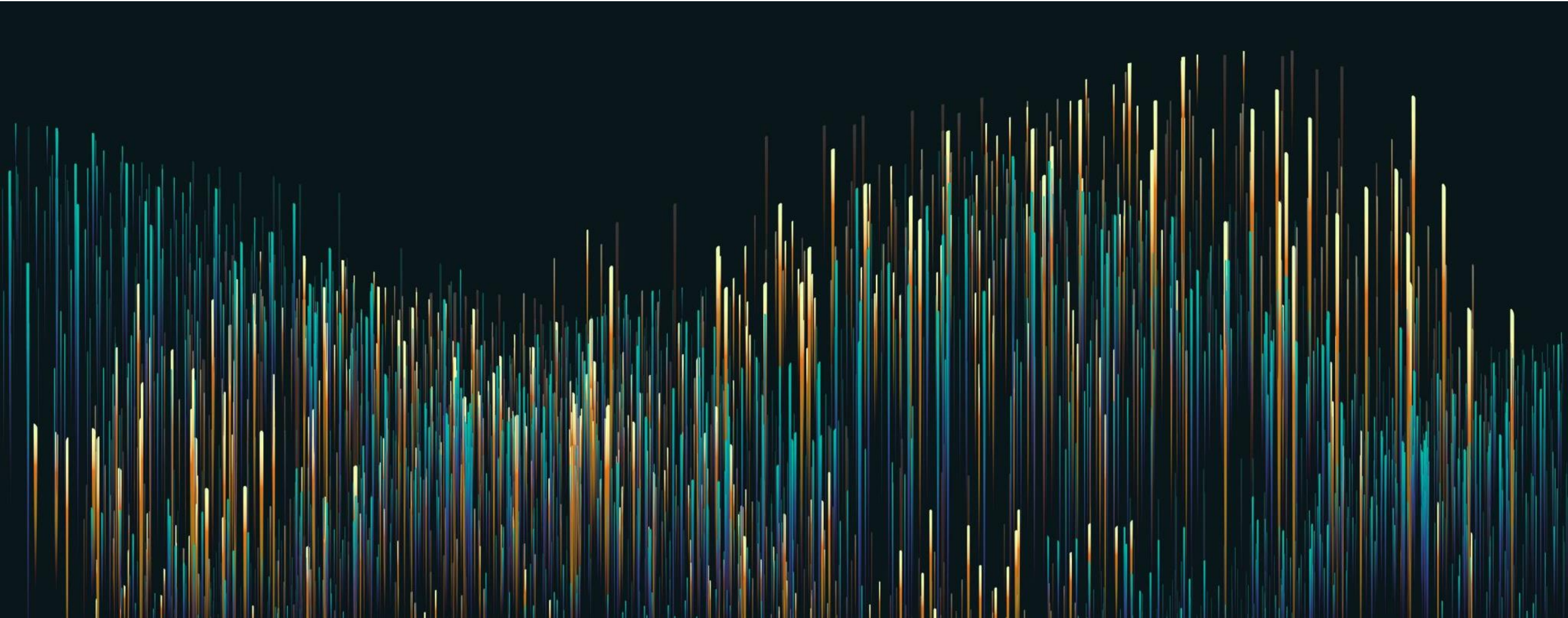


Understanding Early Literacy Screening Data: Making Sense of the Results

April 16th, 2025

David Fainstein, PhD, NCSP





Welcome!

