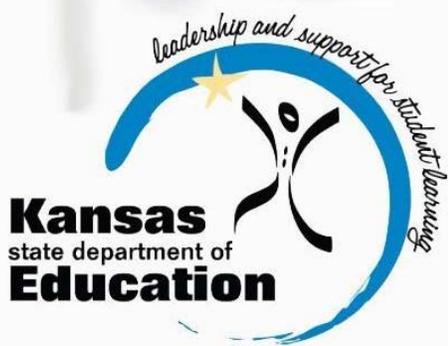


Kansas Guide  
to  
Early Reading Assessments  
Kansas State Department of Education



Career, Standards  
and  
Assessment Services

Revised August 2015



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- Provide a flexible delivery system to meet our students' changing needs.
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- Ensure effective, visionary leaders in every school.
- Promote and encourage best practices for early childhood programs.
- Develop active communication and partnerships with families, communities, business stakeholders, constituents and policy makers.

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# **Kansas Guide to Early Reading Assessments**

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Revised August 2015



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## A Word about Assessment and Instruction

The findings from the National Reading Panel Report identified five essential components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension (NRP, 2000). Additional components include language and concepts of print (Paris, Carpenter, Paris, & Hamilton, 2005). Today, these findings hold true for the use of the Kansas Early Reading Assessment whereby the teacher focuses on identifying each student's reading strengths and needs by the use of these initial screening assessments.

A balanced assessment system is a critical part of the instructional cycle; it is not a separate activity. Its relationship with curriculum planning and instruction is reciprocal (Cobb, 2003). Once information from assessments are gathered, analyzed, and used to design further instruction, teaching is adjusted, fueled by the new information. In four to six weeks, or earlier, the process repeats, often as progress monitoring. This return to assessment allows the teacher to determine whether teaching has made a difference and then make instructional decisions (see Assessment and Instruction Relationship Chart on following page). Careful examination,

**Assessment and instruction  
are connected IF the  
information gathered is  
actually used.**  
*(Garrison & Ehrlinghaus, 2007)*

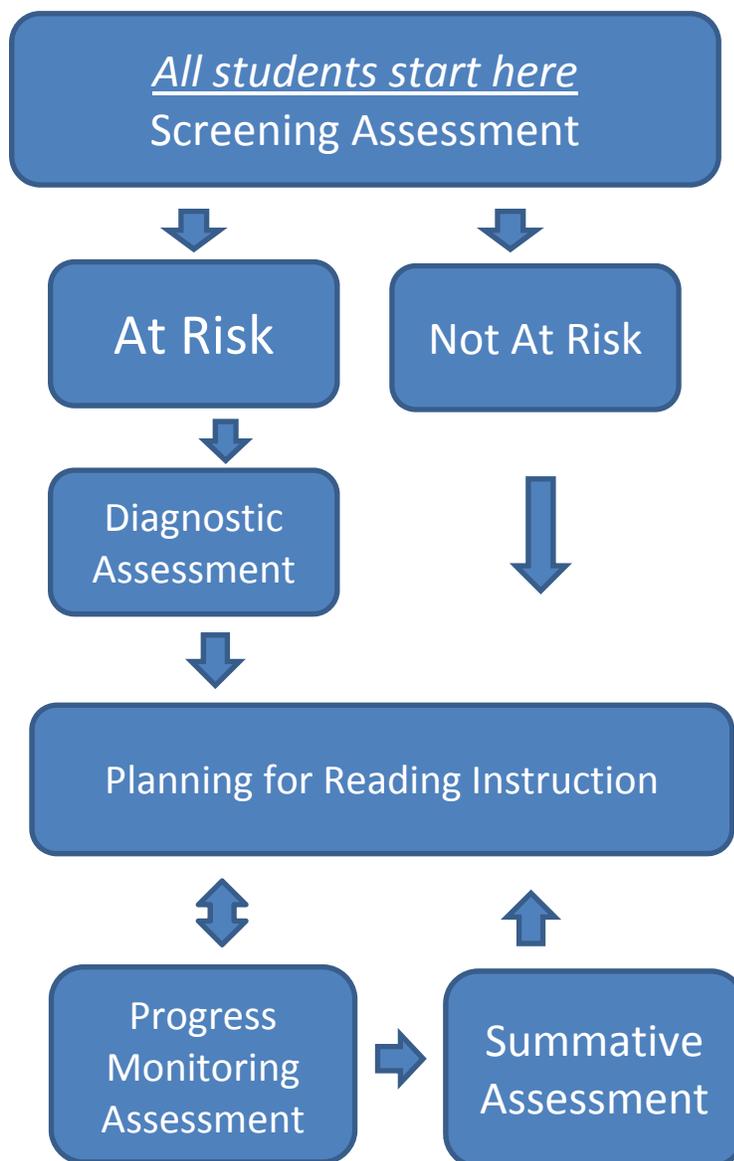
documentation, and analysis of each examination, documentation, and analysis of each student's reading performance throughout the year will enable teachers to modify instructional practices when appropriate. Establishing a data-driven instruction cycle creates a structure to monitor student progress in a systematic way, thus ensuring that instructional time is not lost throughout the school year (Cobb, 2003).

