

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills (DIBELS®)

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FLORIDA CENTER FOR READING RESEARCH

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The Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR) and Project CENTRAL at the University of Central Florida have been assigned the responsibility for training and implementation of the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS®) in Florida elementary schools including those receiving a *Reading First* grant. The purposes of this document are to establish a forum for responding to questions raised by individuals regarding DIBELS® and to establish a system for documenting commonly occurring questions and the answers to those questions. As other questions arise in the implementation of DIBELS®, revisions to these Frequently Asked Questions will be written and posted on the FCRR website, <http://www.fcrr.org/assessment/assessment.htm>. Questions are placed into categories for ease in reviewing. Readers may select from the following menu of questions to locate topics of particular interest:

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GENERAL ISSUES

1. What are the DIBELS® Measures?

DIBELS® are five brief measures of the important skills forming the basis for early success in reading. DIBELS® measure a student's ability to hear the individual sounds or phonemes in words, to decode words, and to read connected text. DIBELS® are typically administered from pre-kindergarten through third grade, the time when these skills should become firmly established.

2. Where were DIBELS® originally constructed, and do they have a strong research base?

DIBELS® were originally developed at the Early Childhood Research Institute on Measuring Growth and Development at the University of Oregon. There has been extensive research conducted on the DIBELS® measures and how they accurately predict performance on important outcomes that depend on the ability to read and comprehend written text. Technical reports are available from the University of Oregon website at <http://www.uoregon.edu/techreports/index.php>.

3. Are DIBELS® considered to be diagnostic measures?

DIBELS® may be considered as the first step in the diagnostic process, but they are not typically thought of as a diagnostic tool. They are best suited to screen students for weaknesses in the phonemic awareness, phonics and reading fluency areas; and they are an efficient and practical progress monitoring measure for K–6 students. In many cases, a student who performs in the at-risk range on DIBELS® may not need additional assessment (i.e., a diagnostic measure) before the teacher is able to implement remedial strategies. In other cases, when the remediation is not successful, the teacher may seek additional data from a diagnostic test of reading to better target the areas of weakness that are impeding the student's progress.

4. Who administers and scores DIBELS®?

For *Reading First* schools, the FCRR has developed an implementation plan that is designed to build district and school-based capacity by training assessment teams. First, reading coaches and selected staff from the district with expertise in assessment and/or reading are taught the DIBELS® measures. These individuals make up the district-level assessment team. After becoming experienced in using the DIBELS®, these team members return for DIBELS® Facilitator training in order to be able to teach the administration and scoring techniques to school-based teams. School-based teams are made up of school staff members who do not have classroom teaching responsibilities. For example, the media specialist, guidance counselor, school psychologist, speech and language pathologist, assistant principal, principal, retired teachers and substitute teachers are likely candidates for training as members of the school-based team. The reading coach who has had the additional Facilitator training may also be a key member of the school-based team. The district-level team provides additional support to the school-based teams for training or student assessment as the need arises. Schools not participating in a *Reading First* grant may choose the team approach to conduct the assessment, may train classroom teachers in the administration and scoring of the measures specific to the grade level(s) they provide reading instruction, or may institute a combination of these two approaches where the classroom teacher is a part of the assessment team when the class is assessed.

5. Can paraprofessionals be trained to administer and score DIBELS®?

Yes. Paraprofessionals can receive training in the administration and scoring of the DIBELS® measures. It is important that the training include additional opportunities for practice and support as many paraprofessionals have had little, if any, experience conducting standardized testing. It is sometimes advisable to assign paraprofessionals to one grade level (e.g., second and/or third grade) where only one or two DIBELS® measures need to be learned to proficiency.

6. How are the materials funded that are needed to train district and school-based teams in DIBELS® and the materials needed to assess the students?

The Florida *Reading First* grant assigns funding responsibility for DIBELS® training and assessment to the FCRR. The Center provides trainers, training materials, student assessment materials, and the web based data management system at no cost to all schools receiving *Reading First* funding. Non-*Reading First* schools

can obtain information and technical assistance from the Center as they adopt DIBELS® progress monitoring measures or may request training through Project CENTRAL. However, non-*Reading First* schools must pay for the cost of training and assessment materials. A web-based data management system (the Progress Monitoring and Reporting Network—PMRN) is available to any Florida school at no cost.

7. Who are the primary contacts at each school district, the Department of Education, and FCRR for DIBELS® information, training, and assessment?

