**, screening assessments should focus on the development of a number of different foundational skills necessary for skillful reading. In kindergarten, knowledge of the alphabet, assessed through letter-naming, is a valuable screening tool.¹¹ Also early in kindergarten, students’ developing awareness of the phonemic structure of spoken words is a good predictor of reading and thus a strong screening measure.¹² Assessing both letter knowledge and phonological awareness skills early in kindergarten should be part of a screening system in reading. By the middle and end of kindergarten, schools should screen students for problems with alphabetic understanding (phonics). In grades 1-3 regular assessments of reading fluency should be used to screen students for problems with fluent reading and for likely problems with reading comprehension.

In **grades 4-9**, it is recommended that reading fluency assessments be administered three times per year, primarily for screening purposes. Particularly for students not reading at grade level, fluency assessments can help determine whether fluency problems are contributing to reading comprehension problems. There may also be students reading at grade level on the OAKS in Reading/Literature who are

⁸ Screening assessments are also called benchmark assessments because all students are assessed and performance is frequently compared to expected levels of performance, or benchmarks.

⁹ In grade 9, schools can also examine grade 8 scores on the OAKS outcome measure to gain additional information about students who are at moderate or high risk for reading problems. Performance from the previous year on the OAKS outcome reading measure can be used as part of a screening measurement in other grades in middle school and high school. The reason it is especially important to examine grade 8 OAKS score as students transition to grade 9 is that the transition to high school can be particularly difficult for students in terms of academic achievement, behavior adjustments, and increasing risk of dropping out of school.

¹⁰ Torgesen & Miller, 2009

¹¹ Adams, 1990

¹² Adams, 1990; O'Connor & Jenkins, 1999; Spector, 1992

not reaching recommended reading fluency levels. In these situations, schools might consider interventions to increase reading fluency. This could help students manage the increasing amount of material they are expected to read as they move from grade level to grade level (see [Instruction](#) chapter, 19).

In **grades K-12** and through high school, **maze and cloze reading assessment** procedures can be used to screen students for **comprehension** problems. Maze and cloze assessment procedures, where students are presented with reading passages with a percentage of words removed from the passage and students have to supply the word (cloze) or choose the correct word from three or four options (maze), provide a direct index of vocabulary and comprehension. From these types of measures, formative goals might be established to track how well students are developing vocabulary and comprehension skills over time. Maze and cloze assessments are particularly effective when they are used in conjunction with reading fluency assessments.

Generally, students who do well on reading fluency assessments are able to read with comprehension and students who are not fluent readers will have difficulty comprehending what they read. Some students, however, may read with sufficient fluency but have difficulty with comprehension. Although research indicates these students are relatively rare, a reading fluency screening assessment, combined with a reading comprehension assessment using maze or cloze procedures can help identify these students.

Immediately following each screening assessment, a designated staff person enters the data into a database and prints the screening reports. **Grade-level team meetings** in elementary schools and **department-level team meetings** in middle schools and high schools should occur after each school-wide screening assessment to analyze the screening reports and **determine instructional grouping and placement decisions** for each student (see [Leadership](#) chapter, 12-15, for a description of these teams and meetings).

Progress-Monitoring Assessments

Effective instruction consists of responding to students' needs while building on their strengths, and it benefits from a sensitive and continuous approach for monitoring student progress.¹³ Progress-monitoring assessments should provide an estimate of student reading growth across time, typically within a school year.¹⁴ Progress in reading, using formative goals to track progress (see [Goals](#) chapter, 9-11), should tell educators whether students are learning reading skills at an appropriate pace to reach end-of-year, grade-level reading goals. The reading progress of students who are not reading at grade level should be monitored frequently in between school-wide screening assessments. The reason for

Given that effective instruction consists of responding to children's needs while building on their strengths, it necessarily depends on a sensitive and continual capacity for monitoring student progress.
National Reading Council (1998)

¹³ National Reading Council (NRC), 1998

¹⁴ Progress-monitoring measures are typically used to monitor students' reading growth within the school year. However, growth can also be measured across years. Note that the OAKS can be used as part of a reading assessment system for the use of systematically monitoring reading progress over time from grades 3 to 10. Because the OAKS in Reading/Literature from grades 3 to the final assessment in approximately grade 10 are constructed on a single scale, changes in student performance can be measured accurately over time.

frequent progress-monitoring assessments is that students who are reading below grade-level expectations have to make more progress than would be normally expected if they are going to “catch up” to grade-level expectations. Consequently, schools need timely information on whether students are making enough progress to reach the outcomes in the timeframe for which outcome goals are set.

