

## Developing a Universal Screening Process for Written Expression

### What is written expression?

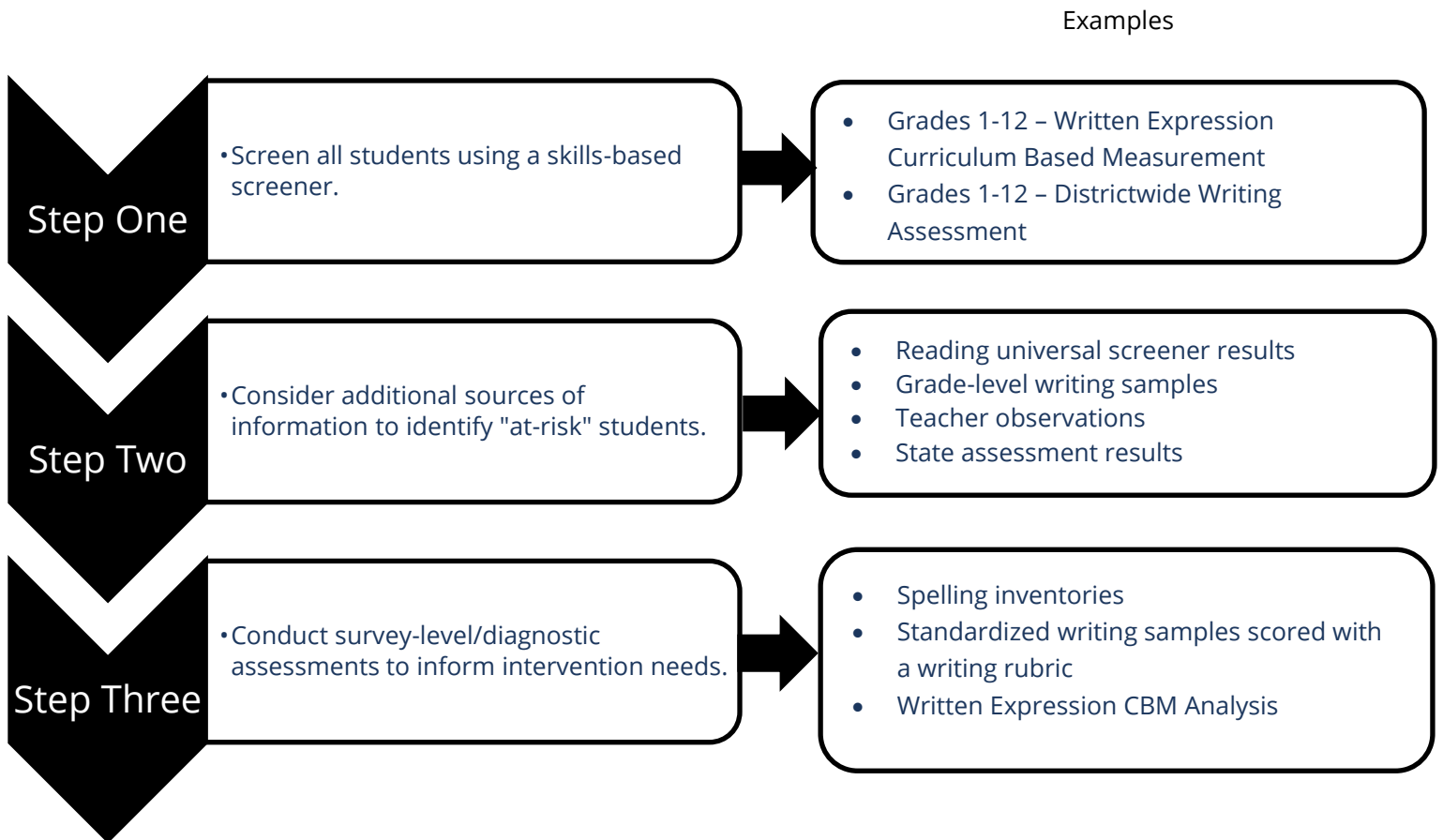
Written expression is the ability to communicate in writing. It is comprised of a wide variety of subskills, including spelling, grammar, handwriting, punctuation, and word usage, among others. Written expression includes both the physical reproduction of letters and words and the organization of thoughts and ideas in written compositions. Students who struggle with written expression have difficulties with some or all of these subskills.

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), all school districts are required to identify, locate, and evaluate all students suspected of having a disability. As part of this mandate and in accordance with Tennessee's Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI<sup>2</sup>) framework, districts must identify a process to screen students for potential concerns in the area of written expression. The universal screening process can be found in the [Response to Instruction and Intervention Framework Manual](#) (pg.18).

Several considerations are key in determining an effective screening process for written expression. These considerations are detailed below.

- **Screening for All** – All students must participate in a universal screening process to identify those who may need additional support and/or other types of instruction. This means that a screening process that exclusively relies on parent and teacher referral for concerns in written expression is not sufficient in identifying *all* students who may be at risk in the area of written expression.
- **Multiple Sources of Data** – Multiple sources of data should be used as part of this screening process in order to determine if a student requires additional intervention addressing their challenges with written expression. Sources could include parent or teacher reports, formative assessments from within the classroom, or performance on prior state assessments in the area of written expression.
- **Written Expression Measures** – Students who may have significant challenges in written expression may or may not have challenges in reading. As a result, a screening process that exclusively utilizes a universal screening measure for reading to identify concerns with written expression is insufficient to identify these students. Other universally administered assessments specifically targeting written expression should be included in the screening process.

## Developing a Universal Screening Process for Writing



\*The list of examples is not exhaustive nor required of districts. Districts should determine the measures that are most appropriate for their population and district needs.

### Planning Considerations

- Ensure that there is some form of initial screener used at all grade levels.
- Determine how and when written expression screening process data will be reviewed.

## Symptoms of Challenges with Written Expression

It is important for educators to recognize when students may be experiencing challenges with written expression. Below are some symptoms that indicate a potential need for further examination of written expression skills. Teams are encouraged to consider a collection of symptoms or the level of concern within multiple skill areas in determining whether to gather more information. One symptom alone (e.g., handwriting challenges) does not indicate a significant concern with written expression.

Students with written expression challenges may:

- have difficulty learning writing without explicit instruction;
- struggle with transcription (spelling, handwriting, punctuation) and general language deficiencies;
- minimize the planning process in writing;
- have difficulty generating ideas and getting them down on paper; and
- often dislike writing.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sopris, 2014; Graham, Harris, & Larsen, 2001