May 2025

CONSIDERATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS WHEN ADOPTING A READING DIFFICULTIES SCREENER FOR MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

CALIFORNIANS TOGETHER
CHAMPIONING THE SUCCESS OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

TEACH +PLUS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Considerations and Suggestions When Adopting a Reading Difficulties Screener for Multilingual Learners

INTRODUCTION

A reading difficulties risk screener is a research-based assessment tool used for the early identification of students who may require additional instructional support for reading difficulties, including dyslexia. In California, all students from kindergarten to grade two must be assessed annually using one of the four screeners approved by the state of California. Districts are required to adopt a screener by June 30, 2025, for implementation in the 2025–26 school year.

Universal screeners are most effective when implemented in the early grades as part of a comprehensive, schoolwide strategy for instruction and further evaluation. However, for multilingual learners, careful consideration is needed during the selection, administration, and interpretation of these tools to ensure accurate and equitable use.

This brief highlights key issues to consider and includes questions to guide decision-making during district adoption and implementation, including the interpretation of results for informing instruction and communication with parents and assessment vendors.

The Role of Screeners for Multilingual Learners

For multilingual learners, screeners can play a critical role in distinguishing between reading difficulties and challenges associated with acquiring English as an additional language.

KEY REMINDERS

- Screeners are not diagnostic assessments (or tools). They help identify students who may need further evaluation and instructional support.

- To ensure accurate identification, particularly for multilingual learners, carefully consider the potential for both over- and under-identification when selecting a screener and interpreting the results.

- Screener results must not be used to meet criteria #4 of the reclassification process. EC 53008 (m) California

    Results of an assessment administered pursuant to this section shall not be used for any high-stakes purpose, including, but not limited to, teacher or other school staff evaluation, accountability, pupil grade promotion or retention, identification for gifted or talented education, reclassification of English learners, or identification as an individual with exceptional needs.

Considerations for Administration

Each district determines the timing of assessment, which may differ by grade level and English proficiency level. According to Ed Code:

> *A local educational agency shall consider whether pupils have received sufficient instruction in foundational reading skills to support a valid assessment.*

CONSIDERATIONS FOR KINDERGARTENERS AND EMERGENT BILINGUALS

Begin by reviewing the [publisher's overviews](#), specifically noting their recommendations for when to administer the assessment at each grade level and for multilingual learners.

Kindergarten and newly arrived students who may arrive throughout the school year should not be screened in the first part (half) of the school year or upon their arrival when their English language proficiency is very limited.

> *When determining a student's readiness for screening, it is crucial to consider factors such as their developmental history, educational history, literacy progress in English and their home language, time of year of arrival, and emotional/mental well-being (e.g., for refugee students).*

Screening in the third or fourth quarter—or after a pre-determined period for midyear arrivals—allows students greater exposure to instruction and provides a more accurate picture of both their literacy and language proficiency. For MLLs, assessment in both English and the home language is strongly recommended. The combined results create a more complete literacy profile.

While avoiding mislabeling is paramount, a "wait and see" approach can be detrimental. Early identification, combined with appropriate monitoring and language support, is essential. If concerns about underlying reading difficulties persist, further investigation is warranted.

According to EC 53008(h), it is strongly advised that multilinguals should be assessed in both English and their home language. The combined results create a more complete student profile of literacy development and language proficiency.

Key Questions for District Protocols and Implementation

TIMING

- When should the assessments be administered for each grade level?

- What English proficiency level ensures valid and reliable results? Careful consideration should be given before multilingual learners at the emerging English proficiency level are administered the screener in English.

- Are there accommodations for multilingual learners with emerging English proficiency?

- Are there clear stopping points if a student demonstrates a lack of English proficiency, understanding, or disengagement?

- What will be the criteria to determine whether a student has received sufficient instruction in foundational reading skills—either in English or the student's primary language—to ensure a valid and reliable screening outcome?

FORMAT

- In which languages is the screener available in addition to English and Spanish?

- Are culturally and linguistically authentic language and measures used versus direct translation?

- Are directions available in the student's home language? Can the vendor provide these translations?

- How are oral language and language comprehension assessed?

Key Questions for District Protocols and Implementation

DELIVERY

- Is the screener conducted one-on-one or in small groups?

- Who administers the screener: a certified teacher, support staff, or is it taken independently by the student?

- Is it paper-based, computer-administered, or both?

- What is recommended when the examiner cannot understand or validate student responses in their primary language?

  - What are the protocols if the examiner does not speak the student's home language?

  - Are recordings or other supports available to ensure accurate administration, especially when the tool is in the student's primary language?

  - Who in the community can assist with administering the screener in languages that students understand?

PROGRAM CONTEXT

- Does the screener align with the school's multilingual learner instructional models (e.g., dual immersion, bilingual)?

- If initial literacy instruction is in a language other than English, and for which there is no screener for that language, what alternative process will be developed to screen in those languages? Possible considerations are suggested in the CISC Adoption Toolkit (tools on p.17 and p.32)

Post Screening Considerations: Instructional Use of Data

An instructional team can develop a comprehensive plan for using screener results in ways that minimize the risk of over-identifying or under-identifying multilingual learners based upon factors relating to second language acquisition. Screener data should be supplemented with additional information about the student's literacy development and language proficiency before making any determinations about potential reading difficulties. Teachers' reflections based on daily observations, along with diagnostic information from district benchmarks, can help validate or raise important questions about the results.

INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

Key questions to consider

- Are supports available for educators to use screener data alongside other information (e.g., ELPAC scores, classroom observations, home language assessments)?

- Are there follow-up tools available to help educators interpret results and determine next steps for supporting multilingual learners, including tests administered in the student's home language?

- Is there guidance for interpreting results based on a student's English language development level?

- For students assessed in both English and their home language, what guidance is provided for interpreting and comparing results?

- How might the screener differentiate between reading difficulties and typical patterns of second language acquisition?

- Are cut scores or norms developed specifically for multilingual learners?

- Is there guidance on avoiding over- or under-identification of multilingual learners based on factors relating to second language acquisition?

Post Screening Considerations: Instructional Use of Data

INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING

- How will the comprehensive plan coordinate screening results with other assessment data, such as classroom observations, daily student interactions, and parent interviews, to create a complete picture of the student's strengths and needs?
  - Are reading difficulties present in both the primary language and English?

- Do the results suggest a need for further assessment to better understand the student's learning needs and progress?
  - Are additional diagnostic tools necessary to guide decisions about classroom supports and targeted intervention?

- How do the instructional plans for reading align with the language development goals of the school's program (e.g., dual immersion, bilingual)?

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

- Does the screener provide resources to help educators explain the purpose and results of the screening to families in multiple languages? Is it offered in a way that is accessible and respectful of families' languages and cultures?

- Are families given opportunities to share information about their child's language background, literacy experiences in their home language, developmental history, and educational background?

- Do parents understand the difference between reading difficulties and their child's English language proficiency?

ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

The Governor has allocated $40 million in the proposed 2025-26 state budget to provide training for teachers and staff who will administer the screeners.

- Train educators, especially those working with multilingual learners, on administration, interpretation, and response to the data

- Include multilingual learner specialists, bilingual staff, and family/community liaisons in decisions regarding adoption, implementation, and the interpretation and communication of results

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- Visit the [California Department of Education (CDE) FAQs on Reading Difficulties Screeners](#)

- View the [CISC Adoption Toolkit](#) (highlights on p.17 and p.32)

- Learn about the [four approved Reading Difficulties Risk Screeners](#)

- The [ELA/ELD Framework](#), [English Learner Roadmap](#), and the [California Dyslexia Guidelines (Ch.7)](#)