When teachers use a balanced assessment system to guide their instruction, the primary goal is to gather information about what students are doing as they read. The teacher looks for patterns in the students' work, sees strengths and challenges, and then uses this information to design instruction. Results from reliable and valid assessments allow the teacher to base instruction on multiple data to meet the specific needs of each student. Informed instruction is the hallmark of effective teaching and learning.

Recognizing the reciprocal relationship between assessment and instruction, the Kansas State Board of Education (KSBE) requires all schools to administer an early reading assessment to students in one of the early grades (K-1). The purpose of the requirement is to enable schools to identify students who need additional interventions to learn to read successfully. While the requirement is to assess students at just one of the early grades, research strongly suggests assessing reading development at each grade level to inform instruction. Further, researchers recommend that schools have in place an assessment system for identifying, diagnosing, and monitoring all students' reading development (Lipson & Wixson, 2003).

## Assessment and Instruction Relationship

The graphic below demonstrates the cycle of assessment and instruction that occurs throughout the year for all students. Student assessment provides information before (screening then if needed diagnostic), during (formative assessment process and progress monitoring) and after (summative) instruction. Before instruction, when a screening assessment is used, it can indicate if the student is on the path to being a successful reader or in need of specific additional instruction. The teacher might find the screening assessment as informative and the report this student's results to KSDE. However, if a student needs further assistance, then a diagnostic test is appropriate. This might be reported to KSDE as either a first or second assessment. During the formative assessment process, progress monitoring, teachers make multiple decisions related to planning and adapting instruction. Summative assessments indicate planning and instruction success or if revision is necessary.



## Types of Assessment

Using Balanced Assessment Systems to Improve Student Learning and School Capacity: An Introduction (Gong, 2010) defines “a balanced assessment system and its need.” Kansas state assessments are administered yearly but educators and parents need more information which leads to student success. A balanced assessment system provides additional information by the uses of other assessments. The Kansas Early Reading Assessment falls into this overall system by providing vital information about kindergarten and first grade students’ path to being a successful reader. Other types of assessments and how they are used it defined in the following section taken from Distinguishing Formative Assessment from Other Educational Assessment Labels (CCSSO, 2012)

**Summative assessment** is designed to provide information regarding the level of student, school, or program success at an end point in time. Summative tests are administered after the conclusion of instruction. The results are used to fulfill summative functions, such as to (1) reach an evaluative judgment about the effectiveness of a recently concluded educational program; (2) arrive at an inference about a student’s mastery of the curricular aims sought during an in-class instructional sequence; (3) arrive at a grade; or (4) meet local, state, and federal accountability requirements. The Kansas state assessments are an example of summative assessment.

“**Formative assessment** is a process used by teachers and students during instruction that provides feedback to adjust ongoing teaching and learning to improve students’ achievements of intended instructional outcomes” (*FAST SCASS, October 2006*).

