

## State Data Use Spotlight: Iowa

**Challenge:** How do we effectively support schools' use of a statewide system for universal screening and progress monitoring?

Many states struggle with collecting reliable and valid data that can be easily analyzed at the state level. This can be particularly challenging in states where schools and districts have local control over the selection of their assessment tools. This state spotlight presents the strategies that the Iowa Department of Education (IDE) used to foster school adoption and use of a state-provided literacy screening and progress monitoring tool.

### State Context

Iowa's Part B state-identified measurable result (SiMR) focuses on increasing the percentage of learners with disabilities who are proficient in English language arts by the end of third grade, as measured by the number of children with individualized education programs (IEPs) who scored at or above benchmark on a valid and reliable literacy screening assessment. The SiMR aligns with other existing state initiatives and requirements under state law. In 2013, Iowa passed the Early Literacy Progression Law (Iowa Code §279.68 and IAC 281—62), which mandates that all public schools support all students in becoming proficient readers by the end of the third grade.

Under the law, schools are required to administer universal early literacy screening assessments three times each year across all kindergarten through third grade students, followed by targeted intervention and progress monitoring, when warranted. Full implementation of this mandate requires that schools utilize effective evidence-based programming, instruction, and assessment practices in reading. To support districts in meeting these requirements, IDE collaborated with area education agencies (AEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) to scale up Iowa's multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS).

#### *Public School Facts: Iowa*

Districts: 335  
Schools: 1,669  
Students: 509,063  
Students with IEPs: 12.5%

(IDE, 2015–2016 SY, PreK–12)

The state planned to use data from a state-identified assessment tool, the Formative Assessment System for Teachers (FAST; [www.fastbridge.org](http://www.fastbridge.org)) adaptive Reading (aReading), to set and achieve SiMR targets. As a local control state, IDE

recognized the importance of allowing LEAs to select their screening assessment tools but sought strategies that would encourage LEAs and schools to use FAST. During initial, statewide implementation of MTSS, IDE approved several valid and reliable, universal literacy screening tools for use in PreK through sixth grade, and approximately 10% of the schools in Iowa used FAST, the state-identified assessment tool.

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## Strategies for Success

To encourage adoption and use of FAST by schools and districts, Iowa:

- *Communicated with stakeholders.* IDE set the stage for the adoption of a new assessment system by communicating with AEA and LEAs about the rationale for and purpose of using tools that provide high-quality data.
- *Provided targeted professional development.* IDE provided large-scale, in-person trainings each summer. These trainings emphasized that the use of a tool that provides reliable and valid student data is a critical component for making intervention decisions about students.
- *Selected an easy-to-use system.* FAST has several characteristics that IDE believed would increase the likelihood of school adoption: online administration and scoring; similarity with other, known and used measures (e.g., AIMSweb, DIBELS); and easy-to-use reports to facilitate instructional decision making.
- *Provided FAST at no cost.* Schools that elected to use FAST to screen all students in PreK through sixth grade literacy were provided access to the tools and reports at no cost to the district.
- *Reduced burden on schools and districts.* Preparing to implement a new system can be a daunting process for many schools. To reduce the burden on schools in adopting a new system, IDE provided access to prepackaged student assessment materials, at a cost, to districts and schools through the AEAs.
- *Aligned the tool with existing initiatives.* All LEAs are required to submit various types of data to a data management system, Iowa TIER. Iowa TIER provides real-time access to student information, such as grades and attendance data, beyond what is available in the general FAST system. IDE ensured that FAST data synced automatically with the system so that educators would not need to enter data twice.

Evidence suggests that the approaches used by Iowa were successful. During the 2014–15 school year, 94% of schools voluntarily adopted the statewide screening assessment system. That number increased to 96% during the 2015–16 school year.

## Recommendations for States Facing Similar Challenges

- Engage stakeholders from AEAs and LEAs in the decision-making process to strengthen support from schools and teachers using the assessment tools.
- Create a transparent process that gives districts the option to use a statewide assessment system, rather than mandating use of a specific tool.
- Focus on the rationale and importance of using tools that provide reliable and valid student information in addition to the “how-to” of using a tool.
- Leverage current resources to provide training in house so that staff may learn from other district personnel who are familiar with the context and needs of LEAs.
- Incentivize the adoption of a state-identified assessment system (e.g., provide assessment tool at no-cost or at a subsidized cost to the district, align assessment tool to other state initiatives).
- Continue to follow up with districts regarding the purpose and importance of universal screening and progress monitoring, and the need for reliable student information.

### Available Resources:

- National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI), Technical Assistance State Facilitators (Find your state on the map at <https://ncsi-resources.wested.org/>)
- NCSI Data Use Team Technical Assistance Support (Contact Kristin Ruedel at American Institutes for Research [AIR] at [kruedel@air.org](mailto:kruedel@air.org))
- National Center on Response to Intervention (CRTI)
- National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII)

*About This Resource:* This resource was developed by members of the NCSI Data Use Service Area Team, including Kristin Ruedel, PhD (AIR), Gena Nelson (AIR), and Tessie Bailey, PhD (AIR), in collaboration with Sarah Brown, Chief, Bureau of Learner Strategies and Supports, and Greg Feldmann, Education Program Consultant, Iowa Department of Education. The content was developed under cooperative agreement number #H326R140006 (NCSI) from the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government. Project Officers: Perry Williams and Shedeh Hajghassemali.