For the most part, school districts have assigned responsibility for DIBELS® to the administrators of elementary education or student assessment. The Director of Elementary Reading is the primary contact for the Department of Education; and the Director of Assessment Programs is the principal contact for DIBELS® at FCRR. The Director of *Reading First* can be reached at 850-245-0503, and the Director of Assessment Programs can be contacted at 850-644-9352.

FCRR welcomes all inquiries but does request that the district contact is made aware of the information requested of FCRR. FCRR, in turn, will keep the district contact in the communication loop by copying relevant written communication to them. If schools need testing supplies, they should request these from the district contact.

8. Do all children participate in DIBELS®?

If a school is receiving a *Reading First* grant, it is required that all K-3rd children enrolled in a *Reading First* school participate in the DIBELS® and other *Reading First* required assessments. Careful consideration must be given to any decision to not include a student in the progress monitoring (and other required *Reading First*) measures. It is recommended that school staff work closely with district administrators of the *Reading First* grant before deciding that DIBELS® is inappropriate in its entirety for administration to a specific student. With some students, it may be appropriate to administer only one or several of the required measures due to severe sensory or cognitive limitations.

9. Are home-schooled children exempt from testing with the DIBELS®?

Only students enrolled in *Reading First* schools are required to participate in the *Reading First* assessments. Children enrolled in a home school are not eligible participants in the *Reading First* program since their reading instruction is not being provided by a teacher at a *Reading First* school.

10. Are there accommodations that can be made to the DIBELS® administration procedures to ensure valid assessment of students with special behavioral and/or cognitive needs?

The University of Oregon has established accommodations that can be made to the administration procedures when certain conditions indicate that the assessment of the student will be more accurate if minor adjustments are made to the standardized procedures. For example, students with limited vision would profit from having the student materials enlarged, and students who have difficulty following oral directions would profit from a repetition of the directions or the examples that are given to help the student understand the requirements of the measure. One accommodation that cannot be made is to change the timing of the measures. DIBELS® is a fluency measure, and the performance of each student must be calculated within the timed procedures in order to determine the level of fluency that the student has with the early literacy skill. It is recommended that an accommodation be implemented only when an accurate assessment of the student would otherwise be in jeopardy. It is further recommended that assessment team members should make such a decision in consultation with the school reading coach, the teacher and/or others on the assessment team. In this way, accommodations will be considered carefully, and the accommodations will not be interpreted as unlimited permission to deviate from the standardized administration procedures. These accommodations are available on the University of Oregon website <http://www.uoregon.edu>, in the DIBELS® training manual, and in the “Reading Coach’s Guide to *Reading First* Assessment.”

11. Is it acceptable to simplify or shorten the instructions to a student identified as Language Impaired in order to make it easier for the student to understand the task? For example, directions for the NWF section may be too lengthy for some students to process. Could you say, "Point to the letter and tell me the sound the letter makes?" This could then be followed by giving the practice examples without reading the long directions?

Rather than shortening the directions, try using the "Approved Accommodations" recommendations found behind tab #9 of your DIBELS® Training Manual. You might try having the student say "sim" and "lut" as individual sounds and as the whole word along with the examiner for extra practice. Because the DIBELS® measures are standardized, it is important that the directions be provided exactly as presented in the administration procedures. Repeating the instructions and having the student repeat the examples after the examiner are listed as appropriate accommodations by the authors. Summarizing the directions is not an acceptable accommodation.

12. Should the DIBELS® 'Approved Accommodations' be used only for particular students (e.g., students with disabilities, Limited English Proficient, and students on Section 504 plans)? Are districts penalized for applying accommodations to a large number of students?

Most students will not require any accommodation if optimal testing conditions are present. However, these accommodations may be appropriate for any student if there is a legitimate concern that not using the accommodation would result in an invalid representation of the student's skills. It is always best to attempt testing under the standard conditions first before considering any accommodation. Districts are not penalized for the number of accommodations used during testing.

13. When assessing kindergartners with measures such as NWF and PSF, is it acceptable to use a blank sheet of paper with a window cut out of it so that the student would only see one row at a time?

It is an acceptable accommodation to use a guide if a student has difficulty tracking or is easily distracted and unable to maintain their place on the line. The authors of DIBELS® state that, in order to facilitate student responding, it may be appropriate to have a marker or ruler under a line of text or items in order to focus attention.

14. How are students with limited English proficiency assessed with DIBELS®?

FCRR has translated the administration directions for DIBELS® into Spanish, Haitian Creole, Farsi, French, Albanian, German, Vietnamese, Bosnian and Portuguese. Additional translations may be requested and will be made available to districts. The responses of students administered with translated directions are scored on the basis of English responses.