Formative assessment is a process, not a “thing.”

“The attributes below have been identified as critical features of effective formative assessment:

- Learning Progressions. Learning progressions should clearly articulate the sub-goals of the ultimate learning goal.
- Learning Goals and Criteria for Success. Learning goals and criteria for success should be clearly identified and communicated to students.
- Descriptive Feedback. Students should be provided with evidence-based feedback that is linked to the intended instructional outcomes and criteria for success.
- Self- and Peer Assessment. Both self- and peer assessment are important for providing students an opportunity to think meta-cognitively about their learning.
- Collaboration. A classroom culture in which teachers and students are partners in learning should be established. (McManus, 2009)

Commentary - FAST SCASS adopted this definition of formative assessment as a process because the empirical evidence then available, and not contradicted by subsequent research, stressed the importance of using ongoing assessment evidence so that teachers could, if necessary, adjust their instructional activities, or students could adjust their learning tactics. Although not all of the attributes need to be present for the practice to be formative, in concert they enhance the process.”

“*Distinguishing Formative Assessment from Other Educational Assessment Labels*” p. 5

The *Kansas Guide to Early Reading Assessment* concentrates on three major types of assessment: screening, diagnostic, and progress monitoring. The three types fall under the broader concept of formative assessment.

### 1. Universal Screening Assessment

“Definition: Universal screening tests are periodically conducted, usually two or three times during a school year, to identify students who may be at risk, monitor student progress, or predict students’ likelihood of success on meeting or exceeding curricular benchmarks. Universal screening tests are typically brief and conducted with all students at a particular grade level.

Commentary - Universal screening measures consist of brief tests focused on target skills (e.g., phonological awareness) that are highly predictive of future outcomes (Ikeda, Neessen, & Witt, 2008). Some universal screening assessment systems feature two or more forms of the same tests measuring student mastery of the same curricular targets.

Results of the screening assessment may be used to identify students needing more targeted progress monitoring or more challenging curricular targets. Within the formative assessment process, these assessment systems are used to identify students who subsequently need more frequent or intensive opportunities to reveal their knowledge and skills during an instructional cycle.”

*“Distinguishing Formative Assessment from Other Educational Assessment Labels” p. 7*

### 2. Diagnostic Assessment

“Definition: Diagnostic assessments are evidence-gathering procedures that provide a sufficiently clear indication regarding which targeted subskills or bodies of enabling knowledge a student possesses or does not possess — thereby supplying the information needed by teachers when they decide how to most appropriately design or modify instructional activities. Because of the time intensive and specific nature of diagnostic assessments, they are only used for the subset of students identified as not making sufficient progress.

Commentary - The function of the diagnostic assessment process is to provide information to teachers about what is not being learned if students are not making progress. Such assessment information is most useful when it indicates to teachers or students what needs to be done to progress learning. Because diagnostic assessments are only of genuine value when they provide a reasonably accurate estimate of students’ status with respect to the curricular aims being measured, it is important for these tests to contain a sufficient number of items/tasks—per assessed curricular aim—to permit valid inferences regarding students’ current status.

When diagnostic tests provide teachers with immediate, instructionally tractable information, they are a useful resource in the process of formative assessment.”

*“Distinguishing Formative Assessment from Other Educational Assessment Labels” p. 7*

## 2b. Informal Reading Inventories

**Informal reading inventories** are individually administered assessments of a student's ability to orally or silently read, retell, and answer questions about graded reading selections. At times, passages are read to the student to determine a listening comprehension level.

The administration of an IRI requires extensive training to ensure that the results are both valid and reliable. Paris and Carpenter (2003) found acceptable levels of reliability in most commercial informal reading inventories, although other researchers have questioned traditional IRIs in terms of inter-rater, test-retest, and alternate form reliability (Klesius & Homan, 1985; Pikulski & Shanahan, 1982; Spector, 2005). Newer versions of IRIs address those issues through major revisions (Leslie & Caldwell, 2006; Lipson & Wixson, 2003) creating instruments that a large number of published studies in peer-reviewed journals use as their measure of progress.

