

# UNIVERSAL SCREENERS FOR PRIMARY MATHEMATICS

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In 2009, the Institute for Education Sciences published the practice guide, *Assisting Students Struggling with Mathematics: Response to Intervention (RtI) for Elementary and Middle Schools*. Based on a meta-analysis of research the practice guide offers eight recommendations for identifying and supporting struggling students in mathematics. The first recommendation is to, “Screen all students to identify those at risk for potential mathematics difficulties and provide interventions to students identified as at risk” (Gersten, et. al., 2009, p. 6). In addition, Newman-Gonchar (2009) state that universal screening assessments are a critical element in an RtI system. Universal screeners are designed to be quick indicators of which students might be in need of interventions before they experience failure. Unfortunately, finding an efficient, informative, and affordable screener has been a challenge for many schools and districts.

CoMMIT (Colorado Metropolitan Mathematics Intervention Team) is a collaborative group of mathematics and special education leaders from the Denver metropolitan area who meet several times each year to share and discuss how best to meet the needs of struggling learners within the context of a Response to Intervention (RtI) model. Over the last few years CoMMIT has worked to develop **free** universal screeners for primary mathematics students to help districts and schools. These screeners were designed by CoMMIT to always be available free of charge to all teachers, schools and districts.

The CoMMIT universal screeners are general number sense assessments fully aligned with the new Colorado Academic Standards and Common Core State Standards. They are quick, one on one interview based assessments that take about three to seven minutes to administer depending upon the student and assessor. The screeners are designed to determine which students might be at risk of struggling and to indicate where further assessment will be helpful. The screeners can also be helpful in determining content that is difficult for an entire class of students.

As of fall 2011, the CoMMIT screeners are available and ready to be piloted. The screeners were developed for students entering kindergarten through third grade. There is currently one form of each grade level assessment. The intent is for the screeners to be administered in the fall, but they could also be administered mid-year.

Research recommends screeners have established norms and demonstrated reliability and validity. In order to establish norms, reliability and validity a data collection system is being developed to collect the data from these screeners This data collection system will also be provided free of charge for schools that choose to pilot the assessments during the 2011-2012 school year. The data collection system, created by Forefront

Math (forefrontmath.com), and the reports that it will generate will assist teachers and schools to quickly determine which students would benefit from further assessment in order to quickly and proactively begin interventions. The system will also provide general grade level and school reports to illustrate relative performance of participating schools and districts. We hope these reports will help schools and districts use the screeners as indicators of the strengths and limitations of tier 1 instruction and serve as a tool to assist schools as they reflect on their practices.

The CoMMIT team was one of fifty teams accepted to participate in a symposia hosted by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and the Council for Exceptional Children. The ongoing collaborative effort between these two organizations will help with technical support needed for analyzing the screeners and allow us to reach beyond state borders to test their efficacy. We hope that many schools and districts throughout Colorado will be interested in taking advantage of this opportunity in Fall of 2011 and beyond. If your school is not yet using a screener, here is an opportunity to work with a K-3 screener that is free of charge. If you already have a screener, we hope you will consider using these screeners as an additional data point perhaps in the middle of the year.

The screeners are available at:

<https://sites.google.com/site/commitcollaborationsite/home/commit-screeners/elementary-screeners>

The data collection project will be housed at:

<http://forefrontmath.com>

If you have any questions or are interested in participating in this project please contact:

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## References

- Gersten, R., Beckmann, S., Clarke, B., Foegen, A., Marsh, L., Star, J. R., & Witzel, B. (2009). *Assisting students struggling with mathematics: Response to Intervention (RtI) for elementary and middle schools* (NCEE 2009-4060). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/publications/practiceguides/>
- Newman-Gonchar, R., Clarke, B., & Gersten, R. (2009). *A summary of nine key studies: Multi-tier intervention and response to interventions for students struggling in mathematics*. Portsmouth, NH: RMC Research Corporation, Center on Instruction.