



# Kansas Guide

## To Early Reading Assessments

Kansas State Department of Education

# Kansas Guide to Early Reading Assessments

2010 Kansas State Department of Education  
120 SE 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Topeka, Kansas 66612-1182  
[www.ksde.org](http://www.ksde.org)

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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). From the point of initial screening assessments, the teacher focuses on identifying each student's reading strengths and needs within the major components of reading.

Assessment 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 assessment is 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, documentation, and analysis of each student's reading performance throughout the year will enable teachers to modify instructional practices when

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

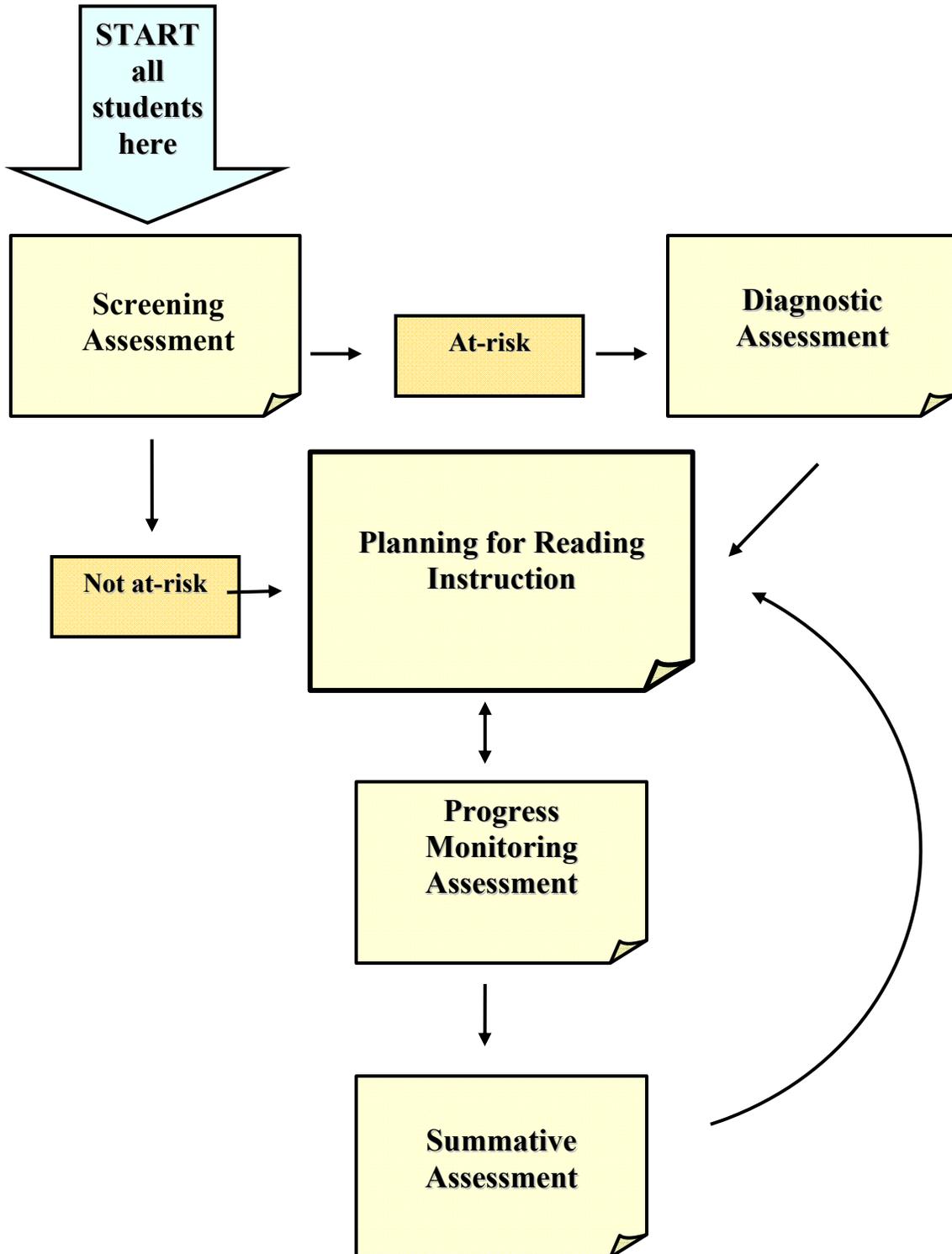
appropriate. Establishing a data-driven instruction cycle creates a structure to monitor student progress in a systematic way, thus ensuring that instructional time is not lost throughout the school year (Cobb, 2003).

When teachers use assessment 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-2). 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 following graphic demonstrates the cycle of assessment and instruction that occurs annually for all students. Student assessment provides information before (screening, diagnostic), during (progress monitoring) and after (summative) instruction. During progress monitoring, teachers make multiple decisions related to planning. Summative assessments indicate planning and instruction success or if revision is necessary.