## 3. Progress Monitoring Assessment

“Definition: Progress-monitoring tests are periodically administered, typically weekly or biweekly, to gauge students' growth toward mastery of (1) a target curricular aim or (2) the en-route sub-skills and bodies of enabling knowledge contributing to students' mastery of a target curricular aim.

Commentary - If educators wish to ascertain the degree to which their students are making satisfactory progress toward certain curricular targets, then one way to do so is to administer, at different points during an instructional sequence, tests specifically intended to gauge student progress. This could also be done, of course, by re-administering precisely the same test repeatedly. However, because students' interactions with earlier administrations of the same test form or items may boost their scores on subsequent test administrations (leading to less valid score-based inferences), most progress monitoring assessments feature multiple forms of tests measuring students' mastery of the same curricular targets.”

*“Distinguishing Formative Assessment from Other Educational Assessment Labels” p. 8*

## What We Can Test in the Kansas Early Reading Assessment

Measurement issues in reading reflect the complex, multidimensional nature of reading itself. The wide ranges of reading capacities, including knowledge, application, and engagement, that teachers strive to develop in their students are not usually assessed; certainly not in one test (Snow, 2003). The measure or instrument selected is reported to KSDE>

The currently available reading assessments do measure many components of reading. The Early Reading Assessment Committee recommends the use of assessments that included one or more of the five essential reading components (i.e., **comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, phonemic awareness, and phonics**) identified by the National Reading Panel (2000). These five components are reported to KSDE. A brief overview of each of the components follows, along with other commonly assessed reading components, language and concepts of print.

► **Comprehension** is described in the National Reading Panel Report (2000) as “the essence of reading.” The Kansas Reading Standards require students to comprehend a variety of text types including narrative, expository, persuasive, and technical texts, each of which has distinct structures. Over time, reading researchers have attached multiple definitions to comprehension from equating reading with thinking to looking at the words in the text as the origin of understanding. Currently, reading comprehension theory recognizes that the text does not stand alone; the reader, activity, and context also contribute to understanding. Comprehension is described as a process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning (Sweet & Snow, 2003).

Although comprehension has a dynamic, developmental nature, assessments typically measure only the products (i.e., retellings, answers to questions) of the complex cognitive processes involved in a student’s ability to read and understand a particular text. Because most comprehension assessments do not measure the strategies (i.e., prediction, comprehension monitoring, and so on) used or not used during oral or silent reading, teachers can only infer what lead to a student’s success or failure in understanding a particular passage.

Listening comprehension is the student’s ability to listen to and then answer questions or retell the gist of a given grade-level passage. Generally, a student’s listening comprehension is at or above his/her reading grade level.

► **Vocabulary** has been studied and recognized for its prominent role in reading achievement for more than 50 years (NRP, 2000). The goal of vocabulary instruction is to help students learn to apply their knowledge of words in appropriate reading situations and to increase their knowledge through independent encounters with words. Most vocabulary assessments evaluate a student’s receptive vocabulary through either a listening or a reading task. World knowledge, life experiences, and wide reading profoundly affect a student’s score on a vocabulary assessment. Because vocabulary is critical to reading comprehension, a vocabulary assessment will identify students who bring to the reading task a rich vocabulary that will support reading comprehension. Students with low vocabulary scores will likely encounter difficulty decoding and comprehending text. Unfortunately, there are few commercial assessments available that

explicitly assess a student's vocabulary.

► **Fluency**, again linked with comprehension, is the ability to read text with appropriate pace (i.e., rate), accuracy, and proper expression (NRP, 2000). It is often associated with only rate. Oral reading rate assessments are individually administered assessments that determine the number of words a student can read correctly in one minute. This type of assessment tells the teacher whether the student can orally read grade-level text with sufficient rate for comprehension to take place. Oral reading rate assessments do not measure comprehension (Pressley & Hilden, 2005).