The assessment team members, unless they are proficient in the language of administration, may need the assistance of individuals proficient in the student's language to be certain that the student has a full grasp of the specific requirements of the individual measures.

15. May a student with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) be marked as "nonparticipating" if no interpreter is available to give directions in the student's primary language?

Yes, it is possible to exclude LEP students from testing under certain circumstances. First, a student may be excluded if there is no translation of the directions available. A student also may be excluded if no one is available who can administer the test using the translated directions and the student's English language skills severely restrict the student's ability to understand the directions in English.

16. Are DIBELS® materials available in large print and Braille?

Yes, DIBELS® student materials have been translated into Braille by the Florida Instructional Materials Center for the Visually Impaired (FIMC-VI). Schools needing these materials should request them through the teacher of the students with visual impairments. The student probes may be enlarged on a duplicating machine or typed in a larger font if this is necessary to gain an accurate representation of the student's skills.

17. If a student cannot take the Progress Monitoring tests because of an exceptionality, do I put a zero in for a score?

No, you would definitely not enter a score of zero. Putting a zero indicates the student was tested and did not get any items correct and met the discontinue rule. If the student is not tested, the student receives no score.

18. Are the norms for DIBELS® derived from the performances of students in Florida?

No. The norms (or expected performance levels for predicting success in reading) have been derived from research conducted across the country by Dr. Roland Good, Dr. Ruth Kaminski and colleagues at the University of Oregon. The FCRR will be studying the need for any modifications in these at-risk categories from the data obtained over the next several years with a broad sample of students from *Reading First* and non-*Reading First* schools. So these numbers may be considered as tentative, pending the collection of data from Florida students on DIBELS® and analysis of the way DIBELS® predict outcome measures used in Florida, including the third grade FCAT test.

19. On the PMRN, when students perform in the Above Average range on all or most of the measures, they are identified as 'Initial' on the overall Instructional Level. Is there a method for designating them as 'Accelerated' or a similar descriptor?

No. There is no method for designating students as accelerated. The determination of the instructional level is based on the University of Oregon model where only three designations for level of performance are provided for the individual measures and three designations of need for support are provided for Instructional Level. The Above Average designations for the individual measures were created in Florida in response to requests for identifying students who were at or above the 60th percentile. However, in keeping with the Instructional Level decision rules developed at the University of Oregon, these "Above Average" scores are considered as "Low Risk." For students who have well established basic skills, as these students do, the teacher would want to provide instruction through the core reading program. Center time and small group time could be used to broaden and expand these students' skills in the essential components with particular attention to vocabulary development and comprehension strategies.

20. Is it possible to test students, especially those with disabilities, with DIBELS® on their instructional level rather than their grade placement level?

All students, including students with disabilities, are administered the DIBELS® at their grade placement level. They also can be administered any of the grade-appropriate measures at more frequent intervals. This is referred to as Ongoing Progress Monitoring and is useful when a teacher wants to track progress on a more frequent basis between two assessment periods.

It also is possible to administer any of the off-grade level measures to any student to track progress when interventions are being provided on below-grade level skills. For example, a third grade student who is weak in Oral Reading Fluency might be assessed on Nonsense Word Fluency to determine if decoding skills are hampering reading fluency. However, at this time, it is not possible to enter these results into the Progress Monitoring and Reporting Network (PMRN). The manual, *Determining Instructional Level and Conducting Ongoing Progress Monitoring*, may serve as a valuable resource for teachers conducting on- and off-grade-level progress monitoring. This is available from FCRR by requesting it in writing to assessments@fcrr.org.

21. We have a student who is repeating 2nd grade. Do we still administer DIBELS® to this student? If so, would we assess the student with second or third grade measures?

Yes, you would definitely include the student in all DIBELS® testing. All students are administered the DIBELS® for their grade level. Therefore, a 2nd grade student who is repeating this grade would be assessed with second grade measures.

22. Is it possible to download DIBELS® passages from the University of Oregon website to practice with students?

The DIBELS® measures available through the University of Oregon website are designed for assessment purposes only. Permitting students to practice DIBELS® or any other measure of reading skills has the potential of inflating scores and giving a false estimate of fluency. This could then cause a student in need of assistance with basic reading skills to be overlooked, denying them the support they need to be successful. The passages on the website can be used on a weekly or biweekly basis to measure progress in fluency as interventions and support are being provided. This is referred to as “Ongoing Progress Monitoring.” Procedures for conducting Ongoing Progress Monitoring are available on request from the FCRR Assessment Program office at assessments@fcrr.org.