## Types of Assessment

**B**efore any inferences about students are made, or any instructional actions taken, evidence about student performance must be generated (Wiliam & Black, 1996). For assessments teachers and schools use to inform their teaching practices. Two broad categories of assessment purpose are formative and summative. Definitions of each purpose are below.

**FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT** is part of a process intended to guide instructional decisions for individual students while lessons are still occurring (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Gronlund, 1985). Accordingly, the measurements used in the process should reflect the instructional focus for students. The information gathered provides feedback so that teachers can “form” or adjust ongoing instruction (Carey, 2001; Chatterji, 2003; Gronlund, 1985; McMillan, 1997; Olson, 2006).

Assessment that provides diagnostic information for appropriate instruction is a formative use of data. (Carpenter & Paris 2005)

Because formative assessments help teachers identify needs, shape plans, and revise instruction, they vary in terms of design and can range from informal observation or classroom exercises designed to reveal understandings, misconceptions, or gaps, to customized tests created by publishers (Chatterji, 2003). The common elements in all of these are feedback about the level of performance and adjustment of teaching practices to raise student achievement. It is only when this evidence of student performance is actually used to adapt teaching to meet students’ needs that it becomes formative (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

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.

► **Screening assessments** are routinely given to students at the beginning of each year, upon entry into a new school, or when a student is not progressing as expected. The crucial issue for selecting a screening assessment is evaluating its predictive accuracy (e.g., predictive validity). In other words, how well does the instrument identify which children are likely to experience reading difficulty?

Screening assessments are quick to administer. Consequently, this type of assessment does not typically give the teacher a clear, fine-grained picture of a student with reading difficulties. Screening assessments are most valuable when used to identify students who may need further diagnostic assessment or additional instructional support.

► **Diagnostic assessments** are administered to students who were identified through the screening process as potential struggling readers or at points during the year when students are not making adequate progress.

Diagnostic assessments provide detailed information about a student’s reading development; they help us understand why a student’s reading is not progressing as expected and help pinpoint the potential causes of difficulty. This assessment provides

the teacher with specific student information necessary to develop an individual intervention plan; it is the heart of the instructional program for teachers of struggling readers. Within this category of assessment is the informal reading inventory (IRI), a method designed specifically to assess and interpret student comprehension of text (Paris, 2003).

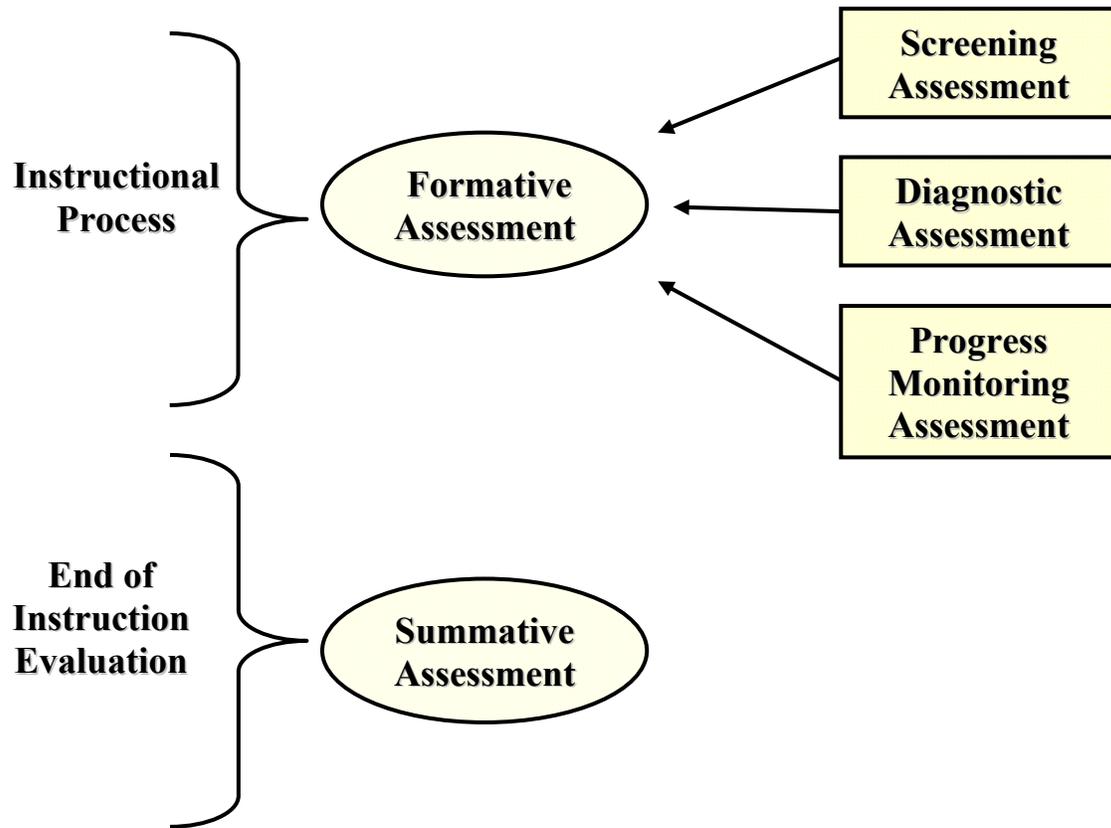
>**Informal reading inventories** are individually administered assessments of a student's ability to orally or silently read, retell, and answer questions about graded reading selections. At times, passages are read to the student to determine a listening comprehension level.

