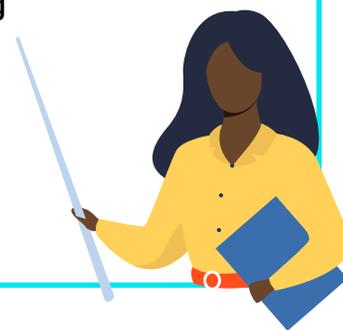


Overview

Universal screening involves collecting performance data on all students in a given setting (e.g., a classroom) to determine if learning is on track in particular areas, such as reading or math. Despite increased awareness of the importance of early universal screening,¹ the vast majority of children who struggle do not receive evidence-based support until third grade or later, and not all children receive the right intervention for their particular needs.² The impact of this “wait to fail” and “wait to intervene” mindset is devastating to both children and their families – as well as to the communities of professionals who provide instruction, services, and support. Early screening is especially beneficial for students who did not attend pre-K programs, who are entering inclusive classroom settings after having received early intervention services, or who are from historically marginalized communities and may be entering school with developmental skills already lagging behind those of their peers.

FAST FACTS

- Potential signs of learning disabilities can be seen in children as young as 3 or 4 years old.³
- On average, one-third of children in inclusive preschool classrooms in the U.S. have disabilities.⁴
- Early interventions can lead to as much as a \$31 return on investment for every \$1 spent.⁵



NCLD believes:

1. Every student at risk for or showing signs of learning struggles should be screened for learning disabilities and attention issues as early as possible.
2. Educators should be equipped with the training and resources to spot and screen for early signs of learning difficulties.
3. School districts should use valid and reliable screeners at no cost to families.
4. Screenings should be done at frequent intervals to determine if a student is making progress or if an additional evaluation may be needed.

To ensure that every student is screened early, NCLD advocates for:

- Funding universal pre-kindergarten programs for 3- and 4-year-olds to support the development of early literacy and numeracy skills in children and the early identification of difficulties in learning.
- Increasing funding for research on early screening and intervention for learning difficulties that focuses on: (1) best practices in screening and intervention for reading and math disabilities; (2) identifying and/or developing culturally and linguistically competent, scalable screening tools and interventions; and (3) efficacy of screening tools and interventions in populations including children who are Black, Indigenous, or a person of color (BIPOC), children impacted by poverty, and English learners.
- Prioritizing and awarding federal grants to conduct research in the areas of evidence-based practices in universal screening for math and literacy challenges at scale.
- Funding for professional development opportunities for educators and instructional support staff on the potential signs of learning difficulties and attention issues, how to effectively administer screening for these difficulties, and what to do once the student is screened.

- 1 American Academy of Pediatrics. (2019). *American Academy of Pediatrics: Universal screening urged for developmental delays*. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/news/Pages/Identifying-Developmental-Disorders-Through-Surveillance-and-Screening.aspx>
- 2 Horowitz, S. H., Rawe, J., & Whittaker, M. C. (2017). *The state of learning disabilities: Understanding the 1 in 5*. National Center for Learning Disabilities. <https://www.nclid.org/research/state-of-learning-disabilities>
- 3 Puolakanaho, A., Ahonen, T., Aro, M., Eklund, K., Leppänen, P. H., Poikkeus, A. M., ... & Lyytinen, H. (2007). Very early phonological and language skills: Estimating individual risk of reading disability. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 48(9), 923–931.
- 4 Lipscomb, S., Shoji, M., Terziev, J., Vogel, C. A., Aikens, N., Snyder, P., & Burchinal, M. (n.d.). *Characteristics of preschool special education services and educators* [Data Tables] (No. a58d8d82b940449891e910d09d2a33aa). Mathematica Policy Research.
- 5 Gross, J. (2009). *The long term costs of literacy difficulties* (2nd ed). Every Child a Chance Trust. p. 5.



1220 L Street, NW Ste. 100 Box #168 Washington, DC 20005

© 2021 National Center for Learning Disabilities