

# Actions to Improve Early Literacy

## Frequently Asked Questions

2025

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## Background and Rationale

Why are we investing in early literacy?

- Focusing on Kindergarten to Grade 3 literacy rates ensures students have the greatest opportunity to succeed in school, graduate and become contributing members of society. Reading is the key that unlocks the door to future learning.
- The November 2024 Throne Speech stated a commitment to focus on improving reading levels in Kindergarten to Grade 3, noting a “child’s ability to read at grade level by Grade 3 is the single greatest predictor of future academic success, because this is when students transition from learning to read to reading to learn.”
- The Provincial Education Plan Implement Team (PEPIT) identified early reading as an area of focus in the Provincial Education Plan (PEP). The PEP was endorsed by all 27 school divisions.

What are we doing to improve early literacy?

- The ministry is working with the sector to implement a variety of actions to improve early literacy rates in Kindergarten to Grade 3 through:
  - implementing provincially-approved screener(s) in every school that will help teachers identify students who may require additional help in learning to read;
  - developing resources that will build teacher expertise in reading instruction; and,
  - renewing Grades 1 to 3 English language arts (ELA) and Kindergarten curricula to align with research in literacy skill development and to emphasize structured literacy;
  - reviewing French Immersion and Fransaskois French language curricula.

What is structured literacy?

- Structured literacy is an evidence-based approach that emphasizes explicit, systematic and cumulative instruction in reading, writing and spelling. Structured literacy focuses on foundational components while incorporating continuous assessment and responsive teaching. Structured literacy approaches are effective in meeting the diverse needs of all learners, including those with reading difficulties and multilingual backgrounds.

What does this new approach to reading and assessment mean for students? For families? For teachers?

- For *students*, a structured literacy approach helps them become skilled and confident readers. Using a screener helps to identify reading difficulties early so that targeted intervention strategies can be put in place.
- For *parents/caregivers*, this approach means clear communication of students’ reading skills, with suggested strategies for parents to support their children at home.
- For *teachers*, this approach includes a time-efficient reading screener that will identify where students may struggle with foundational reading skills. The ministry is working with the sector to provide teachers with instructional resources and professional development opportunities so they can provide students with the support they need.

## Reading Screeners

What is a “screener” and when is it used?

- A reading screener is a time-efficient, evidence-based assessment that provides information about possible reading difficulties. It identifies students who are at risk for, or currently experiencing, reading difficulties so they can receive targeted instruction or immediate intervention.

Which screener will be used?

- The ministry will procure provincial licensing for screeners (1 English, 1 French) and will provide a list of other approved screeners that school divisions may use.
- Both the supported and approved screeners will meet the criteria established by the ministry in consultation with the Reading Advisory Group and other reading groups in the province.

When will the screener be implemented?

- During the 2025-26 school year, all publicly-funded Kindergarten to Grade 3 classrooms will transition to the use of an approved screener once it becomes available.
- By 2026-27, all students in publicly funded Kindergarten to Grade 3 classrooms will be screened with an approved screener.

## Participation

Who will be screened and when will they be screened?

- All students in Kindergarten to Grade 3 in publicly-funded schools will be screened using either the supported screener or one of the approved screeners.
  - Grades 1 to 3 students will be screened in October and January.
  - Kindergarten students will be screened in January.
  - Students in Kindergarten to Grade 3 who are determined to be at-risk of not acquiring expected grade-level literacy skills will be re-screened in June.
- The ministry will consult with educational organizations to determine the most optimal times to screen French Immersion students to maximize the value of the screening process.

Will Independent schools be required to put this approach into practice?

- Students in all publicly-funded schools will be required to implement this approach to reading assessment; using the provincially supported screener or one of the approved screeners.

Are there any students that will be exempt from using the screener?

- Because results from the reading screener are an important way of identifying how to support students in their reading skill acquisition, all students in Kindergarten to Grade 3 in publicly funded schools will be screened.

Will we have screeners for French Immersion and Fransaskois education?

- The intent of the Request for Proposals is to procure screeners that will serve each of the three language groups in Saskatchewan: English, French Immersion and Francophone students.
- If no French screener is available that would meet the needs of Francophone and French Immersion students and teachers, the ministry will explore options with the sector for Francophone and French Immersion screeners and related supports.

