

FCRR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Using the Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading (FAIR) to Identify Placements for Students at the Beginning of the Year

Although we will discuss the assessments described here as taking place at the initial assessment period in the Fall, the same considerations would apply if schools or districts wanted to use information from the Spring assessment to plan for the following year.

For schools or districts that currently use previous FCAT performance to identify students for interventions

Many districts are currently employing a relatively simple strategy to differentiate between students who are assigned to intensive interventions vs. those that might be assigned to less intensive or more narrowly focused interventions. Students who achieved Level 1 performance on the FCAT in the previous year are assigned to intensive interventions, and students who achieved Level 2 are assigned to less intensive interventions. Students who attained Level 3 or above in the previous year (even if their score was very close to the cut point) are typically not provided any special support for literacy development in the current year. Florida's best long-term strategy for ensuring that these latter students can continue to meet grade level standards at successively higher grade levels is to increase the quality of literacy instruction in all content area classes (Kamil et al., 2008; Torgesen et al., 2007). However, for the short term, many students with FCAT scores close to the grade-level cut point are likely to need some kind of extra literacy support in order to meet the higher standards of successive grade levels.

For districts using the relatively simple strategy outlined above, the FAIR assessments should improve the quality of decisions related to placement in different types of intervention classes, as well as in identifying students who performed previously at Level 3, but who might still require extra literacy support to meet standards at their current grade level.

Depending on the instructional resources available to the school or district, one strategy might be to offer some kind of extra literacy support for any student whose probability of success on the current year's FCAT falls below 85%. This would also mean all students whose FCAT Success Probability score (FSP) was below 85% would take the Maze and Word Analysis tasks in order to test for more fundamental reading difficulties.

Because resources for providing intensive interventions are likely to be limited at most schools, one way to use the scores from the Maze and Word Analysis tests would be to start with students who have the lowest combined scores on these two tests and assign students with successively higher scores until the capacity of the intervention classes is reached. Once intensive intervention classes were full, all other students would be assigned to content area classes with teachers who were trained and committed to providing significant literacy support as part of their classroom instruction. Although these teachers cannot be expected to provide effective instruction in basic reading skills such as word analysis strategies, they should be more skillful at adjusting instruction to individual differences in the literacy skills of their students than other content area teachers might be.

As schools acquire increased experience in using the new tests, they will develop a more accurate sense of the range of scores on the Maze and Word Analysis tests that indicate a critical need for intensive interventions, and they could then develop cut-points that would identify all students who were in need of intensive interventions. Once these cut-points were established, the school or district would then be challenged to either expand (most likely) or contract (less likely) their intervention resources to be consistent with the number of students identified as needing comprehensive and intensive interventions.

For schools or districts that currently use tests in addition to previous FCAT performance to identify students for interventions

Some districts in Florida have developed methods for identifying instructional needs in middle and high school students that involve other tests in addition to previous FCAT scores. For example, one county follows a procedure that uses previous FCAT score, number of words read correctly from a word list, and oral reading fluency rate to assign students to one of three levels of “intensive” intervention. In some cases, it may be possible to translate roughly between the cut-points used on current tests and cut-points on the Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading (FAIR).

For example, in the county mentioned above, students in 6th grade are assigned to the most intensive “remedial” classes if their previous (5th grade) FCAT score was 180 or below, they received a score below 3 on the word list, and their correct words per minute on oral reading fluency was 80 or below. Students are assigned to the next most intensive level of intervention (Intensive I) if their previous FCAT score was 181-260, their score on the word list was 3-4, and their oral reading rate was 81-120. A third level of intervention (Intensive II) is available for students with previous FCAT scores from 260 to 280, a score on the word list of 4-5, and a reading rate of 121 to 140.

A district with well-developed criteria like this might think of using the following strategy as a starting place for developing cut-off scores using FAIR.

1. Determine the FCAT Success Probability (FSP) scores on the Broad Screen/Progress Monitoring Tool that correspond to the cut-points developed for previous FCAT scores. These corresponding FSP scores could then be substituted (at least in the first year of use) for the cut-points based on previous FCAT performance. Alternatively, given the more explicit probability statement available from the new Screening tool, the district might decide it should include more students in some kind of intervention. Since the FSP assigned by the Broad Screen/Progress Monitoring Tool uses as part of its prediction algorithm the year’s previous FCAT score when it is available, there should be a reasonably close correspondence between the FSP score from the Broad Screen/Progress Monitoring Tool and the previous year’s FCAT score, but the FSP score provides the actual probability that the student will be successful on the FCAT *in the current school year*.

