Universal Screening of Oral Language within MTSS Frameworks: Why, How, When, and What Comes Next?

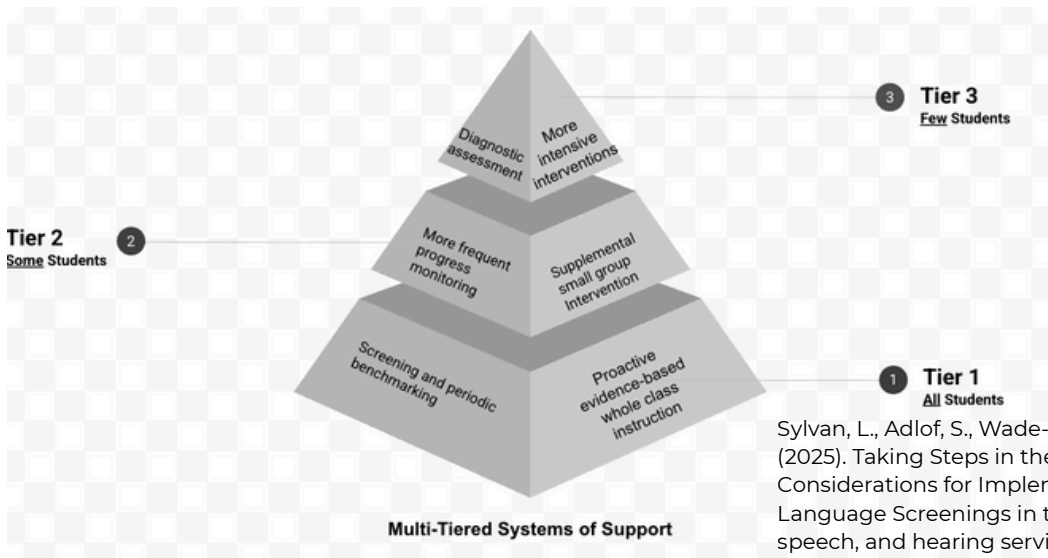**Suzanne M. Adlof, Alison E. Hendricks, Lesly Wade-Woolley, Lisa Kohel & Lesley Sylvan**

TRUE OR FALSE?

1. Screening is the first step in the diagnostic process.
2. Screening is the proper next step when caregivers or teachers have concerns about a student's language.
3. We should only screen children who are having academic struggles.
4. Oral language screenings must be administered by qualified individuals, such as SLPs or SLPAs.
5. Because they are standardized assessments, universal screening is not valid for children from low-income backgrounds or bilingual children.
6. Screening identifies language skills that should be targeted in intervention.
7. RTI must be provided to students who fail a screen before a comprehensive evaluation is conducted.
8. All children who fail a screen should receive a comprehensive evaluation.
9. Following a brief intervention, a screen should be re-administered to determine if a child has responded appropriately to instruction/intervention.

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MTSS is a Proactive, Prevention-Oriented Framework, and Universal Screening Lays the Foundation

Tier 3 — Few Students
- Diagnostic assessment
- More intensive interventions

Tier 2 — Some Students
- More frequent progress monitoring
- Supplemental small group Intervention

Tier 1 — All Students
- Screening and periodic benchmarking
- Proactive evidence-based whole class instruction

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

Sylvan, L., Adlof, S., Wade-Woolley, L., & Kohel, L. (2025). Taking Steps in the Right Direction: Considerations for Implementing Universal Oral Language Screenings in the Schools. Language, speech, and hearing services in schools, 56(4), 896-911. https://doi.org/10.1044/2025_LSHSS-25-00008

Language Screening Examples

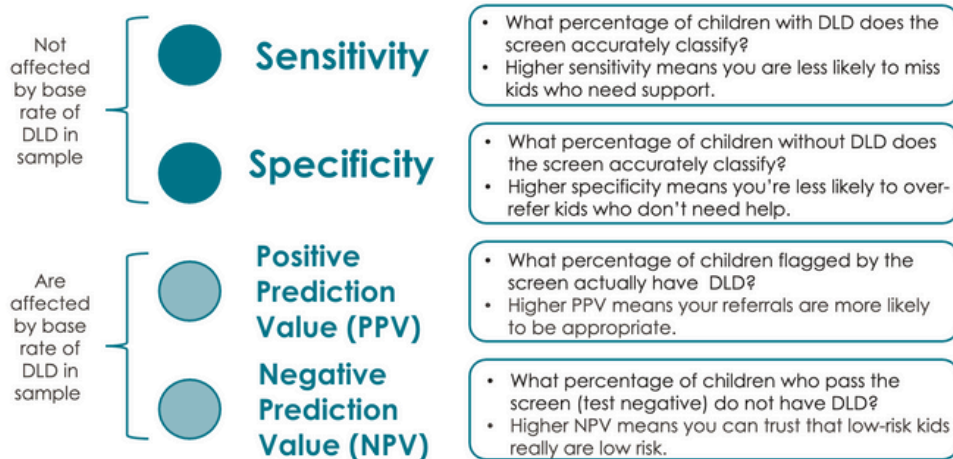|	**Direct Assessments**	**Indirect Assessments** (completed by teachers,
Norm Referenced	- CELF-5 Screening Test - PLS-5 Screening Test - CUBED Narrative Language Measures - Redmond Sentence Recall - Quick Interactive Language Screener (QUILS) - LanguageScreen	Children's Communication Checklist -2 (CCC-2)
Criterion Referenced	- DELV Screening Test - TEGI Screener*	Student Language Scale (SLS) Screener
Informal/Qualitative	- Quick Take-Along Screener - SLP-generated screens	CELF-5 Observational Rating Scale

Multiple options available with varying price points, examiner qualifications, and psychometrics. Several report acceptable sensitivity & specificity (> 80%) for detecting DLD, but few have been tested as universal screeners.

See also: Table of Screening Tools Infographic from TISLP Bao et al. (2022) fact sheet of commercial screens

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Classification Accuracy

Not affected by base rate of DLD in sample

Sensitivity
- What percentage of children with DLD does the screen accurately classify?
- Higher sensitivity means you are less likely to miss kids who need support.

Specificity
- What percentage of children without DLD does the screen accurately classify?
- Higher specificity means you're less likely to over-refer kids who don't need help.

Are affected by base rate of DLD in sample

Positive Prediction Value (PPV)
- What percentage of children flagged by the screen actually have DLD?
- Higher PPV means your referrals are more likely to be appropriate.

Negative Prediction Value (NPV)
- What percentage of children who pass the screen (test negative) do not have DLD?
- Higher NPV means you can trust that low-risk kids really are low risk.

What factors should we consider when selecting a screening tool?

Accurate — Cheap — Easy — Unicorn

Purpose/Scope
- Which language domains are assessed?
- Is there a sound rationale for the assessment tasks/items?

Psychometric Properties
- Reliability
- Validity
- Classification Accuracy
- Bonus: Sensitivity to developmental change/improvement

Feasibility
- Time, qualifications, additional resources required for
  - Administration
  - Interpretation
- Acceptability to stakeholders

Cost
- Assessment costs
- Training, initial implementation
- Resources for long-term sustainability
- Costs associated with false positives and false negatives

Get access to the SC Screen once it is available!

https://www.scrolllab.org/contact

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