Researchers found that fluency is much more than the number of words read per minute (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003). There appears to be a consensus that fluency includes the following three components (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991):

- **Pace/Rate** is the speed at which text is read orally or silently. Rate is the number of words read correctly per minute. It ranges from slow and laborious reading to consistently conversational.
- **Smoothness** refers to automatic word recognition. Smoothness ranges from frequent hesitations, sound-outs, and multiple attempts at words to smooth reading, where most words are recognized automatically, and word-recognition and structure difficulties are resolved quickly, usually through self-correction.
- **Prosody** means reading with expression, using the rhythms and patterns of spoken language. Prosody ranges from monotone, word-by-word reading to reading expressively with appropriate phrasing. Prosody can be separated into pitch, stress, and juncture.

► **Phonemic awareness** falls under the umbrella of phonological awareness. Phonological awareness refers to an overall awareness of the sounds in spoken language. Moving through the various levels of phonological awareness takes the student from a general awareness of sounds in words into more sophisticated sound awareness tasks.

The following list shows the most commonly agreed-upon levels of phonological and phonemic awareness in terms of student tasks (Goswami, 2000; Goswami & Bryant, 1990; Yopp, 1988). Note that all tasks purporting to assess phonological awareness must be strictly oral.

### **Phonological Awareness**

#### **A. Word Level**

1. **Concept of Word**
2. **Rhyme (Identification & Production)**

#### **B. Syllable Level**

1. **Word (cow/boy)**
2. **Syllable (ta/ble)**

#### **C. Onset and Rime Level**

- Onset and Rime**  
/m/ /ice/

#### **D. Phoneme (Sound) Level**

##### **Phonemic Awareness**

##### **Simple Compound**

- |                                |                                |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. <b>Phoneme Counting</b>     | 1. <b>Phoneme Deletion</b>     |
| 2. <b>Phoneme Isolation</b>    | 2. <b>Phoneme Substitution</b> |
| 3. <b>Phoneme Segmentation</b> |                                |
| 4. <b>Phoneme Blending</b>     |                                |

► **Phonics** refers to the relationship between letters and the sound/s they represent—the alphabetic principle. In order to decode our alphabetic language, students must have knowledge of those relationships (i.e., phonic knowledge) and then apply that knowledge to decode unknown words. The following numbered list shows phonic elements that are likely to be assessed to determine a student’s understanding and application of phonic knowledge.

- |                        |                              |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. <b>consonants</b>   | 4. <b>digraphs</b>           |
| 2. <b>short vowels</b> | 5. <b>long vowels</b>        |
| 3. <b>blends</b>       | 6. <b>vowel combinations</b> |

Additionally, a teacher can determine a student’s proficiency in applying phonic knowledge by administering an assessment in which students use phonic knowledge to decode words. Sometimes, reading assessments include decoding strategies such as structural analysis in their phonics assessment sections, or the authors may include a separate section on decoding strategies.

► **Language** development has a longitudinal impact on reading achievement (Paris, Carpenter, Paris, & Hamilton, 2005). The varying degrees of developmental language skills that students come to school with affect both comprehension and word recognition (Catts, Fey, Zhang, & Tomblin, 1999). Typically, language is assessed through a variety of oral language subtests such

as expressive and receptive vocabulary, narrative recall, conceptual knowledge, and syntactic ability (Paris, Carpenter, Paris, & Hamilton, 2005).

► **Concepts of Print** refers to an understanding of the fundamental elements that are related to how print is organized and used in reading and writing tasks (Clay, 2005). Subtests about concepts of print survey how students believe text works and what ideas about language and print the student brought to school.

## Suggestion for Reporting Results to KSDE

In preparing your report to KSDE, the building principal will need to report the following:

- |                       |                                      |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| A. USD Number         | N. Number Assessed                   |
| B. USD Name           | O. Percent Need Support              |
| C. Building Number    | P. Additional Information            |
| D. Building Name      | Q. Additional Grade                  |
| E. Building Address   | R. Additional Instrument             |
| F. Principal Name     | S. Additional Number Assessed        |
| G. Instrument Used *  | T. Additional Percent                |
| H. Phonemic Awareness | U. Second Additional Grade           |
| I. Phonics            | V. Second Additional Instrument      |
| J. Fluency            | W. Second Additional Number Assessed |
| K. Vocabulary         | X. Second Additional Percent         |
| L. Comprehension      | Y. School Year                       |
| M. Grade Level        |                                      |

\*Screener is usually the first instrument used.  
Diagnostic can be appropriate if screener indicated its use.