Teachers have many options for building fluency and comprehension skills including selecting passages from supplementary reading materials at the student’s independent reading level and assigning these for reading practice. The teacher also can time a student’s reading fluency on these reading materials to monitor progress and to determine when more advanced passages can be assigned.

23. What is the relationship between fluency and reading comprehension?

Overall, studies have shown that there is a strong relationship between oral reading fluency and reading comprehension. Most studies indicate a correlation of .85 to .87. Increases in fluency will almost always have a positive impact on comprehension. A research study conducted by FCRR addresses the relationship between fluency and performance on the third-grade FCAT. The FCAT is a very strong measure of reading comprehension. The report is located at the following URL: <http://www.fcrr.org/technicalreports/TechnicalReport1.pdf>. A number of states have conducted similar studies looking at reading fluency and standards-based tests, finding results similar to those reported in Florida.

24. Is it permissible to begin DIBELS® testing before an assessment window begins provided the data is entered during the window?

No. The assessment windows were established for our *Reading First* grant to ensure equal intervals (45 school days) between each assessment period. This requirement also applies to non-*Reading First* grant schools in order that growth rates can be established for classrooms and grades at the local and state levels. Conducting the testing at earlier or later dates (except in emergency situations with the approval of those in charge of the state *Reading First* grant) may have an unpredictable effect on the interpretation of the growth data.

25. Many of our students’ scores dropped significantly or showed only minimal growth between two assessment periods. How do you explain this pattern of performance when our teachers and coaches are working hard to help students become successful readers?

When students exhibit a lack of progress or very limited growth from one assessment to the next, it can be very discouraging. It is important to remind ourselves that we do not always see steady and even growth in the development of early literacy skills. For example, students may level out for a period of time in one aspect of their reading development yet show significantly greater gains in another aspect. A second grade student who shows a very low rate of growth in the measure of oral reading fluency between two assessment periods but has rapidly increasing skills in decoding on the NWF measure is an example of differing growth patterns between two measures. Whenever limited growth between two assessments is found, school personnel should immediately take steps to ensure that growth in the important element of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, or fluency) is stimulated and a recurrence of weak growth does not take place at the next assessment period.

26. Would it be possible to receive a video demonstrating the proper pronunciation of all the speech sounds? I think it’s important that we are all pronouncing them the same way.

A video demonstration entitled “Sounds of Standard English” is available on the FCRR website at <http://www.fcrr.org/assessment/index.htm>. Go to ‘Screening and Progress Monitoring’ and scroll down to “Sounds of Standard English.” Individuals are welcome to download this video prepared by a speech-language

pathologist. FCRR has also prepared an audio CD of the correct responses to the Phoneme Segmentation Fluency and Nonsense Word Fluency measures given four times during the year. These are available by writing to assessments@fcrr.org.

SCORING FORMS

27. How do schools order DIBELS® scoring forms?

The Department of Education, in support of the School Readiness and Uniform Screening System (SRUSS), provides all elementary schools with sufficient DIBELS® forms to assess kindergarten students throughout the school year at quarterly intervals. The Florida version of DIBELS® (four times a year at 45 - day intervals) must be ordered by FCRR for *Reading First* schools for grades 1–3. Other schools following the Florida assessment schedule will order scoring forms from the publisher, Sopris West, using an order form posted on the FCRR website. If schools are using the Oregon model (assessing students three times a year rather than four), classroom sets of forms must be ordered directly from Sopris West or can be downloaded from the University of Oregon website: <http://dibels.uoregon.edu>. DIBELS® forms for grades 4 and 5 can be ordered by any school using a form posted on the FCRR website.

FCRR works directly with a district level *Reading First* contact who receives the DIBELS® orders and distributes the materials to participating schools. If additional forms are needed during the course of the school year as enrollment changes, the district contact should notify the FCRR Assessment Program office via e-mail at assessments@fcrr.org where additional materials are kept for such situations.

28. Are the scoring forms the same at each assessment period?

No. Different passages are provided at each assessment time for measuring reading fluency in grades 1–3. Each test form is color coded for ease in identification: white for kindergarten, yellow for first grade, blue for second grade, and gray for third grade. Fourth grade forms are pink and fifth grade forms are green. Each form also has the grade level boldly printed at the top of the form as well as the specific year and assessment period.

29. Are scoring forms for all assessment periods disseminated to schools at the beginning of the year?

The FCRR recommends that forms be maintained in a secure location at the district office until approximately two weeks before each assessment window begins when they are sent to each school. Then student enrollment can be verified and additional forms can be secured from the district office or from FCRR if a *Reading First* school.

