



Administrators' Role in Developing an Evidence-Aligned Assessment Plan

By Ryan Buggy

Administrators play an important role in ensuring that teachers have the time and resources they need to provide effective instruction. One of the best ways administrators can support their teachers is by providing them with high-quality assessment data, while minimizing the amount of instructional time spent on its collection and analysis. It is important for schools to collect and analyze literacy data that measure all foundational skills necessary for skilled reading (e.g., phoneme awareness, phonics, nonsense word reading, encoding, language comprehension) that go beyond basic comprehension measures included in curricula. Many schools invest in platforms (e.g., DIBELS, Acadience, AIMSweb, FastBridge, among others) to assist in collecting this data.

When choosing assessments, it may be helpful to consider the simple view of reading. Remember that one half of the simple view is "word recognition," or students' ability to get words off the page fluently and accurately. Some of the most widely used assessments in reading research measure students' word recognition, such as oral reading fluency—which has an extremely high correlation with comprehension—and phoneme segmentation, a sub-skill of word recognition. In general, word recognition skills are easier to *operationalize*, meaning that there are valid, reliable assessments that can measure these skills objectively and provide normative data. The other half of the simple view, "language comprehension," can be trickier to operationalize, as skills such as background knowledge and vocabulary are often more context specific. Since most students with reading difficulties have a primary deficit in word recognition—and word recognition is more easily measured than language comprehension—school leaders may opt to organize their assessment strategy around screening all students for word recognition deficits. If students demonstrate problems with their reading comprehension, but their

assessment data has ruled out difficulties in word recognition, then the simple view of reading indicates issues in language comprehension. One key takeaway: assessing **only** comprehension is not enough, and might not be the most valuable use of instructional time. There are a variety of reasons why students may have comprehension difficulties, including word-level reading deficits and gaps in vocabulary knowledge, so we want to select assessments that provide us with as much actionable data as possible. With this in mind, we recommend universally screening students in word recognition (using assessments such as oral reading fluency, nonsense-word reading, and phoneme segmentation), and using this data to identify students who show signs of reading difficulties.

Administrators can remember the four C's of assessment to help them understand their role in this process: **c**ollect, **c**ommunicate, **c**onnect, and **c**ome back:

- **Collect:** Make a plan for when you will collect assessment data throughout the year and who will be responsible for doing so. This plan will include allocating time for your assessment team (paraprofessionals, reading interventionists, etc.) to receive training on assessment protocols and calibrate their scoring, and then enough time to ensure that every student is assessed using curriculum-based universal screeners.
- **Communicate:** Although you will likely ask non-teaching staff to help administer the assessments, it's important that classroom teachers understand their students' data and its implications. If you use an assessment platform, ensure your teachers understand which reports are most useful to them, and provide them with common planning time to go through each student's results. If there are any building-wide trends you notice—for example, particularly low scores in phoneme segmenting among first graders—be sure to address these concerns with teachers, who may not have the same bird's-eye view afforded to administrators.
- **Connect:** High-quality data allows us to connect our instruction to individual students' needs. One way to do so is by providing time within your daily schedule for more individually tailored instruction, such as a WIN (What I Need) block, or a Walk-to-Learn period. During this time, you can organize students based on their data (for example, students who do not yet know all letter-sound correspondences), and communicate each group's instructional goals to their teacher. This allows teachers to target their instruction as efficiently as possible, connecting assessment data to their lesson planning.
- **Come Back:** After universally screening all learners, there may be certain students whose scores indicate that they are more significantly below benchmark than their peers. For these students, it is especially important to collect progress monitoring data in order to ensure that the intervention they are receiving is effective in bridging the gap in their reading ability. This

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means collecting biweekly data in between benchmarking windows, so that if you need to make any changes, you have current data available to you.

While teachers are the ones working directly with students in the classroom, their work would not be possible without the support of their administrators. By providing teachers with assessments that emphasize the efficient collection of actionable data—and the time they need to respond to it—administrators can ensure that all students have the greatest chance of becoming skilled readers.

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