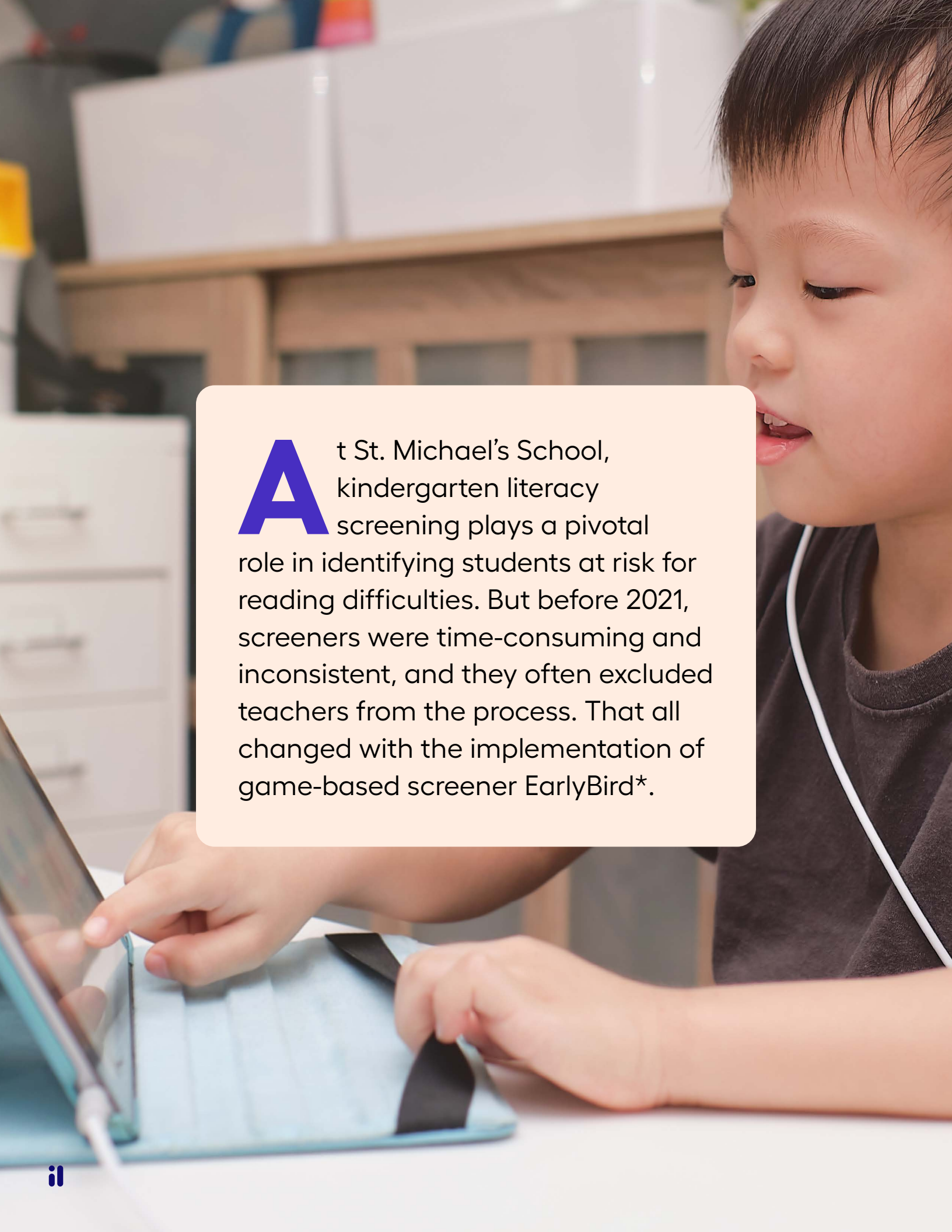


How a Game-Based Screener Transformed Early Reading Risk Detection

EarlyBird streamlines early literacy screening with attention-grabbing student gameplay, instant insights for teachers, and a practical path to stronger instruction.





At St. Michael's School, kindergarten literacy screening plays a pivotal role in identifying students at risk for reading difficulties. But before 2021, screeners were time-consuming and inconsistent, and they often excluded teachers from the process. That all changed with the implementation of game-based screener EarlyBird*.

A comprehensive screener that teachers can actually use

St. Michael's implemented EarlyBird in its kindergarten classrooms in 2021, by recommendation of the school's literacy coach, Dr. Susan Schatz. "Each of the screeners [I studied] had strengths, but none were as comprehensive or user-friendly as EarlyBird," she said. Unlike traditional tools, EarlyBird brings together all the relevant predictors of reading in one easy-to-administer assessment.

- Teachers at St. Michael's participated in professional learning to understand how to successfully administer the assessment and act on the data accordingly. The very next day, they began implementing the screener independently and confidently.
- "With other screeners, I'd have to sit in a corner in the classroom for days and then upload and present the data to teachers, [but] with EarlyBird, teachers can just log in and see the results," said Dr. Schatz. "Our teachers feel empowered. They feel like they own the data."

Pain-free implementation with instant results

Students self-administer the screener, guided by Pip, a trusted companion who guides them through an exciting cityscape adventure. While students play, the tablet-based game assesses them, autoscoring results and saving teachers' valuable time. Additionally, the convenient teacher dashboard highlights student needs in real time and connects directly to interventions.

- The app-based screener requires minimal adult supervision, and it's a joy to implement," said Dr. Schatz. "Our students love Pip and have fun with the game."
- **Why it matters:** By making screening fun for students and simple for teachers, EarlyBird turns a once-time-consuming task into a seamless, high-impact part of early literacy support.

Data that drives actionable change

EarlyBird gives teachers meaningful, easy-to-understand data they can use right away — no specialist required. Subtests are clearly named, grouped by skill, and reported in percentile scores, making next steps intuitive. "In four years of implementing kindergarten literacy screeners, this is the first time I haven't had to take an active role in testing or data analysis," said Dr. Schatz. "Instead, I could just be there to support the teachers."

- When teachers saw a schoolwide need to strengthen oral language, they used EarlyBird's recommended routines and saw an immediate shift in how students communicated, both in class and with each other.
- **Why it matters:** EarlyBird makes high-quality literacy screening manageable and instantly actionable, putting teachers in control of the data — able to use it to make targeted changes and see almost immediate improvement.

Supporting a systemic literacy transformation

The clear, user-friendly dashboard also fosters productive collaboration. “You have all of this rich information that invites conversation in a very nonthreatening way,” said Schatz. “When you get teachers talking about literacy and their instructional practices in a focused way, that’s when you see change happen.” Now, St. Michael’s uses EarlyBird across PreK–1, screening three times per year. “EarlyBird has given us a tool to accelerate [our preventive approach] in a more structured, systemic way,” Schatz said. “We’ve searched for an effective and efficient early literacy screener — and we’ve found our answer.”

*After this story was written, EarlyBird joined the Imagine Learning family of products as Imagine+ Screener.



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