## Selecting Assessments

Because educational researchers repeatedly find that early identification and subsequent intervention is a key to improving reading achievement (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998), the quest to find assessments to identify, diagnose, and monitor at-risk students is a prominent issue for many schools and school districts.

**A single assessment cannot capture the variety of skills and developmental levels of most students in elementary schools.**

(Paris & Hoffman, 2004)

When selecting the appropriate assessments to meet their specific needs, schools and districts are advised to ensure that those individuals who will be administering the assessments are well trained in the specific administration procedures. Fidelity to each assessment's directions will support the validity and reliability of assessment results. Additionally, before purchasing an assessment, schools and districts are advised to request

sample copies of the assessment for more detailed descriptions of purpose, administration procedures, results, and other information that will be provided. KSDE does not provide a list of preferred assessments but suggest you contact school leaders with similar demographics to see what is being used. Also, the Kansas Early Reading Assessment website has reported results from previous years and you can have an overview of assessments employed. The form on the following page provides a list of considerations in selecting assessments.

## Considerations for Assessment Selection

- 1) What is the specific purpose for the assessment?
- 2) Do the purposes of the assessment stated by the authors match the needs (purposes) of the school? How?
- 3) How are test results meaningful and usable for instructional design?
- 4) How will the results be reported?
  - a. charts
  - b. graphs
  - c. narrative
  - d. other
- 5) How will the results be used? Are the results in a format that supports their use?
- 6) Who will receive/use the assessment results?
  - a. Teachers
  - b. State officials
  - c. District office
  - d. Principal
  - e. Parents
  - f. Student teams
- 7) Which students will be assessed? Are the assessments administered individually or in groups?
- 8) How much time per student or class will the assessment(s) occupy?
- 9) Will the assessment(s) be part of the school's QPA, NCA, Title I, or At-risk plan?
- 10) Who will administer the assessment(s)?
- 11) Who will train the assessors?
- 12) Will professional development be available for any phase of the assessment (administration, interpretation, and planning) process?
- 13) Where will the testing take place? Is private space needed and/or available?
- 14) Where will the information be stored?
- 15) Which test(s) best fit the needs of the school, teachers, and students?

## Glossary

**Alternate forms reliability** determines if the two forms of an assessment (i.e., Form A, Form B) are equivalent.

**Construct validity** tells us if the test is effective in measuring what it is intended to measure. To have construct validity, an assessment must measure the construct according to its definition in that field's literature. If the assessment claims to provide information about student performance in one or more of the five essential components of reading (i.e., phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency) then does the assessment, in fact, measure those components?

**Content validity** reveals whether the assessment is effectively sampling the relevant domain. Appropriate and thorough coverage of content should appear in the task format(s), item type(s), wording, questions, and test administration and scoring (AERA, APA, & NCME, 1999; Rathvon, 2004).

**Criterion-related validity** reports how effective the assessment is in predicting performance now (concurrent validity) or later (predictive validity).

**Inter-rater reliability** establishes the degree of agreement among examiners on a student's reading performance. That is, each person administering the test obtains similar results. This form of reliability is critical when scoring involves subjective judgment, such as rating a student's performance on a task (Invernizzi, Landrum, Howell, & Warley, 2005).

**Internal consistency reliability** indicates the degree to which all items in a test consistently measure the same concept. This reliability is estimated from a single form of a test (Gronlund, 1985).

**Test-retest reliability** measures consistency of results over time. The same assessment is administered to student(s) at a preset interval (i.e., minutes to weeks) to determine if the results are stable over time (Gronlund, 1985).

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