How often progress-monitoring assessments are administered should be based on the level of student risk. For students at low risk, there is no need to administer progress-monitoring assessments. Screening assessments administered three times per year will be sufficient to make sure students who are at low risk for reading problems continue to meet formative goals and grade-level reading expectations over time. For students who are at moderate risk for reading problems, progress monitoring once every two weeks is typically sufficient. If school resources are an issue, once per month will be acceptable. For students at high risk, schools should try to administer progress-monitoring assessments once per week. In some cases, if resources are an issue, once every two weeks is acceptable. The table below summarizes these recommendations.

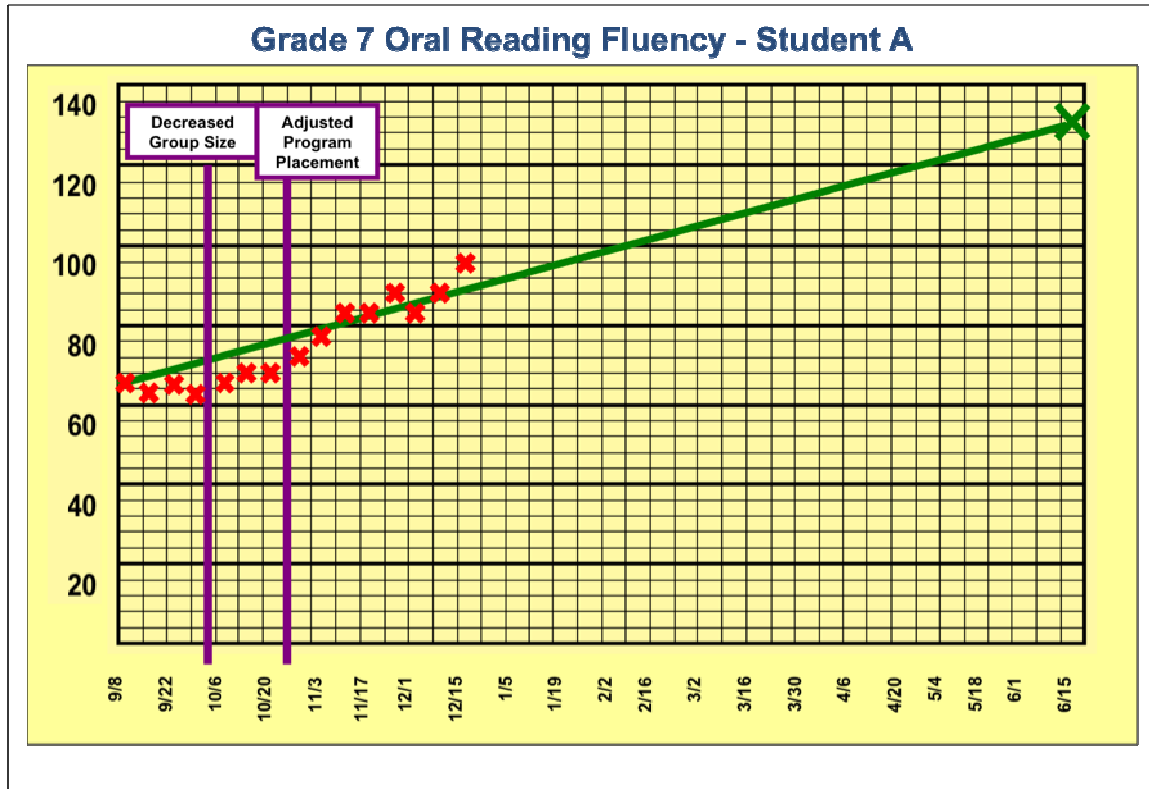
Risk Level	Student Skill Level	Frequency of Progress Monitoring Recommendation
Low Risk	Grade level or above; meets or exceeds expectations on the OAKS	Screening assessments only, three times per year
Moderate Risk	Somewhat below grade level; nearly meets or below expectations on the OAKS	Twice per month (or once per month, if funding is limited)
High risk	Well below grade level; very low performance on the OAKS	Once a week (or twice a month, if funding is limited)

Progress-monitoring assessments must be quick and efficient to administer and score because in many schools, a large number of students are reading below grade level and need to be assessed frequently. The important point is to minimize the amount of instructional time students lose to assessments and maximize the quality of the information a brief assessment can provide. Because progress-monitoring assessments are given frequently, different versions or forms of the same assessment need to be used. These “alternate” forms need to be equivalent in all aspects (e.g., how difficult they are) so that the student’s growth across many monitoring assessments can be analyzed and interpreted. The analogy is using a scale that is calibrated the same way from one week to the next in order to accurately measure weight gain or loss over time. If the scale’s calibration fluctuates, estimates of “real” weight gain or loss will be inaccurate.

