

## Using EWIS in Early Elementary Grades

Understand who is at risk of missing an early milestone, to intervene early & prepare students for success.

### The Challenge:

Students who are proficient readers by the end of third grade are 3.7 times more likely to graduate from high school than their peers.

### How can all students be set up for success?

Early elementary educators may have extensive data available from many sources. Through the thoughtful consideration of students' language development, social and emotional learning, early warning data and more, educators can build a **complex picture** of students' strengths and needs. This can serve as a foundation for reflection and improving instruction, and can lead to interventions at the individual, small group, and school- or district-wide levels.

### EWIS: A data-informed approach

**Reading by the end of third grade** is an important milestone for students to learn from increasingly complex texts and be on track to ultimately graduate from high school.

With the Early Warning Indicator System (EWIS) reports, educators can see *exactly* who is at risk of not reading by the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, beginning as early as 1<sup>st</sup> grade.

As language is connected to learning and progress in all domains – including social and emotional domains – it is important to stay grounded in **child development** and an understanding of **how young children learn** as we approach this complex picture.

### How does it work?

- Early in the year, [review EWIS](#) reports to understand *who* is at risk.
- **Gather other information** about students to understand their strengths and needs and determine possible causes of academic risk.
- **Take steps** to modify instruction, assign supports or make other changes.
- Then, **monitor risk through the year** to ensure modifications are having desired effects. By monitoring ABCs (**A**ttendance, **B**ehavior and **C**ourse performance or literacy progression) educators can update their view of which students are still at risk and adjust supports along the way.

With early warning tools, observations and instructional practices reflecting child development, educators can respond based on students' strengths and needs.

### What else do we know about our students?

For young children especially, paper & pencil assessments are **only one way** that students show us what they know and what they are able to do. Rich data can be collected when we **observe** students as they are learning naturally in the learning environment.

These include –

- Social & emotional learning, such as self-regulation, self-management, decision-making, relationship skills and social awareness;
- Behavior; for example when challenging behaviors typically appear or triggers related to the behaviors;
- Literacy, including language development, vocabulary development, language and reading comprehension; also letter recognition, decoding & fluency;
- Conceptual understanding and skill development in other areas, such as mathematics, science and social studies; and
- Formal preschool (now in [SIMS](#)) and early intervention experiences

### Educators can build observation opportunities into instructional practices.

Instructional practices that intentionally provide students with opportunities to **explore, experiment, investigate and dive deeper** into their understanding of concepts with peers provide rich and meaningful context and data to help educators understand what students know and are able to do. These allow educators to step back from instruction and **observe** as children **lead in their learning** and **engage with other students**. We can observe children, but if we are not clear in what we are looking for or whether expected skills and competencies are developmentally appropriate, our observations may not tell us what we hope to learn.

For more on Early Learning, contact [DESE's Early Learning team](#) or see <http://www.doe.mass.edu/kindergarten/resources.html>

For more on EWIS, email [EWIS@doe.mass.edu](mailto:EWIS@doe.mass.edu) or see resources at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/ccr/ewi/>.

## What other factors are important?

When educators reflect on student data and make meaning of students' strengths and challenges, they can consider contextual factors reflecting cultural values and norms of students and the importance of [culturally responsive teaching](#).

**Learning Environment:** Learning, and behavior in particular, is often a **reflection of the learning environment and instructional practices**, and not necessarily what students are capable of understanding. Classrooms with lots of distractions, many or unstructured transitions, long periods of sitting and not talking, or instructional practices that are not engaging (e.g., worksheets) and/or limited opportunities for children to practice and generalize skills and concepts that they are learning about can be difficult for children to engage and therefore, they are not available to access the learning.

**Instructional Practices:** This is an opportunity to reflect on the extent to which **instructional strategies support how young children learn**, and to strengthen children's social emotional competencies alongside academic content. Consider whether instructional practices meet the needs of young students, and in how much of the instructional time students are allowed to talk with one another and build vocabulary, solve problems, and collaborate in learning.

**Development Continuum:** Particularly with young children, a child's development and the rate at which they develop and learn across the domains can vary significantly. It is important to **take the time to reflect on what is reasonable to expect of young students across these domains**, and how that intersects with what we expect of children. This is especially important when determining whether a child is struggling because of a learning need, a missed opportunity in prior learning experiences, or if there is a developmental delay, where simply with a strong learning environment, a child will develop the competency or skill over time.

**Behavior: Behavior is a form of communication for young children.** Collecting information on challenging behavior can illuminate ways to support students' skill development. Understanding whether there are adverse childhood experiences or other stressors affecting the child is critical to understanding and responding. Data on what happens prior to the behaviors; what time of day are they taking place; and other patterns are just a few of the contextual questions important to answer. Educators can use this when considering developmentally appropriate responses to challenging behaviors. In the early grades, **students are building their competencies and need many and varied opportunities to practice** in safe and supportive environments.

