



Nebraska Leaders,

When the **Nebraska Reading Improvement Act (NRIA)** was enacted in 2018, more than 20 reading screener assessments were placed on the state’s approved list. Since that time, the list has gradually narrowed. **To achieve Nebraska’s goal of at least 75% proficiency on Grade 3 NSCAS-ELA**, it has become clear that a system allowing wide variability in K-3 screening tools will not produce the consistent outcomes our students deserve.

Over several years of implementation, significant inconsistencies have emerged in how students are identified for additional reading support. Not all approved screeners measure the same foundational skills or apply comparable classification criteria, yet districts rely on these results to make consequential instructional decisions. This variation has also created understandable confusion for families when identification outcomes differ across districts.

In response, the Nebraska Department of Education committed to a thorough review of the 11 currently approved reading screener assessments. This review was conducted in partnership with the National Center for Intensive Interventions and the Buros Center for Testing at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. The analysis examined technical adequacy, classification accuracy, content coverage, and usability.

The findings were informative and reinforce an important conclusion: **Nebraska must ensure that early literacy screening is grounded in strong technical evidence, aligned to essential reading skills, and applied consistently across districts.** Greater uniformity will strengthen student identification, improve clarity for families, and better position the state to meet its literacy goals. NDE is also mindful of legislation that could elevate the consequences attached to assessment results, further elevating the stakes for students and systems.

Based on this review, DIBELS 8th Edition has been identified by the Nebraska Department of Education as a single statewide screener to be used by all districts. Its strengths include its short administration time (approximately 4-6 minutes), the ability to administer dyslexia-specific subtests, and built-in progress monitoring. More than 60 Nebraska districts report using DIBELS 8th during the 2025-2026 school year. For stability, the NDE plans to maintain this screener in place for five years, with a re-evaluation at that time.

NDE recognizes the operational and financial realities districts face. Districts that are ready to make a change are encouraged to implement DIBELS 8th beginning in the 2026–2027 school year. For districts needing additional time, a “hold harmless” period will be in effect during the 2026–2027 school year, with required implementation beginning in the 2027–2028 school year.

The NDE is committed to supporting districts through implementation to the greatest extent possible. If funding can be secured, either through the Legislature or other sources, NDE plans to pursue a statewide contract to provide mClass DIBELS 8th to Nebraska districts.

This approach will prioritize coherence, high-quality professional learning for screener administration, and effective use of screening data to inform instruction.

Through a shared commitment to evidence, coherence, and sustained support, Nebraska is positioned to become a national leader in achieving early literacy proficiency.

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Commissioner of Education

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