EARLY READING SCREENERS

Preparing Your Learning:
What is an early reading screener, how is it implemented, and what does it tell you about your students?

Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario

Issued by the Ontario Ministry of Education in July 2023, Policy/Program Memorandum 168 (PPM 168) defines early reading screening as "a process of assessing a student's foundational reading in the early years of school. It involves administering a series of measures to identify students who may be at risk for reading difficulties."

Access to evidence-based assessments has always been available to teachers. It is important that students with reading difficulties be identified as early as possible to enable appropriate intervention.

The introduction of PPM 168 has the potential to create confusion about professional judgement regarding the use of other classroom assessment tools.

This is why, in addition to maintaining existing language enshrining professional judgement in the Teacher/Occasional Teacher Central Agreement, ETFO has negotiated provisions in the collective agreements to ensure that workload concerns are addressed while balancing support for students experiencing difficulties in learning to read.

Through the collective bargaining process, a Memorandum of Agreement was reached with the Crown and district school boards that includes the hiring of specialist teachers who will provide release time to classroom teachers for the administration of the early reading screener in year two of Kindergarten, in Grade 1, and in Grade 2 and provide much-needed early intervention support to students.

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IMPLEMENTATION OF EARLY READING SCREENERS

Starting September 2024, classroom teachers have a professional responsibility to administer the first early reading screener. Between the start of the school year and November 20, students in year two of Kindergarten, in Grade 1, and in Grade 2 will be screened annually. Specialist teachers will provide literacy and language instruction to classes that do not have a designated early childhood educator (DECE) while the early reading screeners are being administered by the classroom teacher. A classroom teacher in a year-two Kindergarten class that has a DECE can request the support of a specialist teacher, which may be provided, subject to availability.

Students who do not meet the benchmark after the first screening will receive reading support from the specialist teacher, who will administer the second screening in the spring. Students who meet the benchmark of the first early reading screener are not required to do the second screening.

The Kindergarten Communication of Learning and the elementary provincial report card issued between January 20 and February 20 will include the date the early reading screener was administered and whether the child met the benchmark. The early reading screener score should not be used to calculate the language mark on the report card.

Teachers have a professional responsibility to follow Growing Success, PPM 155, and PPM 168, but you should also rely on your professional judgement in the use of classroom assessment. Using a variety of assessment methods is essential to understanding each student's needs. It is also your professional responsibility to keep up-to-date assessment records that capture this information, which may be requested by administrators or used to communicate progress with families.

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HOW TO ACCESS EARLY READING SCREENERS

Teachers will be provided with access to early reading screeners selected by their district school boards. Each board will select one of the following options approved by the Ontario Ministry of Education:

acadience learning

aimsweb PLUS

easyCBM

Acadience Learning
(English or French versions)

Pearson AIMSweb+
(English version only)

Nelson EasyCBM
(English version only)

All early reading screeners are part of a larger platform that includes a variety of functional tools and additional assessments. Teachers only have to complete the mandatory measures used to create a composite score. Teachers should exercise their professional judgement regarding the use of the other assessments and tools within the platform.

A **composite score** is the statistical combination of raw scores from the different early reading screener assessment measures. The composite score will be compared to the predetermined benchmark score within the platform to determine whether a student is experiencing difficulty, or is at risk of experiencing difficulty, with reading.

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WHAT IS INCLUDED IN AN EARLY READING SCREENER?

While each of the ministry-approved early reading screening platforms will have its own variations and measures to calculate the composite and benchmark thresholds for each grade level, the following are common measures used in early reading screeners:

Letter naming fluency
a matrix of lowercase and uppercase letters that a student names from left to right and down a row

Phoneme segmentation
a word provided orally that a student would repeat identifying the sounds in the word

Nonsense word fluency
a list of nonsense words that follow typical phonological and phoneme patterns

Word identification
a list of words that a student reads from left to right and down a row

Oral reading fluency
a text passage that a student will read

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WHAT DOES THE COMPOSITE SCORE TELL YOU?

Research has shown that a composite score based on several measures can help predict a learner's reading trajectory. Each platform has its own benchmarks and colour coding system that supports the identification of students who are currently experiencing or are at risk of experiencing difficulties learning to read.

However, this is where teacher professional judgement is essential: by analyzing the screener information in combination with classroom-based assessments, you'll be best-positioned to ensure that students receive positive, responsive learning geared to their needs.

For more information about benchmarks and composite scores, or how to implement a tiered intervention approach, please see ETFO's Pedagogy and Professional Judgement series on the ETFO member website.

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