

Providing guidance for leaders dedicated to children's literacy development, birth to age 9

# THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY LITERACY ASSESSMENT

**The Issue:** Effective practice starts with effective assessment. To monitor young children's literacy development, educators need an assessment approach that provides timely and crucial information. Yet in many settings, an early, ongoing and comprehensive approach to literacy assessment is not in place.

## What Are Some Common Pitfalls That Impede Impact?

Common Pitfalls	What We're Learning
1. Waiting to formally identify and support struggling readers until state tests show failing results.	1. There is no reason to wait: a child's vocabulary at age 4 is predictive of third grade reading comprehension. Early literacy screening is needed to provide timely supports (Memo 2).
2. Seeing early literacy assessment as only the job of educational settings.	2. Communities need to start earlier to prevent literacy problems. Community health clinics and pediatric practices should implement language/literacy screenings and monitoring.
3. Forgoing literacy assessment with young children due to concerns that these assessments are developmentally inappropriate, or that their results are not valid.	3. Neglecting to regularly assess young children's literacy development can do more harm than good. In fact, assessment-driven remediation and enrichment activities look similar in the early years and are often enjoyed by young children!

### For More on This...

Much of the guidance provided in this memo is drawn from *Making Assessment Matter: Using Test Results to Differentiate Reading Instruction* by N. Lesaux & S. Marietta.

## Self-Study for Impact: Lead the Conversation!

Young children need ongoing assessments to support their literacy development. Review the appropriate section below to steer a self-study of your early literacy assessment approach:

### Early education, early care & PreK-3rd

Key strategy: To respond to children's literacy needs, ensure there is a tight link between assessment and instruction

#### Self-study:

- *Do we use data from early, ongoing assessments to inform our priorities for:*
  - *preventive practices* (Memo 2)?
  - *professional development* (Memos 8 & 9)?
  - *curriculum* (Memos 14-16)?
  - *family partnerships* (Memos 10 & 11)?

### Community health clinics & pediatric practices

Key strategy: Include a language development checklist as part of regular visits

#### Self-study:

- *Are measures of language development part of the standard protocol?*
- *Are the results used to initiate conversations about healthy language development and encourage language-building practices?*
- *When appropriate, do we use what we learn from literacy assessments to link children and families with additional services (e.g., state-funded early intervention programs)?*

This series was made possible by the PreK-3rd Grade Initiative at Harvard Graduate School of Education and the generous funding of the W. Clement and Jessie V. Stone Foundation. The content is informed in part by *Turning the Page: Refocusing Massachusetts for Reading Success*, commissioned by Strategies for Children.