2. Based on national norms for oral reading fluency (ORF) reported by Tindal, Hasbrouck, and Jones (2005), a score of 80 or below at the beginning of 6th grade corresponds roughly to the 15th percentile and below. ORF scores of 81 to 120 fall between the 15th and 45th percentile, and ORF scores between 121 and 140 fall between the 45th and 65th percentile. One relatively simple way to translate between the measures of basic reading competence currently used by this district and the assessments in the FAIR system is to think of the percentile rank score as indicating a roughly similar level of competence in both systems. FAIR has two measures of oral reading fluency: 1) the ORF passages equated for difficulty and available for ongoing progress monitoring (OPM) at a Grade 1 through Grade 5 level of reading ability; and 2) online Maze passages available three times a year as a diagnostic measure or monthly for ongoing progress monitoring in grades 3-12. The ORF OPM passages yield an adjusted fluency score (i.e., words correct per minute (wcpm) that is adjusted to equate the difficulty of the passages) and not a percentile score and, therefore, a district might want to use a similar cut-point as their current wcpm criterion. Alternatively, if they want to use the Maze test to measure fluency in grades 3-12, but especially for students in grades 6-12, then they would use the 15th percentile or below as a starting point for establishing a cut-point using the Maze test on the FAIR. .
3. The word list used in the district's previous system does not have normative scores associated with it. In this case, one strategy would be to simply use the same cut-points in terms of percentile scores on the Word Analysis test as are used for the Maze test.

Important note: It would be our current recommendation that this district re-evaluate their criteria for assigning students to intensive intervention classes that provide instruction on word level reading (accuracy and fluency), because it seems unlikely that students who perform between the 45th and 65th percentile on FAIR's ORF or Maze test are in need of instruction in basic reading skills. Rather, it is likely that these students would profit most from an exclusive focus on the reading comprehension strategies, vocabulary, and thinking/reasoning skills that are required for grade-level reading performance. Thus, our recommendation might be that students below the 15th percentile be assigned to the most intensive classes, students between the 16th and 30th percentile to the next most intensive, and students between the 31st and 45th to the least intensive. This district may have richer intervention resources available than most districts, and thus is able to provide a broader range of interventions than most schools will be able to provide. At present, it is our judgment that schools *should be most concerned* about the basic reading efficiency of students that fall below the 30th percentile (Florida norms) on FAIR's Maze and Word Analysis tasks (and FAIR's ORF task). Thus, students with scores above this might profitably be served in content area classes that provide strong support for the development of complex, grade-level reading comprehension skills.

In making these suggestions, we recognize that the very best strategy for establishing cut-points on FAIR in Grades 3-12 would be based on thorough knowledge of the level of skill on these measures that indicates critical instructional needs of various types. As FAIR is used across Florida, we will empirically examine the cut-points on the Broad Screen/Progress Monitoring Tool, Maze, and Word Analysis tasks that maximally separate students into risk categories. These data will allow us to make recommendations about the kind of instruction/intervention

needed for students with particular skill profiles. In the meantime, schools and districts will need to keep careful track of the validity of decisions made with their beginning cut-points in order to gradually improve the quality of their decision making within their individual instructional contexts.

References

- Kamil, M.L., Borman, G.D., Dole, J., Kral, C.C., Salinger, T., & Torgesen, J. (2008). *Improving adolescent literacy: Effective classroom and intervention practices: A practice guide* (NCEE #2008-4027). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. (Available at <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc>.)
- Tindal, G., Hasbrouck, J., & Jones, C. (2005). Oral reading fluency: 90 Years of measurement. *Technical Report #33*. Eugene, OR: Behavioral Research & Teaching. (Available at: www.brtpjects.org/publications/tech_reports/ORF_90Yrs_Intro_TechRpt33.pdf.)
- Torgesen, J.K., Houston, D.D., Rissman, L.M., Decker, S.M., Roberts, G., Vaughn, S. Wexler, J., Francis, D.J., Rivera, M.O., Lesaux, N. (2007). *Academic literacy instruction for adolescents: A guidance document from the Center on Instruction*. Portsmouth, NH: RMC Research Corporation, Center on Instruction. (downloadable at www.centeroninstruction.org under Reading)