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.

► **Progress monitoring assessments** are given throughout the school year to determine a student's progress toward the instructional goal/s and to help plan differentiated instruction. This type of criterion-referenced assessment (see page 10) is administered regularly— a minimum of three times per year— especially at critical decision-making points such as regrouping students. For students at-risk, progress monitoring occurs as frequently as needed, based on student growth.

**SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS** evaluate student performance after instruction is completed; they document what students know and do not know (Garrison & Ehrlinghaus, 2007). Because these assessments occur at the end of the instructional process, they are often used to assign students' grades or verify students' achievement (Gronlund, 1985). Summative assessment techniques include performance ratings and publisher- or teacher-made tests.

## Relationship of Assessments to One Another





## Interpreting Scores

**A**nother framework for categorizing assessments is according to the method by which the results are interpreted; a test score without context has little meaning. Teachers can attach meaning to basic raw scores by choosing a frame of reference. The two basic methods of interpreting individual student performance are through norm-referenced and criterion-referenced measurements.

**Norm-referenced measurements** determine how an individual student's performance compares with the performance of other students on the same test (Gronlund, 1985). Teachers use these measurements to determine whether a student's test performance is above average, average, or below average compared to classmates (local norms) or a broader group of like students (national norms). Teachers can also determine if a student's performance on the test is consistent with past performances.

"The most important part of giving a test is making sense of the scores."  
(McKenna & Stahl, 2003, p. 25.)

Both local and national norms are based on representative groups of students at the same grade level. These students are tested and the data obtained from testing constitutes the norm group to which other students are compared. Therefore, it is essential that the normed population is similar in composition (i.e., demographics, ages, and grades) to the group being assessed. National norms should be updated periodically to represent the current population and then published by test-makers (Chatterji, 2003; Salvia & Ysseldyke, 1988; Gronlund, 1985).

To make comparisons against the normed group, the raw scores earned by each student are converted into derived scores such as percentile ranks, stanines, normal curve equivalents, or scaled scores. Most derived scores are based on the standard normal distribution of scores (McKenna & Stahl, 2003). Those scores then indicate a student's relative position within a clearly defined reference group (Gronlund, 1985).

**Criterion-referenced measurements** compare an individual student's performance against a pre-established criterion or other point of reference. Criterion-referenced score interpretations are descriptive in nature. That is, the score is converted into a description that allows teachers to express what an individual student can do, without referring to other students' performances (Gronlund, 1985). For example, teachers can describe the specific tasks a student can perform (i.e., recognize and name all 26 letters), indicate the percentage of tasks a student performs correctly (i.e., spells 90 percent of the words in the word list), or compare the test performance to a set standard in order to make a mastery decision (i.e., must answer 80 percent of the questions correctly on a comprehension test). Assessments that accompany basal reading series are usually criterion-referenced; the "passing" score is the criterion.



## Validity and Reliability

The terms “validity” and “reliability” represent prominent concepts within the assessment literature and in federal guidelines for documenting student learning. Both concepts refer to the results obtained from the assessment instrument, not the instrument itself (Frisbie, 2005; Gronlund, 1985). Because tests are an indication of underlying knowledge, it is essential that administrators, reading specialists, and teachers select assessments that are appropriate for the specific test administration purpose.

**Validity** is based on various kinds of evidence to support the claim that the test measures what it is intended to measure so that inferences about student results are accurate.

"A 'standardized' assessment is any test for which the procedures for administration and scoring are rigorously prescribed."  
(McKenna & Stahl, 2003, p. 27)

Most publishers report three basic approaches to test validation in their technical documentation. The approaches are construct validity, content validity, and criterion-related validity. The strongest case for validity can be made when evidence from all of the approaches is present. The *Standards for Educational*

*and Psychological Testing*, published jointly by the American Educational Research Association (AERA), the American Psychological Association (APA), and the National Council for Measurement in Education (NCME), (AERA, APA, & NCME, 1999) clearly describes how to evaluate educational assessments. The standards describe a broad-based approach to establishing validity, including uses, interpretation, and consequences of testing (see the Glossary for definitions of types of validity).

