5 Ways to Use Universal Screening Data to Inform Instruction

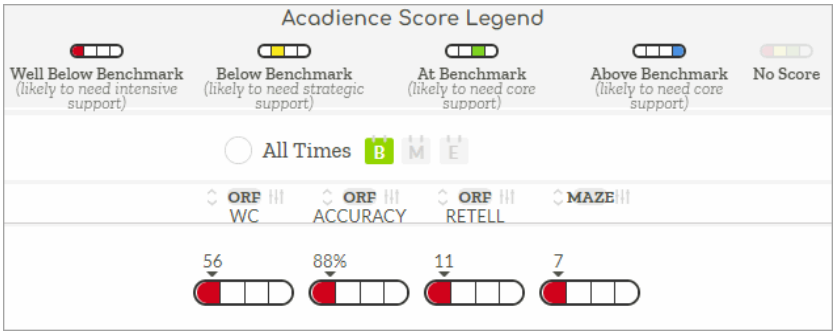
By Dr. Stephanie Stollar

Universal screening is an essential component of an effective schoolwide literacy model. Assessing all K–8 students three times a year on indicators of essential reading skills supports identifying students who are at risk before they develop reading problems, and identifying struggling readers early enough to successfully remediate their reading difficulties. Although universal screening is essential, it is only the first step. Now more than ever, educators need to know how to use reading data to support students' academic and social-emotional needs.

To maximize your investment in collecting universal screening data, here are five ways to use the data to inform instruction and improve reading outcomes.

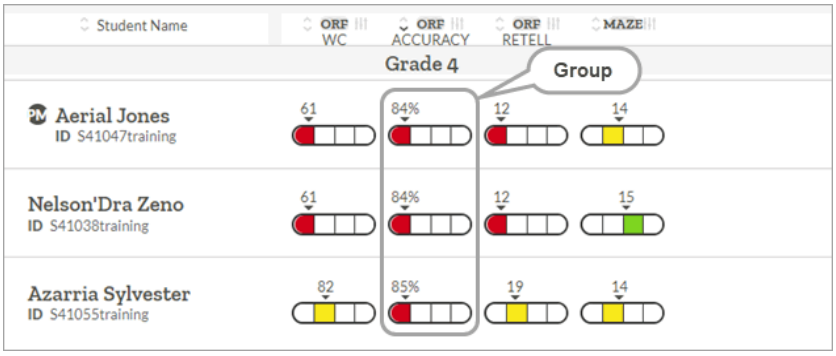
Learn the 5 Ways

1 Find Students Who Need Instructional Support



The most common use of universal screening data is to find students who are at risk of not meeting future reading outcomes unless they receive instructional support. Universal screening assessments that have research-based benchmark goals and cut points for risk are especially useful because the benchmarks articulate the likelihood of a student being an OK reader in the future. Every student who scores below or well below benchmark is at risk of not meeting future reading goals unless they receive instructional support. Grade-level teams of teachers and administrators should review universal screening data, identify students who scored below and well below benchmark, and plan instruction that will target the skill deficits.

2 Group Students for Classroom Reading Instruction

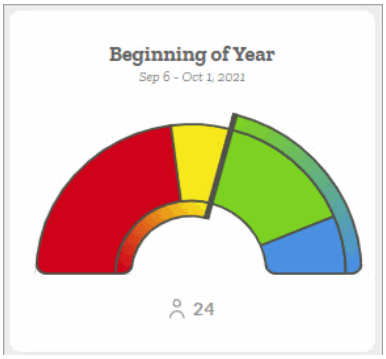


Low performance on universal screening should lead directly to instructional support on the skill(s) each student is missing. Targeted support is most effectively delivered in small groups. Universal screening data can be used to place students into initial instructional groups that can later be refined with diagnostic assessment data.