Schools should analyze and interpret progress-monitoring data as soon as it is collected. The objective is to determine whether students are making sufficient progress to meet reading goals or whether instructional changes should be made to increase progress and put students on a trajectory for meeting reading goals. This decision is more complex than it might appear. To do this well, schools have to determine the rate of student progress and compare this to the rate of progress needed to reach the goal.

An effective way to help decide whether student progress is adequate is to use a **data decision rule**. In this method illustrated in the following graph, a line representing the student’s expected rate of progress is drawn from a stable period of baseline performance, prior to intervention, to the point at which

the goal should be met. A line of expected progress is commonly referred to as an **Aim Line** (the green line). A student's progress is monitored frequently, and when a specific number of consecutive data points fall below the Aim Line, some type of change is made to the student's instruction to increase progress.^{xiii} In the following graph, the decision rule is that if three consecutive data points fall below the Aim Line, an instructional change is made. A good rule of thumb is that three to six consecutive data points that fall below the Aim Line necessitate an instructional change. The instructional change is noted with a purple vertical line. In the box at the top of the purple line a brief description of the change is noted.



Summative Outcomes Using Formative Measures: Grades K-2

Because the foundation for reading development occurs in grades K-3 and the OAKS in Reading/Literature is not administered prior to grade 3, progress monitoring/formative measures of reading in grades K-2 take on special significance. **These measures of reading in grades K-2 indicate whether students are on track to read at grade level in grade 3, and they may also be used as summative or outcome measures for specific essential elements of reading in grades K-2.** The essential elements of reading that can be measured effectively as outcomes are phonological awareness, alphabetic understanding (phonics), and fluency (see [Goals](#) chapter, 11, for an example of a range of scores that can be used as a guide for district). While comprehension is critically important, it is not as readily measured.

Generally speaking, the following formative outcomes can also be used as summative outcomes because they are important goals in school.

- By the end of **kindergarten** students should meet formative outcomes on measures of phonological awareness. Also by the end of kindergarten students should demonstrate an emerging degree of proficiency in word-level reading.
- By the middle of **grade 1**, students should meet formative outcomes measuring their ability to use a phonetic-based approach to reading words accurately and fluently.
- Throughout **grades 1-2** students should meet formative outcomes measuring their ability to read grade-level connected text accurately and fluently.
- In **grade 3** (and also in grades 4-12), outcomes associated with reading connected text accurately and fluently, as well as comprehension skills, are the most important formative outcomes schools should track closely.

Summative Assessments: Grades 3 through High School

Summative or outcome assessments are typically administered at the end of the school year to determine whether students have met important grade-level reading goals for that year. Summative measures are administered for two purposes. The most important purpose is to determine whether students are able to read a variety of grade-level materials with comprehension. A second purpose is to determine whether students have met key formative goals that are important benchmarks of successful overall grade-level reading. Summative assessments provide valuable information regarding whether students are on track for grade-level reading.

Grade-level reading outcomes

Comprehensive measures of reading proficiency help determine whether students are able to meet grade-level reading expectations—a

The ultimate purpose of any evaluation process that takes place in schools should be to improve student learning.

Howell & Nolet
(2000)

summative reading goal (see [Goals](#) chapter, 6-9). The OAKS in Reading/Literature administered in grades 3-8 and in high school is a summative assessment used to determine a student's overall level of reading proficiency. If a student is reading at grade level or higher in grade 3, the implicit message to parents, students, and educators is that the student has the foundational reading skills necessary to be able to read grade-level texts in grade 4. And with ongoing reading instruction, the student should be able to read more rigorous grade-level texts and other materials each successive year in school. This student will likely achieve well academically in middle school and high school.

Other OAKS Summative Assessments

The frequent administration of the OAKS in Reading/Literature means that each year from grades 3-8 schools have summative information on whether students are able to read at grade level. Students also take the OAKS at grade 10 and are given multiple opportunities to re-take the assessment in grades 10 through 12 if they do not meet. The OAKS in Reading/Literature also provides information on students' reading levels using Lexile scores.^{xi} The OAKS assessments in science, social sciences, and mathematics can provide additional information on students' reading skills. **Students need both reading skills and content knowledge to meet state standards on content-area assessments.** When students meet grade-level reading goals, and do well on content-area assessments, multiple sources of information indicate that students are developing strong reading skills generally, as well as the reading skills needed for understanding written material in specific content areas.

