

FCRR Briefing Paper

Determining Instructional Levels Using DIBELS Data: Common Patterns of Scores and Decisions July, 2004

The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) are administered to Florida students in kindergarten through third grade in *Reading First* and other selected schools to determine risk levels for later difficulties in reading. In many cases, students are administered more than one DIBELS measure, and the risk levels achieved on each measure are not always identical. This is not unusual, since students develop some early literacy skills with greater ease than others.

To assist in combining the results from different DIBELS measures into a single statement of overall instructional need, Dr. Roland Good and colleagues at the University of Oregon have prepared Technical Report #11. This report, which is titled "Summary of Decision Rules for Intensive, Strategic, and Benchmark Instructional Recommendations in Kindergarten Through Third Grade," may be viewed in its entirety on the following webpage:

http://dibels.uoregon.edu/techreports/decision_rule_summary.pdf.

Recommendations for overall level of instructional need were determined from the end-of-year or later performance of students whose scores were entered into the DIBELS Data System at the University of Oregon. Within Technical Report #11 there are a number of tables that represent the different configurations of scores (risk levels) that resulted when students were administered the DIBELS measures appropriate to their grade level and time of year. There are many possible combinations of scores since, in kindergarten and first grade, more than one measure is given at any one time. Students in the second and third grades whose scores were entered into the DIBELS Data System were administered only the Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) measure. Therefore, instructional recommendations provided by Dr. Good for second and third grade students are based solely on the ORF scores and student performance on end-of-third grade ORF measures.

The purpose of this document is to reduce the complexity of the decision charts provided in Technical Report #11 into some general statements reflecting patterns that will appear more commonly with DIBELS testing. The language used in this Briefing Paper will be consistent with language used in the Progress Monitoring and Reporting Network (PMRN) where risk levels and instructional recommendations are provided in colored, graphic form.

Kindergarten

Deciding about the instructional needs of kindergarten students becomes more complex as the number of tests administered increases during the school year. For the first two assessment periods, only two measures are administered, Letter Naming Fluency (LNF) and Initial Sound Fluency (ISF). Common patterns for students identified as needing intensive reading interventions are those who are at high risk in both measures or are at high risk in one measure and at moderate risk in the other. Those considered at grade level or who are expected to continue to profit from initial instruction, are those who are at low risk on both measures. The remaining students, those with mixed results on the two measures or where both measures fall in the moderate risk range, are deemed to be in need of strategic interventions where additional supports over and above initial instruction are indicated.

Kindergarten students are assessed at Interval 3 with four measures and with three measures at Interval 4. The Oregon system does not administer Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF) until the last assessment of kindergarten. Therefore, the instructional recommendations in the technical report for Interval 3 are based on risk levels obtained on LNF, ISF, and Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF). The instructional recommendations for Interval 4 are based on the risk levels for LNF, PSF, and NWF. In general, at both the 3rd and 4th Intervals, the patterns for determining instructional levels are somewhat similar. Specifically, students who are at high risk on at least two of the measures and at moderate risk on the third measure are considered to need intensive interventions. Those who are judged to be able to continue to profit from quality initial instruction are primarily those who are at low risk on at least two of the measures and at moderate risk on the third measure. Those falling within the strategic level tend to have somewhat mixed results on the three measures or to have at least two measures that are in the moderate risk range.

Summary – KG

The instructional level for kindergarten students during Intervals 1 and 2 is determined primarily by the consistency of the risk levels on the two measures. There is a tendency to place greater weight on the higher risk measure in recommending intensity of instruction. During Intervals 3 and 4, two measures at high risk usually result in a recommendation for intensive instruction and two measures at low risk typically result in a recommendation for grade level initial instruction. Students with mixed profiles are typically recommended for strategic instruction.

First Grade

First grade students in Florida are administered four DIBELS measures at the first interval: LNF, PSF, NWF and ORF. The University of Oregon model does not administer ORF at the beginning of first grade. Therefore, this measure is not incorporated into the decisions for instructional need. Most students at the beginning of first grade who are at high risk in two or three measures are classified as needing intensive instruction. Those at low risk in all measures or at low risk in two measures and at moderate risk in the third measure are determined to be on grade level with continued high quality instruction. Those with varied combinations of scores on the three measures or with a predominance of moderate risk measures are characterized as needing strategic interventions. During Intervals 2 and 3 in first grade where PSF, NWF, and ORF are administered, the recommendations for instruction are identical. The greatest weight is placed on ORF and NWF scores. Students at high risk in one or both of these two measures are considered to need intensive supports. The only exception, and this is not a common profile, is students who are at high risk in ORF and low risk in NWF. In this case, students are judged to need strategic supports. Students at moderate risk in ORF and moderate or low risk in NWF also will benefit from strategic interventions as will students who are low risk on ORF but high risk on NWF. During the fourth Interval, the determining factor for the level of support needed is the student's performance on ORF. If this is at high risk, the student needs intensive support. Similarly if this is at moderate risk, the student needs strategic support. Finally, if ORF is at low risk, the student can continue with the core reading program.

It is important to keep in mind as we discuss instructional levels that this is only a first level indicator of the need for extra instruction. It is intended to draw attention to the students most in need of either very intensive interventions or for less intensive additional support (strategic level of intervention). By looking at scores on the individual measures, teachers can begin to form a plan to focus on the critical skills that are most in need of intervention.

Summary – Grade 1

The instructional level for first grade students during Interval 1 is determined primarily by the consistency of the risk levels on three measures (ORF is not included) with a tendency to place greater weight on the higher risk level measure in recommending intensity of instruction. During Intervals 2 and 3, the ORF measure replaces the LNF and plays an important role along with NWF in the instructional recommendations. By Interval 4, the level of support is entirely dependent on the student's performance on ORF .

Second and Third Grades

The simplest interpretation occurs with the second and third grade students. Although Florida requires the administration of Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF) during second grade, the decision system created at the University of Oregon uses only the ORF measure. Therefore, the level of risk for ORF indicates an equivalent level of instructional intensity because ORF is the best predictor of later proficiency in reading fluency. Specifically, if students scores are in the high risk range on ORF, they are classified as needing intensive and substantial reading interventions; if they score in the moderate risk range, they are judged to need strategic or additional interventions; and if they score in the low risk range, they are classified as being at grade level for initial instruction.

Please note that the exclusion of the NWF measure from the decision rules for instructional level does not mean that this measure is not an important indicator of instructional need in second grade. It simply reflects the fact that the this measure has not previously been widely administered in second grade, so that it was not possible to incorporate it in the decision rules for second grade which are based on statistical probabilities.

Summary – Grades 2 – 3

The instructional level for students in Grades 2 and 3 reflects their risk level obtained on the ORF measure alone.

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Reference: Good, R. H., Simmons, D., Kame'enui, E., Kaminski, R. A., and Wallin, J. (2002). *Summary of decision rules for intensive, strategic, and benchmark instructional recommendations in kindergarten through third grade*. (Technical report #11). Eugene, OR: University of Oregon.