For example, logical groupings in the primary grades include:

- **Group 1**: Students who need to learn to decode basic words
- **Group 2**: Students who need to learn advanced decoding
- **Group 3**: Students who are accurate readers but need to build fluency
- **Group 4**: Students who are accurate and fluent but need instruction focused on reading comprehension

3 Improve the Effectiveness of Classroom Reading Instruction

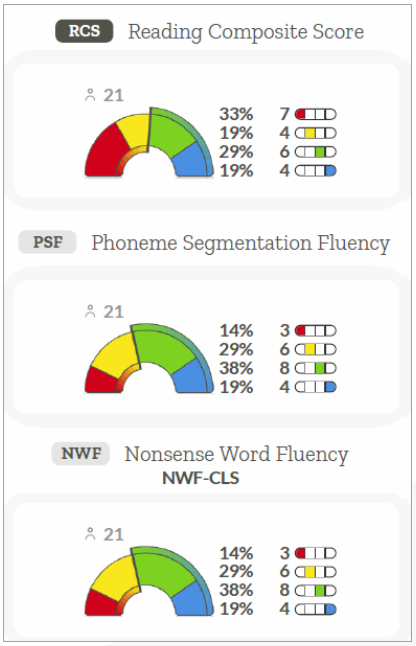


The percentage of students scoring below or well below benchmark on universal screening indicates the health and effectiveness of the past reading instruction and informs the design of future instruction. For example, if only 40% of the first-grade students can read CVC words accurately and automatically at the middle of the year, instruction in the first half of the year hasn't been aligned to the needs of the students. Classroom reading instruction in the second half of the year should be designed to target reading CVC words. By using screening data to reflect the health of the instructional system, administrators can move their schools beyond a student-by-student intervention approach, to a systems-level approach that will potentially improve reading outcomes for a larger number of students.

4 Identify Skills to Address in Intervention

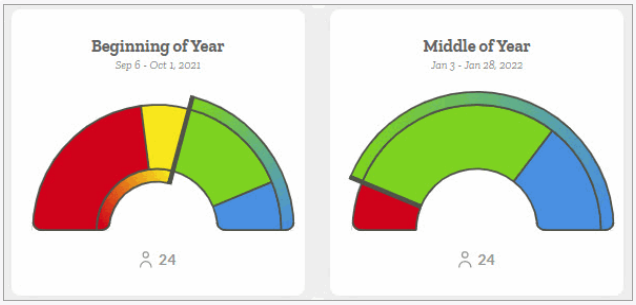
In addition to addressing potential changes to classroom reading instruction, the percentage of students who score below or well below benchmark on universal screening can inform decisions about which skills should be the focus of reading intervention in each grade.

For example, if a large proportion of third-grade students aren't reading grade-level text accurately, a decoding intervention should be made available, in addition to the small-group decoding instruction in the regular classroom. Planning intervention based on universal screening results, rather than meeting about each struggling reader, saves time and reserves resources to use for individual problem solving with the students who have the greatest learning challenges.



5 Measure Progress Over Time

Universal screening data can be used to measure growth over time in two important ways. First, the percentage of students who score below and well below benchmark should decrease from beginning to middle of year, and from middle to end of year. This indicates that the instructional system is supporting students to meet important reading goals. In addition, the scores for individual students should increase over time. Students who were below or well below benchmark should move to at or above benchmark across the year. If students are not making progress, the effectiveness of their instruction should be examined.



Universal screening is a powerful tool for prevention of and intervention on reading difficulties.

While collecting the data is important, improving reading outcomes depends on using the data to change instruction. Administrators can use the actions detailed here to maximize their investment in collecting universal screening data by ensuring students get appropriate instructional support.

For more information about universal screening and Acadience® Reading and Math assessments, visit **voyagersopris.com/acadience**.

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Dr. Stollar is the former vice president for professional learning at Acadience® Learning Inc. She is an adjunct professor in the online reading science program at Mount St. Joseph University, and a founding member of a national alliance for supporting reading science in higher education. Dr. Stollar has worked as an educational consultant, a school psychologist, and an assistant professor in the school psychology program at the University of South Florida, and has provided professional development for teachers for the past 25 years. She is a co-author of Acadience® Reading K–6, Acadience® Reading Survey, and Acadience® Reading Diagnostic.