Standardized Diagnostic Assessments

In some cases, even after making a number of instructional changes (based on a lack of student progress) to increase the rate of reading progress of a particular student, reading progress will remain low. Students continue to fall further behind grade-level expectations, and as time goes on, it becomes less likely students will catch up. Continued lack of progress despite multiple instructional changes increases the urgency of designing and implementing an instructional plan that will improve the student's reading progress. In this case, the use of a commercially available standardized diagnostic reading assessment may provide information the school can use to better understand the cause of the reading problem and the precise instructional needs of the student.

There are **two fundamental and related reasons for administering a formal, standardized diagnostic assessment**. The first is to better understand the underlying cause of poor reading progress and the second is to better understand the student's instructional needs. Lack of student progress may be influenced by the presence of a disability. An important purpose of a formal diagnostic assessment is to help determine whether a student has a disability. **A hallmark of formal diagnostic measures is technical adequacy, which is a critical feature of assessments used to determine the presence of a disability.** If a determination is made that a student has a disability and the disability is contributing to

When teachers' classroom assessments become an integral part of the instructional process and a central ingredient in their efforts to help students learn, the benefits of assessment for both students and teachers will be boundless.

Guskey (2003)

- Fielding, L.,
Kerr, N.,
& Rosier, P.

the student's lack of reading progress, specialized education may be necessary to provide the additional resources to develop and implement individualized student interventions to increase reading progress.

Another important and related purpose of a formal diagnostic assessment is to determine the precise areas where a student needs support. This information is used to develop and implement instruction that is aligned as closely as possible with student need. Sometimes this instruction is developed in the context of special education (if the student has a disability) and sometimes it is developed in the context of general education. An important point is that formal diagnostic measures are intended for use in very specific situations. **There are a number of reasons formal diagnostic reading assessments should not be used with all students**, and only with those students who demonstrate poor reading progress even when instructional interventions have been implemented under strong implementation conditions.

First, if students are close to reading at grade level, or making sufficient progress to be reading at grade level by the goal date, it is not necessary to diagnose why students need support. Second, diagnostic measures need to be administered one-on-one with students. They are lengthy and expensive to administer and thus a poor use of school resources when used widely with students. Third, the results of formal diagnostic assessments are for the purpose of providing highly intense instructional interventions for students precisely because repeated attempts to change reading instruction to increase progress have not been successful. Intense interventions of this magnitude are expensive to implement, not feasible for use on a large scale, and unnecessary if students are making sufficient reading progress. **The administration of formal diagnostic reading assessments means that very intense instructional interventions are needed to increase the reading progress of specific students.**

Comprehensive School Assessment Plan

Each school needs to identify the assessment measures that will be used to answer important educational questions about screening, progress-monitoring, evaluating student reading outcomes, and diagnosing students' instructional needs.¹⁵ The following table displays four key purposes of reading assessments. For each purpose, the table identifies the key features of assessment, which students are assessed, and the primary questions that are addressed for each purpose. Often, the same assessment tool may be used for different purposes. For example, an indicator of early reading skill might be used for screening and progress monitoring in the early grades. Or, the OAKS in Reading/Literature administered in grade 5 might be used as an outcome measure in grade 5 and as part of a screening assessment for the beginning of grade 6. The School Reading Plan (see [Commitment](#) chapter, 2) should document which assessments schools will use to address these four purposes.

¹⁵ Torgesen & Miller, 2009

Purposes and Features of Reading Assessments			
Assessment Purpose	Educational Question	Key Features	Who is Assessed?
Screening	Is the student at risk for reading problems?	Brief Predictive of reading outcomes	All students
Progress Monitoring	Is the student making enough reading progress to reach summative reading goals?	Brief Alternate forms Sensitive to small changes over time	Students not meeting reading expectations—not reading at grade level or not reaching key reading goals
Summative Evaluation	Is the student reading at grade level and meeting other reading goals?	Comprehensive measure of overall reading proficiency	All students
Diagnosing Instructional Needs	What precise instructional needs does a student have that if identified will improve his/her rate of progress toward important reading goals?	Provides in-depth instructional profile	Students who are not making adequate progress despite the use of intense intervention

Informal Curriculum-Embedded Assessments for Instructional Purposes

Curriculum-embedded assessments are frequently included in core and intervention reading programs. A drawback of most curriculum-embedded assessments is that reliability and validity information is unknown or weak. Thus, interpreting student performance should be done cautiously. The benefit of curriculum-embedded assessments is that the data can provide useful information regarding the degree to which students appear to be learning what has been explicitly taught. Teachers can use this information to determine whether their instruction seems to be meeting students' needs for re-teaching and for planning future instruction. Three of the most useful curriculum-embedded assessments are

- Core program survey assessments
- Core program theme skills tests / intervention program mastery tests
- Placement tests.

