Software Program Identifies At-Risk Children In The Classroom

University of Virginia

High literacy rates are among the chief hallmarks of a strong educational system. And in order to stay ahead of the curve, teachers must regularly assess students' reading skills, monitor their progress, and determine how well they are achieving their literacy goals. To help teachers meet this formidable task, researchers at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville invented the "Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) Online Score Entry and Reporting System," a diagnostic reading software tool for kindergarten through third grade students.

Marcia Invernizzi, director of the McGuffey Reading Center in the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia, developed PALS from 1997 to 2002. The Virginia Department of Education initially funded the project at $350,000, which it increased to an annual amount of $950,000 in 2000.

> *PALS is a software program that quickly assesses how well children understand literacy*

fundamentals.

Children who need intervention are identified quickly so they can receive the tools and special instruction they need before they fall too far behind. Students are tested two to three times a year to monitor their progress and adjust their method of instruction, if necessary.

PALS is an important diagnostic tool that identifies at-risk elementary students at a young age, allowing for early intervention. It is easy to use and generates quantitative data that accurately determines reading level, comprehension and other literacy metrics. The PALS Internet database has resulted in 100 percent universal literacy screening in K–3 in Virginia and has become a model for other states.

This story was originally published in 2008.

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