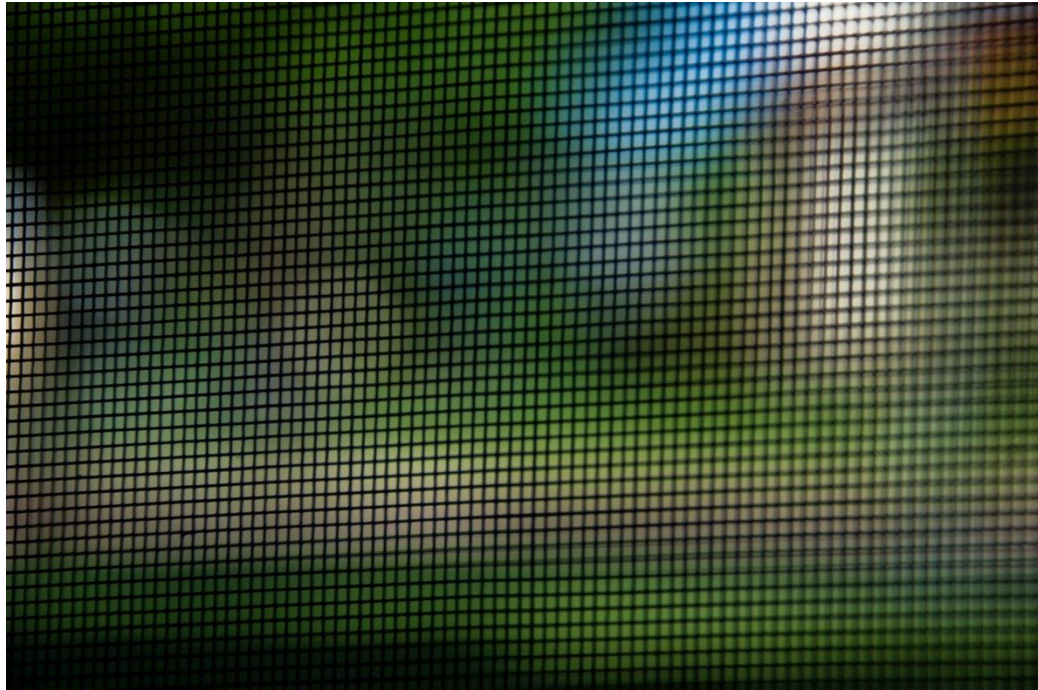
Shape of our Session

- ✓ Early literacy screening results: types and processes
- ✓ Developing proficiency and using practitioner tips
- ✓ Organizing your data for use
- ✓ Preview, and Q&A

The background of the slide is a dark, monochromatic scene filled with numerous three-dimensional question marks. These question marks are of varying sizes and are arranged in a way that creates a sense of depth and a vast, unending field. At the bottom center of the image, there is a bright, glowing light source, possibly representing a sun or a city skyline at dawn, which casts a warm, golden light upwards, illuminating the lower portions of the question marks and creating a strong contrast with the dark background. The overall mood is one of mystery and inquiry.

Revisiting Questions from Session 1

Early Literacy Screening: Results



@photonburst, CC

Not all screening results look the same, so let's talk through key ideas:

1. Range
2. Benchmark
3. Local Cut-points for Risk

Guiding principle: screening is intended to screen in those students who are likely to benefit from more support, and screen out those students who are on-track

Screening Results: Range

Range	Possible Interpretation
Green	Student is benefitting from core classroom instruction – no further supports needed at this time
Yellow	Student may benefit from additional support to classroom instruction. Consider providing additional support
Red	Student will very likely benefit from additional support. Providing this support early is a protective factor for literacy skill acquisition

Some early literacy screeners will use a ‘range’ approach, where student results are compiled to summarize likelihoods of the level of support that student’s may need. Some ranges are definitive, and others are a gradient.

CRITICAL POINT: Students are not ranges, numbers, or composite scores. Our students are so much more as they develop literacy skills



Let's Define "Benchmark"

In early literacy screening, a **benchmark** is like a **risk-level**. That is, if a student is “below benchmark,” then they are at-risk for reading difficulty

Screening Results: Benchmark

Example: Oral Reading Fluency, Second Grade

Range	Possible Interpretation	Benchmark
Green	Student is benefitting from core classroom instruction – no further supports needed at this time	84 WCPM
Yellow	Student may benefit from additional support to classroom instruction. Consider providing additional support	59 WCPM
Red	Student will very likely benefit from additional support. Providing this support early is a protective factor for literacy skill acquisition	35 WCPM

Many early literacy screeners also use benchmarks to establish the cut points for risk. There are specific metrics that we use to correctly identify which students will benefit from additional support.

Example: Oral Reading Fluency, Second Grade

One sunny morning, Popey decided to go on an adventure. He packed his backpack with some snacks, a bottle of water, and his favourite toy compass. He waved goodbye to his mom and walked into the forest.

As Popey walked through the forest, he heard birds singing and leaves moving in the wind. He followed a small path that led him to a shiny blue lake. The water was so clear that Popey could see fish swimming. He sat down on a big rock and ate his snacks while watching the fish.

After a while, Popey saw something shiny on the other side of the lake. Curious, he decided to check it out. He carefully crossed a fallen log that acted like a bridge and went to the shiny thing. When he got closer, he saw that it was a pretty, golden key!

Popey picked up the key and wondered what it could open. He looked around and saw an old, wooden box hidden behind some bushes. Excitedly, he ran to the box and tried the key. It fit perfectly! With a little effort, Popey opened the box and found it filled with sparkling jewels and shiny coins.

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Screening Results: Local Cut-Point for Risk

Example: Oral Reading Fluency, Second Grade

Range	Possible Interpretation	Cut Point
Tier 1	Student is benefitting from core classroom instruction – no further supports needed at this time	31 WCPM
Tier 2+	Student may benefit from additional support to classroom instruction. Consider providing additional support	

Early literacy screening benchmarks are like a GPS. Sometimes in our local context we need to decide on our own cut-point for risk to clearly define which students we will be providing additional support for and how to group them by instructional need.