Core program survey assessments

The purpose of core program survey assessments is to sample a broad range of skills on a given essential element of reading (e.g., phonics, comprehension). Information from these assessments is used to design small group instruction using the core program or material contained in supplemental or intervention programs. Schools can use core program survey assessments to develop instructional profiles that include student strengths and weaknesses in relation to the essential elements of reading.

Core program theme skills tests / Intervention program mastery tests

At the end of each theme or unit in the core program, students are typically assessed on the skills they were taught in that section of the program and in previous sections. Teachers and school teams can analyze this information to decide whether any of the content should be reviewed instructionally or re-taught to some students. Some intervention programs contain mastery tests, which require students to reach a specified performance standard before advancing in the program. Information from mastery tests can be used to determine whether groups of students are prepared to continue in the program or need to repeat previous lessons. Often, a program provides specific remedies based on student performance on the mastery tests. Information from these tests may also be used to help place students appropriately within the intervention program or accelerate their progress. For example, teachers can administer mastery tests, starting at the beginning of the program, and continue testing until a student does not meet the criteria for passing. The last mastery test passed indicates the lesson where the student can enter the program.

Placement tests

Many intervention programs have placement tests to assess student strengths and weaknesses relevant to the skills taught in the program. This information can be used to place students appropriately within the program. Most placement tests provide a rough indicator of where to place students in the program. Mastery tests can provide more precise placement information.

Collecting Reliable and Valid Data

Student assessments used for all four purposes—screening, progress monitoring, outcomes, and diagnosis—must be reliable and valid for the purpose being used. A **reliable** reading assessment means the same, or very similar, data would be obtained if the student were (a) tested two or more times in a brief period of time, (b) tested in two or more settings, (c) tested on different versions of the same test, and (d) tested by different test examiners. If an assessment is not reliable—and the reliability of a test should be documented scientifically—the data gained from the test should be interpreted cautiously and the information should not be used to make important decisions.

If an assessment is not reliable, then it cannot be a valid measure of performance. A **valid** reading assessment measures what it is intended or designed to measure. Using measures that are valid for a specific purpose or purposes is the most important aspect of an assessment system. In reading, measures used for assessment purposes must have documented validity for the purpose being used. If an assessment does not have documentation of validity for one or more of the four major purposes, it should not be used.



Key Term

Reliability: The assessment results in similar scores when used in different contexts.



Key Term

Validity: The assessment measures what it is intended or designed to measure.

Information on the reliability and validity of assessment measures can usually be found in the assessment manual. Other sources of information that can be used to evaluate the technical adequacy of an assessment include comprehensive reviews of assessment measures and scientific studies.^{xii} ■

Student assessment data should be collected by individuals who have been appropriately trained in the test being administered and who have passed periodic calibration checks. For example, district-based or school-based teams are typically responsible for conducting screening assessments. Teachers are frequently part of these data collection teams. To avoid questions about data accuracy, teachers should not collect screening and summative data on students in their own classrooms.

Six Strategies for Ensuring the Quality of Data Collection

1. Provide high-quality professional development on the administration and scoring of reading assessments.
2. Provide brief “refresher” trainings for teachers and staff who conduct reading assessments.
3. Have an assessment expert “shadow score” alongside individuals collecting assessment data. The expert can provide feedback to the tester on the standardized administration and scoring procedures and efficient and effective administration.
4. Conduct a retrospective check of scoring accuracy. After all testing is completed, choose a random sample of the tests (approximately 20%) and check scoring according to the guidelines. If scoring errors are identified in more than 10% of the booklets, re-check all of the booklets.
5. Conduct a retrospective check of the data entry of a random sample of scores. If errors in data entry were made in more than 10% of the scores, re-check all data entries.
6. Retest a random sample of students (i.e., approximately 10%) and look for significant score discrepancies.

