

LEAD FOR LITERACY MEMO

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

COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT: TOWARDS A MORE COMPLETE PICTURE OF LITERACY

For an introduction to literacy skills and knowledge, read *Literacy Unpacked* (Memo # 4)

The Issue: When early literacy assessments are in place, they often provide only a partial or limited understanding of children's overall literacy abilities. The lack of comprehensive information can misinform instructional needs.

What Are Some Common Pitfalls That Impede Impact?

Common Pitfalls	What We're Learning
1. Screening and monitoring children's skills-based competencies (e.g., letter sounds and names) without assessing knowledge-based competencies (e.g., vocabulary, comprehension).	1. Measuring children's progress in one type of competency can mask significant weaknesses in the other; both are needed for literacy success (Memo 4).
2. Not screening and monitoring vocabulary and language development in settings that serve academically vulnerable populations.	2. Many children growing up in low-income and non-English-speaking homes need additional support to develop knowledge-based competencies, but their needs go undetected and unmet.
3. Because of imbalanced assessment practices, instruction often does not match children's literacy learning needs, focusing predominantly on the skills that were assessed.	3. To focus instruction on the many competencies necessary for literacy success, educators need information from multiple measures.

Self-study for Impact: Lead the Process!

To determine if your current approach to literacy assessment is comprehensive, fill in this matrix for your site and then use the questions below the chart to discuss the significance of your findings.

Age level	Assessment	What is it measuring?	Skills	Knowledge

- Are we measuring both skills- and knowledge-based literacy competencies?
- Is one area taking priority over another?
- Are there gaps in certain areas and/or at certain age-levels?
- Do we have lingering questions about any of our assessments (e.g., what the test measures or how it is used)?

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.

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.