**Content:** Many reading passages are steeped in science and social studies. While it is important for young children to be able to decode the passages, it is equally important to simultaneously be exposed to **rich, deep instruction** to build vocabulary and understanding in these areas. Schools are encouraged to reflect on how much time is available in the elementary schedule for science and social studies instruction.

**Dual Language Learners:** For a student learning English, the development of multiple languages can slow down development and learning while a child builds an understanding of each language. Schools should be encouraged, whenever possible, to support a student's primary language and to encourage families to engage with their children in the primary language. Research shows that **when the primary language is strong, a student's ability to reach competency in English is advanced**. Research also shows that dual language learners have stronger skills in self-regulation and executive function than their monolingual peers do; thus we encourage schools to see dual language learning as a strength.

**Literacy:** Literacy is complex. If data have gaps, a child's strengths and needs can be misdiagnosed. Educators should consider both **the decoding side of literacy as well as the meaning-making side of literacy** (e.g., language development and comprehension) when gathering information. Similarly, if interventions are 'one size fits all' (e.g. always related to decoding or fluency), then we don't address the nuances of a child's particular language development needs (e.g., vocabulary development). **Here's an example.** Literacy data could identify several students as struggling readers. The data may reflect students' decoding and fluency progress, but not provide information on language development. A teacher acting on this could place a child into an intervention with an incorrect focus on decoding when the difficulty is vocabulary or comprehension. This can often result in students not getting what they need.

**Context Outside of School:** Others can bring context about the child to the conversation; educators can understand young students and their development and learning through **engaging preschool staff, afterschool and out-of-school time providers, and families**. Often, others have experience with what works or does not work for a child, and bring an understanding of what the child knows and is able to do.

**Strengths and Challenges:** Because a young student's development can vary across domains, it is important to be reflective of his or her strengths as well as challenges. When we know something about a student's strengths, **we can often engage those strengths** in helping us to address the challenges.

## Use EWIS in an ongoing cycle of inquiry.

Consult the [e-learning tutorial](#) for more about each step.

### In the Summer or Beginning of the School Year

#### Step 1: Get Organized

Collect your teammates, line up access to [Edwin](#) and plan time to review EWIS together. All EWIS tools are online, and reports are in Edwin. Districts control access to Edwin. Contact your district's [directory administrator](#) for access. If there is a team already reviewing data and making decisions about how to support students, they may be able to incorporate early warning data into their scope.



#### Step 2: Review EWIS

[Students' EWIS risk levels](#) are available every year in the late summer to coincide with the start of the school year. Use the EWIS reports to examine students' strengths and weaknesses. If you work **directly with students**, the Student Roster is a good place to start. If you work with **adults who work with students**, you may find the Indicator Analysis most valuable. Either way, draw concrete conclusions about students' indicators and begin to form hypotheses about causes of students' risk.

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5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	1

### Repeat Each Marking Period or Throughout the School Year

#### Step 3: Explore Underlying Causes

Continue to identify causes of risk, pulling in local data and context for a comprehensive picture. Note whether students across a district, school or grade have common needs for universal supports.

#### Step 4: Take Action

Compare students' needs to the services available, and assign interventions that will best meet their needs. Examine any gaps in support, and consider school-wide or universal efforts.

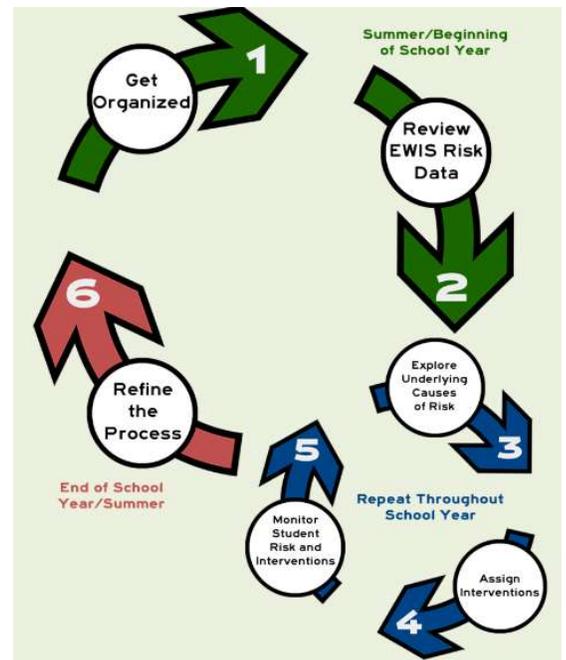
#### Step 5: Monitor

Monitor students' ABCs to assess student progress, see who else may be at risk, and improve interventions. Then, refer back to Steps 3 & 4 as the cycle is repeated.

### At the End of the School Year or In the Summer

#### Step 6: Refine the Process

How did it go? What was easy, what was hard? Take time at the end of year to reflect on the approach and outcomes, and make plans to incorporate changes next year.



#### Would you like to get better at 'using data'?

Many strategies work; choose one that feels right for you and your team. Periodically, reflect on what is working and what is not working, and adapt your strategies as needed. Start small, stay flexible and tap others for support.

You – and your students – are worth it!