Data Used to Guide Instructional Decision-Making

Assessment data collected in relation to reading goals can be used to make decisions at two different levels. First, data can be used to make decisions at the **individual student level**. For example, screening data are used to determine whether a student is at risk for reading problems. Progress-monitoring data are used to determine whether a student is making adequate progress toward overall reading proficiency and formative reading goals. Summative data are used to determine whether a student attained a level of reading proficiency for meeting grade-level reading expectations.^{xiii} ■

At a second level, student reading data can be used to make decisions about **the school’s “system” of reading instruction** provided within and across grade levels. Ideally, making instructional decisions about individual students is done in the context of an overall strong system of school-wide reading instruction. This basic idea is straightforward. When a few students are experiencing difficulty, the school can focus squarely on ways to change reading instruction to meet the needs of specific individual students. However, when many students are experiencing difficulty, it is important for the school to consider ways the overall system of reading instruction may be contributing to poor reading progress and should be changed to increase reading performance. **Considering the system of reading instruction and the needs of individual students simultaneously increases decision-making efficiency and the effective use of limited resources.**

When many students are experiencing difficulty, it is efficient for the school to view the problem at a “systems” level and allocate resources to address the underlying systems-level challenges. When underlying systems-level problems are addressed on a case-by-case basis with individual students, the larger focus necessary to address systems-level structure and infrastructure issues is missing. This does not imply that a systems-level focus ignores individual students. The specific instructional needs of individual students must always be addressed. However, in the context of systems-level difficulties, the needs of individual students should be addressed, but at the same time the underlying *system* of reading instruction should be addressed. **A careful analysis of student reading data will allow schools to understand the extent to which the specific problem an individual student is experiencing is occurring in the context of an underlying strong system of reading instruction or in a system that is in need of overall improvement.**

Decision-Making for Individual Students

Targeting the need of an individual student works in the following way. The **first decision** is to identify whether a particular student is reading at a level of proficiency to meet grade-level expectations or has met important formative goals. This decision is based on screening data and, if the student is below these expectations, the reading team at the school decides on the level of instructional support the student needs to reach grade-level reading outcomes and attain important formative goals. The instructional support plan is implemented, the student’s progress is monitored, and the team uses data decision rules to determine whether student progress is sufficient. When student progress is sufficient, generally the team maintains the level of instructional support that enabled the student to make adequate progress and the team continues to monitor the progress of the student.

If the student’s progress is not adequate, the **sequence of decision-making is as follows**. A student may not be making adequate progress for three reasons. First, the level of support the school believes is being provided to the student is not occurring. For example, if a grade 8 student is supposed to receive homework support each night in the form of several guiding questions to help the student focus on comprehension, and that is not occurring, then the instructional support intended for the student is not being provided. Second, the quality of the instructional support is not equal to what the staff believes the student needs to be successful. For example, the guiding questions used with the student are at a level of abstraction that may be too difficult. The team concludes the student needs more concrete guiding questions. Third, the instructional support plan is being implemented as intended, and with expected quality, yet the student is still not making sufficient progress. In this case the team decides to make a

change in the student's plan to increase the intensity of the support. For example, the team decides that the student should highlight several paragraphs in the text that are relevant to each of the guiding questions and read and discuss the questions with a partner for ten minutes at the start of each class. The team implements this plan with the classroom teacher, and the student's progress is monitored.

Once again data decision rules are used to make a decision about the adequacy of student progress.

The important point is that all three levels need to be considered when a student is not making sufficient progress. Frequently, lack of student progress is conceptualized as a problem with the student, and not enough attention is directed toward investigating whether the instructional plan specified is being used, and if the plan is being used, whether it is being implemented with the quality necessary for the student to make sufficient progress.

When student progress is not adequate, and schools have determined that the instructional support is being implemented as intended, **the school needs to consider ways to increase the intensity of the support provided to the student in an effort to increase progress.** Implementation features that can be adjusted include: (a) time for instruction, (b) program efficacy (content of instruction, programs, and materials), (c) program implementation, (d) grouping for instruction, and (e) coordination of instruction. The table below includes implementation features that can be adjusted to increase the intensity of instruction. See the following "Alterable Variables Chart."

Implementation Elements	Alterable Variables Chart				
	Specific Adjustments				
	Less intense		→	More intense	
Time for Instruction	Increase student attendance	Provide instruction daily	Increase opportunities to respond	Vary schedule of easy/hard tasks/skills	Add another instructional period (double dose)
Program Efficacy	Preteach components of core program	Use extensions of the core program	Supplement core with appropriate materials	Replace current core program	Implement specially designed program
Program Implementation	Provide model lesson delivery	Monitor implementation frequently	Provide coaching and ongoing support to teacher	Provide additional professional development	Vary program/lesson schedule
Grouping for Instruction	Check group placement	Reduce group size	Increase teacher-led instruction	Provide individual instruction	Change instructor
Coordination of Instruction	Clarify instructional priorities	Establish concurrent reading periods	Provide complementary reading instruction across periods	Establish communication across instructors	Meet frequently to examine progress

Decision-Making for Groups of Students and Systems-Level Decisions

When many students a) are not able to read grade-level texts and materials, b) are not meeting formative reading goals, or c) are not making adequate progress toward meeting grade-level summative reading goals, the school should carefully examine the system of reading instruction being provided to students. Schools can use student reading data to address systems-level issues in a number of important ways.

