

# Ongoing Literacy Assessment Using D I B E L S

As district personnel charged with improving literacy within the Cache County School District, we are continually looking for promising practices. Three years ago, one elementary faculty expressed a desire to track reading progress of individual students across grade levels and requested our assistance. We were aware of Dr. Ed Kame'enui's efforts to assess the effects of an early reading intervention program and knew that he was using an assessment that focused on the skills research has shown to be critical to reading acquisition. With additional probing, we learned the assessment he used provided a method of gathering ongoing data from the beginning of kindergarten through the primary grades. We were further encouraged to find that this assessment was available online with no charge for downloading the materials.

With what appeared to be an appropriate match of faculty interest and instrument, we presented our findings to the school faculty. The principal and several key faculty members were very interested in learning more about the instrument and utilizing it to measure student progress. This was the beginning of the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) in Cache County School District.

Word quickly spread that tracking individual student reading progress across grade levels was possible, and all 12 elementary schools expressed an interest in implementing the DIBELS assessment. Our first goal, therefore, was to assist each school in completing the testing within a single day three times per year.

To achieve this goal, we proposed and the schools agreed to the following:

- Each school would provide a site testing team consisting of 1) a teacher at each grade level, 2) the resource teacher and speech pathologist, 3) the media specialist, 4) the ESL teacher, 5) the principal, and 6) parent volunteers to deliver and return students from classrooms.
- The district would provide a team of approximately ten people to assist with the assessment at each school.
- The district would also supply assessment training and materials for each school.



**Tape-assisted reading** (reading while listening). In tape-assisted reading, students read along in their books with an audiotaped fluent reader. In the basic form of the procedure, students listen to a taped selection that has been recorded by a fluent reader. For the first reading, students follow along in their own copy of the selection, pointing to each word as the reader says it. After listening to the entire selection, students choose one passage from it to practice. They then read aloud with the tape repeatedly until they gain fluency and can read the passage independently. The students then read the passage to the teacher. This last stage is very important because, for some students, listening to a tape can serve as time to engage in off-task behaviors. To be effective, tape-assisted reading must be monitored and students must be held responsible for what they hear and read.

**Computer-assisted reading.** In recent years, a number of computer programs have been developed to provide students with repeated reading practice. In general, these programs use speech recognition software and immediate feedback as students read aloud a text presented on a computer screen. Computer-assisted reading has been found to be effective in improving fluency, word recognition, and comprehension in 1st through 4th grade students.

**Partner (or buddy) reading.** In partner reading, paired students take turns reading aloud to each other. Various forms of partner reading have been found to produce significant gains in fluency. In a typical informal partner-reading procedure, students who are better readers are paired with students who are less able readers. The teacher first reads aloud a text (usually a story from the students' basal readers), pointing to words as they are read and modeling expressive reading. The students follow along in their books. Next, the pairs of students take turns reading a passage from the story to each other. The fluent reader first reads a passage, following the teacher's model. Then the struggling reader reads aloud the same passage, as his or her partner gives guidance with word recognition and provides feedback and encouragement. The struggling reader re-reads the passage until it can be read independently, usually after four re-readings.

It is important to note that all effective repeated reading procedures have two features in common: (1) they provide students with many opportunities to practice reading, and (2) they provide students with guidance in how fluent readers read and with feedback to help them become aware of and correct their mistakes. This guidance and feedback can come from peers and parents, as well as teachers .

Evidence indicates that repeated oral reading with guidance and feedback helps to improve the reading ability of typically developing readers until at least 5th grade. It also helps struggling readers at higher grade levels. ■

"A Focus on Fluency" is the first in the Research-Based Practices in Early Reading series published by the Regional Educational Laboratory at PREL Research-Based Practices in Early Reading Series—Product # ES0303

**Editors' note:** This abridged article will be published in two installments; the second installment will appear in the May issue of the Educator. How does your district/school reading program align with research-based, Reading First strategies and mandates? This article is another installment in an ongoing series on best practices for teaching reading. All issues of *The Utah Special Educator* will address each of the five essential reading components, one per issue, and highlight schools, programs and teachers that successfully apply these best practice criteria. A compilation of current and future articles in this reading series can be found at:

[www.updc.org/specialeducator/index.html](http://www.updc.org/specialeducator/index.html)

Citations and references for this article are available at:

[www.updc.org](http://www.updc.org).

# Assessment in Cache County School District: (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills)

With this level of support, we were able to achieve our single day assessment goal.

Our second goal was to ensure the DIBELS data generated would be understood by teachers so they could use it to measure progress, guide instruction, and share with parents. Therefore, professional development that focused on data management and analysis was also provided. This assisted our teachers in interpreting reports containing information about students' instructional needs; those progressing on grade level, those

of instruction, intervention efforts, and flexible groupings. Additionally, DIBELS benchmark and progress monitoring data provide principals, who meet monthly with teachers to review student skills and distribute resources based on student needs, with reliable and current information on the struggling readers. Parents are also able to see where their child is in relation to desired fluency goals and to monitor progress throughout the school year and across grades. Individual schools are utilizing Spring DIBELS data as they create class lists for the following year in an effort to make an equitable distribution of struggling learners.



With three years of DIBELS data now collected, we are excited to see the picture that the student data generates and to utilize that information to support current and future literacy efforts.

DIBELS has provided educators in Cache County School District with the ability to collect and utilize data that focuses on the skills that research has shown are critical to reading acquisition throughout the elementary grades. It has allowed information to be gathered in a timely and efficient manner. It has also supported administrators, educators, and parents in their efforts to pinpoint needs and enhance student literacy skills through a variety of reader-friendly reports. These significant contributions have been a driving force in supporting our efforts to differentiate instruction and measure its effectiveness throughout the school year. With three years of DIBELS data now collected, we are excited to see the picture that the student data generates and to utilize that information to support current and future literacy efforts. ■

needing strategic adaptations, and those requiring intensive intervention. Teachers were and continue to be introduced to the numerous sources of information readily available online as well as the progress monitoring support option available for struggling readers needing frequent monitoring.

The DIBELS assessment has proven to be an excellent tool to draw into focus the need to differentiate instruction within classrooms. Data is now driving tiers

**Editors' note:** For a complete description of DIBELS with examples, see Leann Hawkin's article in the February issue of the Educator. This article is another installment in an ongoing series on best practices for teaching reading. A compilation of current and future articles in this reading series can be found at: [www.updc.org/specialeducator/index.html](http://www.updc.org/specialeducator/index.html)

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