**Reliability**, tied closely to validity, refers to the consistency of the assessment results regardless of the conditions or settings of testing, number of times tested, or persons scoring the test. Reliability answers the question, “Are scores from this assessment consistent and accurate?” Assessments that are consistent more accurately estimate student ability (Carpenter & Paris, 2005).

One of the biggest threats to reliability is differences among practitioners in administering tasks and recording responses. Rathvon (2004) suggested that live-voice tasks (i.e., phoneme blending), fluency-based tasks, and complex administration and scoring tasks are likely to cause variances in administration that jeopardize reliability. The types of reliability commonly reported by reading test publishers include inter-rater, test-retest, internal consistency, and alternate forms. A brief description of the terms related to reliability is in the Glossary.



## What We Can Test

**M**easurement 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 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). 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. Phoneme Counting     | 1. Phoneme Deletion     |
| 2. Phoneme Isolation    | 2. Phoneme Substitution |
| 3. Phoneme Segmentation |                         |
| 4. Phoneme Blending     |                         |

► **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. consonants   | 4. digraphs           |
| 2. short vowels | 5. long vowels        |
| 3. blends       | 6. vowel combinations |

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.



## Selecting Assessments

**B**ecause 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. The form on the following page provides a list of considerations in selecting assessments.

## Considerations for Assessment Selection

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

**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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# Education Priorities for a New Century



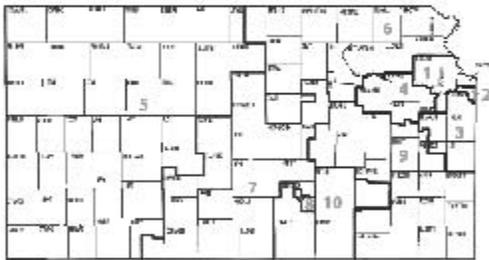
**Kansas State Board of Education**  
120 S.E. 10th Avenue • Topeka, Kansas 66612-1182

## Education Priorities of the Kansas State Board of Education

Ensure that all students meet or exceed high academic standards and are prepared for their next steps (e.g., the world of work and/or post secondary education). To accomplish the mission of the Kansas State Board of Education, the Board has identified four goals. They are as follows:

- Redesign the delivery system to meet our students' changing needs.
- Provide an effective educator in every classroom.
- Ensure a visionary and effective leader in every school.
- Improve collaboration with families and communities, constituent groups and policy partners.

Kansas State Board of Education  
Adopted 5/2009



### Board Members



**District 1**  
Janet Waugh, Chairman  
715 N. 74th St.  
Kansas City, KS 66112  
913-287-5165 (home)  
jwaugh1052@aol.com



**District 2**  
Sue Storm  
8145 Mackey  
Overland Park, KS 66204  
913-642-3121 (home)  
sstorm717@aol.com



**District 3**  
John W. Bacon  
14183 W. 157th  
Olathe, KS 66062  
913-660-0392 (home & FAX)  
jwsubacon@aol.com



**District 4**  
Carolyn L. Wims-Campbell  
3824 S.E. Winiss Ave.  
Topeka, KS 66609  
785-266-3798 (home)  
campell4kansasboe@verizon.net



**District 5**  
Sally Canble  
530 Liac  
Liberal, KS 67901  
620-624-6677  
scanble@jwox.net



**District 6**  
Kathy Martin  
859 Valleyview Rd.  
Gay Center, KS 67432  
785-463-5463 (home)  
martinkathy@yahoo.com



**District 7**  
Kenneth Willard  
24 Dakota Dr.  
Hutchinson, KS 67502  
620-669-0498 (home)  
866-389-2103 (FAX)  
kwillard@cox.net



**District 8**  
Walt Chappell  
3165 N. Porter  
Wichita, KS 67204  
316-838-7900 (work)  
chappellw@chappell4ksboe.com



**District 9**  
Jana Shaver, Vice-Chairman  
113 Woodane Dr.  
Independence, KS 67301  
620-331-1452 (home & FAX)  
janashaver@cableone.net



**District 10**  
David Dennis  
615 N. Rainbow Lake Rd.  
Wichita, KS 67215  
316-729-1979 (home)  
316-650-0152 (cellular)  
ddennis@swbell.net



Kansas State Department of Education



**Dr. Diane DeBacker**  
Interim Commissioner/Deputy Commissioner  
Division of Learning Services  
785-296-3202



**Dale M. Dennis**  
Deputy Commissioner  
Division of Fiscal & Administrative  
Services  
785-296-3871

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