Screening Results: Local Cut-Point for Risk

Example: Oral Reading Fluency, Second Grade

Many of my students are far below benchmark, what is a reasonable cut-point that we can set to provide additional support to those who need it most?

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Screening Results: Local Cut-Point for Risk

Some guidance on setting a cut-point for risk:

- We can set a cut-point **below** a benchmark, not above a benchmark
- Providing additional instructional support based on student need depends partially on **resource and capacity**
- As you're setting a cut-point, remember that "there is no magic down the hall, or with this one teacher, or in this particular space" → **learning to read can happen persistently, throughout the day, and across multiple settings**

Practitioner Tip



The best way to understand where a child is at in their reading development is to listen to them read

Using Screeners for Understanding

Considerations as we **screen-in** those who are at-risk for reading difficulty, and **screen-out** those who are on-track:

- Taking formal screening data with informal broader data is best done by someone who knows the student well (Martin & Shapiro, 2011)
- Our intuition is often good, and screening data can help support our position, surprise us, or something else entirely. The data that we get is **objective**: “on this day, this student segmented 21 phonemes”

Practitioner Tip



Don't let perfect be the enemy of good enough! Literacy screening is a tool for you and your instructional practice to meet the needs of students. Use it as a tool.

Developing Proficiency in Using Screeners

Use an efficient, empirically tested, and useful tool by keeping several factors in mind:

- **We all have a learning curve**, and it is especially steep with something new. Please take a training if you can!
- **Preview** a form or passage before asking students to tackle it
 - try it out yourself at least twice if you're new.
- When in doubt, **check the manual**. All empirically tested screeners have a manual which will answer almost all of your questions or concerns.
- Feeling stuck after being surprised with a screening result? Consider **additional tools** (e.g., diagnostic) and **teaming** with a colleague to talk through what you've noticed.

Practitioner Tip



Screening tells us two critical pieces of information:

1. Which students are likely to benefit from more support
2. The strand(s) of literacy that they are struggling in

Many Strands Are Woven into Skilled Reading

Language Comprehension

Background Knowledge

facts, concepts, etc.

Vocabulary

breadth, precision, links, etc.

Language Structures

syntax, semantics, etc.

Verbal Reasoning

inference, metaphor, etc.

Literacy Knowledge

print concepts, genres, etc.

Word Recognition

Phonological Awareness

syllables, phonemes, etc.

Decoding

alphabetic principle, spelling-sound correspondence

Sight Recognition

of familiar words

increasingly strategic

increasingly automatic

Skilled Reading

Fluent execution and coordination of
language comprehension and
word recognition

Figure 1.9 Reading Rope
(Scarborough, 2001)

Organizing Your Data for Use

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Need-based
support by
area of
literacy

Student	WRF	NWF	ORF	MAZE
AB	Red	Red	Red	Red
BC	Yellow	Red	Green	Red
CD	Green	Red	Red	Red
CE	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
EF	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Yellow
FG	Green	Yellow	Green	Green
GH	Green	Green	Yellow	Green
HI	Green	Green	Green	Yellow
IJ	Green	Green	Green	Green
JK	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow
KL	Green	Green	Green	Green

Organizing Your Data for Use

Once you have a class-wide, grade-wide, or group-wide picture of what's happening, it's time to **use your data**.

1. Team with others to gain insight.
2. Instructional grouping often forms within two broad strands for our earliest learners: (1) decoding, and (2) phonological awareness.
3. Celebrate wins.
4. Communicate student learning internally for further insight and externally for others to see growth
5. Reflect and ask yourself what you want to set as a growth goal.

Resource



<https://www.readingrockets.org/topics/differentiated-instruction/articles/grouping-students-who-struggle-reading>



Differentiated Instruction

Grouping Students Who Struggle With Reading

By: [Sharon Vaughn](#), [Marie Tejero Hughes](#), [Sally Watson Moody](#), [Batya Elbaum](#)

There are a variety of grouping formats that are effective for teaching reading to students with learning disabilities: whole class, small group, pairs, and one-on-one. Learn more about the research and implications for practice for using each format in the general education classroom.

Practitioner Point: screening data is from an effective screener if it is easily summarized and communicated

“David read 41 words correctly in a minute on this reading passage. This means that he will likely benefit from some additional help in learning how to read connected text”

Next Time

April 23rd: “Using Early Literacy Screeners to Target Instruction: Connecting Data to Action” will help us answer a few questions:

- ❑ How can screening data inform what I’m doing in the classroom for whole class or small group instruction?
- ❑ When I check-up on my student’s reading growth, what can I expect? How does this impact instructional routines?
- ❑ What are some “easy wins” or “try this next week” after I gather screening data?

Questions

Please route all questions to **Jen Kelly** in the Chat