The major question is: “Is the system of reading instruction and support effective for a high percentage of students?” At the broadest level, the entire school’s system of reading instruction can be examined. At this school-wide level, the school examines student reading data—an integrated analysis including screening data, progress-monitoring data, and summative data—and the school might conclude, for example, that the overall reading system is

- Highly effective
- Generally effective
- In need of serious attention.

This examination of data serves as a starting point for examining the effectiveness of the *system* of reading instruction being provided at the school. From this starting point, the school can examine many other levels within the system to conduct a more fine-grained examination of the effectiveness of the system of reading instruction at the school. For example, the school can examine their system of reading instruction

- At each grade level
- At each level of instructional support—support for students at grade level, for students somewhat below grade level, and for students well below grade level
- For specific groups of students—for example, English learners, students who are highly mobile, or students with a specific learning disability.^{xiv} ■

For example, a middle school may determine that it is highly effective helping students remain at grade level when they begin the year reading at grade level. However, the same middle school may determine that their system of instruction and support for students who begin the year reading well below grade level is not working as well as it should if these students are going to reach reading goals by the end of the year. An organizing decision-making flow chart called the “**GATE Map: Going from ALL To Each**” illustrates a decision-making process that uses data to make decisions about groups of students and individuals.^{xv} ■

When a school staff determines that the overall system needs attention, or that important levels within the system need attention (e.g., specific grades, support for groups of students at specific levels of reading risk), they must begin by examining the implementation of instruction being provided. At this point, the school examines two dimensions of the system.¹⁶ The school addresses (a) the structure of elements in the system, and (b) issues related to quality of implementation.¹⁷ Grade-level teams can use a worksheet called the “**Elements of a Healthy Grade-Level System Checklist**” to identify areas of the support system that may need to be adjusted.^{xvi} ■

¹⁶ The dimensions were also addressed when the focus was at the individual student level.

¹⁷ Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Gersten, Chard, Baker, 2000

Response to Intervention (RTI)

Schools that implement the Oregon K-12 Literacy Framework will be implementing a framework that is completely in line with a Response to Intervention (RTI) model of service delivery.¹⁸ RTI integrates instruction, assessment, and intervention in a way that allows schools to match the level of intensity and instructional support to student needs in essential academic areas, such as reading.^{xvii xviii xix xx} RTI is also a way for schools to determine whether students *have* a specific learning disability. Frequently, the primary purpose a school has for implementing an RTI model of service delivery is to identify students with learning disabilities. However, RTI should be conceptualized at a much deeper level than this. In its deepest conceptualization, **RTI is a comprehensive system of instruction that is designed to match student services with student need.**¹⁹ In this way, it is completely consistent with the Oregon K-12 Literacy Framework which is designed to meet the needs of ALL students.

The major features that need to be in place in an **RTI framework** can be found throughout the **Oregon K-12 Literacy Framework**. Important highlights are

- Using scientifically-based programs and practices in the general education classrooms
- Developing a multi-tiered support system that incorporates prevention and early intervention services
- Implementing a reliable and valid comprehensive assessment system
- Using student data for making a range of instructional decisions, including student responsiveness to instruction and intervention.

RTI is also a legal way for a school to identify whether a student has a specific learning disability. The basic idea is simple in conceptualization, extremely difficult in execution. **In an RTI framework, a learning disability can be diagnosed when a student has failed to respond “to scientific, research-based intervention as a part of the evaluation procedures.”**²⁰

^{xxi} This means that increasingly intense instructional interventions have been implemented with the student in an effort to increase academic progress. Insufficient progress on the part of the student, despite the use of scientifically defensible interventions implemented as intended and with quality, defines a learning disability. **The Oregon K-12 Literacy Framework includes all of the components necessary for diagnosing the presence of a learning disability in this manner.**

When a school implements the Oregon K-12 Literacy Framework, they will be implementing the basic features of an RTI system.