## Curriculum

Does the screener correspond with English language arts curricula?

- Screener(s) will allow teachers to assess the reading skills outlined in the renewed ELA curriculum. Identifying areas where students require support is essential for students to be successful on all reading outcomes in the curriculum.
- Renewed Grades 1 to 3 ELA and Kindergarten curricula align with research in literacy skill development, emphasize structured literacy, and include more specific content regarding end-of-year literacy expectations.
- A scope and sequence of literacy skills, developed in consultation with practicing Kindergarten to Grade 3 teachers, has been posted as an appendix to the Grades 1 to 3 ELA and Kindergarten curricula.

What is the timeline for curriculum renewal?

- *English Language Arts 1, 2, 3 and Kindergarten curricula:*
  - A draft reading scope and sequence for Kindergarten and Grades 1 to 3 ELA curricula is available on the Curriculum website and will be piloted throughout the 2025-26 school year.
  - Writing and oral language components will be added to the draft reading scope and sequence for Kindergarten and Grades 1 to 3 ELA during the 2025-26 school year.
  - Preliminary Kindergarten and Grades 1 to 3 ELA curricula will be available by fall of 2027.
  - Final Kindergarten and Grades 1 to 3 ELA curricula will be available by fall of 2028.
- French Immersion and Fransaskois French language curricula:
  - The ministry is exploring the renewal of French Immersion and Fransaskois French language curricula. Current curricula already include components related to structured literacy.

## Results and Reporting

What will school organizations be required to report to the ministry?

- In the 2025-26 school year, school organizations will continue to report reading data as they did in the 2024-25 school year, with the option of reporting on the 1 to 4 scale or using the scales of previously approved assessments (i.e., Fountas & Pinnell, Diagnostic Reading Assessment, GB+.)
- As school organizations transition to the use of a screener during the 2025-26 school year, the ministry will meet with school organizations to determine how to report in future years.

What will school organizations communicate with parents/caregivers?

- School organizations will provide parents/caregivers with timely reports following each screening in the fall, winter, and spring (if required).

What is a teacher expected to do with the results?

- Teachers will be able to use the results from the screener to accurately identify where a student may need more support in reading skill acquisition.
- Teachers and families can then apply targeted strategies to support students in bridging the gaps in their reading skills to help them become more proficient readers.

How will teachers be supported in using the screener and responding to the results

- Professional development opportunities will be made available to school divisions and teachers once a screener is procured to ensure that educators are comfortable using the tool with their students and are trained in how to use the data to further support students' reading skill acquisition.
- The ministry will collaborate with reading experts in the field to identify the supports and resources that will be required to build teacher expertise in interpreting and responding to the screener results.

## Other Reading Assessments

Will schools still be able to use running records and Diagnostic Levelled Reading Assessments to monitor progress in reading?

- In the 2025-26 school year, all publicly funded schools will be required to transition to the use of an approved reading screener(s), with full implementation in the 2026-27 school year.
- In addition to the implementation of the approved screener(s), school organizations may continue to use other reading assessments as they choose.

What if we are already using an approved screener? Do we have to use the one the ministry provides?

- School organizations that are already using a screener to assess students' reading skills may continue with their current practices if the screener they are using is on the approved list.
- School organizations may choose to use the provincially-supported screener free of charge, but they are not mandated to do so if they would prefer to cover the cost of another approved screener.

How does the Early Years Evaluation differ from the reading screener that will be used with Kindergarten students?

- Both the EYE-TA and the screener provide teachers with valuable information that will support them in helping meet each child's needs, developmentally and with regard to acquiring pre-reading skills.
- The Early Years Evaluation-Teacher Assessment (EYE-TA) is completed early in the kindergarten year. It is used again at the end of the Kindergarten year to assess students who were identified with the first assessment as needing support.

- The EYE-TA assesses five areas of learning, including:
  - awareness of self and environment;
  - social skills and approaches to learning;
  - cognitive skills;
  - language and communication; and,
  - physical development.
- The reading screener that will be used with Kindergarten students is very short (5-10 minutes), will be implemented mid-way through the school year and will focus on age-appropriate skills that are specific to reading acquisition, including:
  - phonological awareness;
  - letter sound association; and,
  - letter naming.