

1. **Title of the submission:** *The Trials and Tribulations of Early Literacy Assessment within a Statewide Reading Initiative*
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6. Abstract of paper:

Virginia's Early Intervention Reading Initiative (EIRI) was legislated in 1997 in hopes of reducing the number of children with reading problems and increasing the number of children who could meet the state-established standards for reading. The EIRI provides incentive funding for early reading intervention services for students in kindergarten through third grade who demonstrate weaknesses reflected in their performance on a state-provided literacy screening. In this paper we discuss four critical issues surrounding the implementation of this statewide literacy initiative, as informed by a five-year perspective: (a) state vs. local control of assessment and intervention practices, (b) false positives, false negatives, and other complications regarding predictive validity, (c) program evaluation, and (d) improving classroom instruction through assessment practices.

The first part of this paper provides an overview of the Virginia Early Intervention Reading Initiative (EIRI)—its purposes, regulations, and limitations. This opening section will provide the background and highlight the tensions inherent in any statewide literacy initiative.

The second part of the paper describes the history and development of the state-provided literacy-screening instrument for the EIRI, *the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening* (PALS). We present the key components of early literacy development and how they can be assessed reliably and validly in a way that provides teachers with instructionally useful information.

The third part of the paper summarizes PALS results from the first five years of the statewide reading initiative and discusses the limitations of what literacy-screening data do and do not tell us about the effectiveness of a statewide reading initiative. Finally, we share some lessons learned from the first five years of the statewide initiative and offer some recommendations for other states embarking on similar reading initiatives. We conclude with some general guidelines for how to use literacy data to inform instruction on a large scale.