Summary

In summary, a comprehensive assessment system for grades K-12 should be linked explicitly to formative and summative reading goals to determine overall reading proficiency. An assessment system should be used for four purposes: (a) screening, (b) monitoring progress over time, (c) evaluating overall reading outcomes, and (d) diagnosing potential causes of reading difficulty and instruction need. Data from reading assessments should be used to make instructional decisions about groups of students and individual students. Major features that need to be in place in a Response to Intervention (RTI) framework are integral to the Oregon K-12 Literacy Framework.

¹⁸ Gersten et al., 2009

¹⁹ Bastsche et al., 2005

²⁰ Public Law 108-446 Subpart 614(6)(b)

Links to Resources

ⁱ The National Center on Response to Intervention provides a helpful webinar on using curriculum-based measurement (CBM) for reading

http://www.rti4success.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1230

ⁱⁱ For ideas on implementing a K-3 reading assessment plan, see the following guide by the Center on Instruction: *A Comprehensive K-3 Reading Assessment Plan: Guidance for School Leaders*

http://centeroninstruction.org/resources_searchresults.cfm?searchterms=assessment

ⁱⁱⁱ To learn more about screening, see National Center on Response to Intervention's website:

<http://www.rti4success.org/chart/screeningTools/screeningtoolschart.html>

^{iv} See the practitioner guide, *Effective Literacy and English Language Instruction for English Learners in the Elementary Grades*, by the What Works Clearinghouse for recommendations to conduct screening assessments with English learners. <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/publications/practiceguides/>

^v For examples of formative goals for K-6, see the DIBELS Data System website at

<https://dibels.uoregon.edu/benchmark.php>.

^{vi} For the full technical report on Oral Reading Fluency Normative Data, see "Oral Reading Fluency: 90 Years of Measurement (Tech. Rep. No. 33)" at <http://www.brtprojects.org/publications/technical-reports>

^{vii} For a module on strategies for team approaches to collecting screening data, see "Approaches and Considerations of Collecting Schoolwide Early Literacy and Reading Performance Data" (Harn, 2000)

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

^{viii} For more information on progress monitoring, including a technical review of progress-monitoring tools, go to the National Center on Response to Intervention at

<http://www.rti4success.org/chart/progressMonitoring/progressmonitoringtoolschart.htm>.

^{ix} The National Center on Student Progress Monitoring provides a helpful webinar on progress monitoring in reading. See <http://www.studentprogress.org/library/Webinars.asp#ABC>

^x Other types of decision rules and resources for progress monitoring are available at the National Center for Student Progress Monitoring at <http://www.studentprogress.org/> and the Oregon RTI Initiative at <http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?id=315>.

^{xi} Oregon students receive Lexile measures automatically when they take the Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS) for Reading/Literature. For information on how Lexile measures are used in Oregon, see <http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?=1638>.

^{xii} Information on selecting reliable and valid measures can be found at the National Center on Student Progress Monitoring at <http://www.studentprogress.org/>

^{xiii} See the What Works Clearinghouse practitioner's guide, *Using Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making*, for guidelines on using achievement data to set instructional goals <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/publications/practiceguides/>

^{xiv} See the practitioner guide, *Effective Literacy and English Language Instruction for English Learners in the Elementary Grades*, by the What Works Clearinghouse for recommendations to conduct screening assessments with English learners. <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/publications/practiceguides/>

^{xv} For an example of a decision-making framework that includes both systems-level and individual-level decision making, please see the “Going from All to Each” (GATE) Map on the Oregon K-12 Literacy Framework website: <http://oregonreadingfirst.uoregon.edu/toolbox.html#rti>

^{xvi} The “Elements of a Healthy Grade-Level System Checklist” can be downloaded at <http://oregonreadingfirst.uoregon.edu/toolbox.html#swrm>

^{xvii} See the practitioner guide, *Assisting Students Struggling with Reading: Response to Intervention (RtI) and Multi-Tier Intervention in the Primary Grades*, by the What Works Clearinghouse for recommendations to help schools implement RtI. <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/publications/practiceguides/>

^{xviii} See the *Doing What Works* website to learn more about Response to Intervention in the primary grades: http://dww.ed.gov/topic/?T_ID=27

^{xix} The *Doing What Works* website provides two helpful videos of expert discussions in the area of Response to Intervention: http://dww.ed.gov/topic/?T_ID=27

^{xx} To learn more about Oregon’s Response to Intervention Initiative, see the Oregon Department of Education’s RTI web site at <http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?id=315>.

^{xxi} The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities. Information on the IDEA can be found at <http://idea.ed.gov/>.