30. How should scoring forms be handled or stored after the scores have been entered into the PMRN?

The state records retention and destruction rules require that testing forms such as the DIBELS® must be retained until at least 90 days after the information has been recorded in the student's record; in most cases this will be the Progress Monitoring and Reporting Network (PMRN).

It may be a good idea to keep the forms for the entire school year in a secure location and organized by classroom teacher by assessment period. In this way teachers may have access to the records, and a longitudinal history of the actual responses to items may be reviewed for additional information that is not captured in the fluency scores.

Whatever decision is made about the retention of the DIBELS® forms, this decision should be reviewed by the district contact for student records. This is more than likely the Director of Student Services.

TRAINING

31. Can teachers become trained to use DIBELS® for frequent progress monitoring of selected students?

Yes. Teachers should be supported in learning the DIBELS® measures that are specific to their grade level. Once the reading coach or others on the assessment team have been trained to provide training to others, they can facilitate teacher training for more frequent, ongoing monitoring of student progress with the DIBELS® measures. Materials for the more frequent, ongoing progress monitoring can be purchased from Sopris West or downloaded from the University of Oregon website. FCRR has provided procedures for the implementation of the more frequent progress monitoring and the assessment of student's instructional level. These procedures may be downloaded from <http://www.fcrr.org/assessment/pdf/opm/opmGuide2005.htm>

32. If someone has been trained to administer DIBELS® and has conducted numerous administrations of all of the measures, can that person train others in DIBELS®?

No. The requirements to train others in the administration and scoring procedures for DIBELS® are specific. The person conducting any training would need to attend the FCRR or Project CENTRAL "Facilitator's Training" where the training guide, training CD, and all training materials are reviewed. This one-day training provides the individual with valuable information that is not gained during the initial training or even in the administration of the DIBELS® measures. It is important that every person who is trained in DIBELS® is afforded the same opportunities and experiences as every other person.

That assurance is made possible through the Facilitator-training model. It is the intent of the FCRR to provide every school and district with a large group of educators who are skilled in the DIBELS® assessment and in the DIBELS® training areas. Anyone desiring to become a DIBELS® Facilitator should inform the district contact about his or her interests.

33. What is the cost of training materials for non-Reading First schools?

The approximate cost for training materials for each individual is \$40.00. A set of camera-ready materials is provided by FCRR that can be duplicated at the district level or by a contracted printer. The other materials will need to be ordered, and districts may secure a "shopping list" from FCRR that outlines the materials that are needed to train in the *Reading First* model.

TESTING

34. There appears to be some overlap and perhaps testing conflicts in the assessment requirements of several grants that have been provided to one or more schools. How can this be resolved?

These conflicts can only be resolved at the district level between the individuals who are responsible for the grant requirements. Any school or district participating in more than one reading grant should be aware of and would have to have agreed to abide by the individual grant requirements.

35. How can a school determine when their specific DIBELS® assessments will take place?

The window for each assessment is 10 days with the first assessment beginning on school day 20. Thereafter, every 45 days begins the next 10-day assessment window. The second assessment begins on the 65th school day; the third assessment begins on the 110th school day. The final assessment takes place between the 155th and 169th day of school. An extra five days are provided during the fourth assessment window to accommodate an additional outcome measure required of *Reading First* schools. By reviewing each district's calendar, the schedule for DIBELS® can be mapped out for planning purposes. The PMRN posts an assessment schedule for each school entering scores into the PMRN.

36. Is parent consent required for DIBELS® assessment?

No, parent consent is not required because all children will be participating in the assessment if it is a *Reading First* school or the school is required to monitor the progress of students who are in failure of not meeting grade level reading expectations.

It is important that parents are informed about the type of assessment that will be taking place with the students during the year. In turn, teachers are encouraged to send home the parent report from the PMRN after each assessment period and to be prepared to discuss ways in which parents can support the student's reading achievement from home. A parent brochure describing the DIBELS® measures is available from the FCRR website at <http://www.fcrr.org/assessment/PDFfiles/ParentBrochure.pdf>.

37. Once a student has achieved the “low risk” or “above average” level of proficiency, can the student be excluded from the next assessment?

No. There are several reasons why we would want to include these students in later DIBELS® assessments in the measure where they have shown proficiency. First, many of the probes require higher levels of proficiency at each assessment period. Should students “plateau” or not continue to improve during the time between the two assessments, it is possible that they would fall into the “moderate risk” range and need instructional supports to meet the goals for the following assessment. Secondly, the teacher, school, district and state need information about the success of reading instruction for students at all levels of reading proficiency. We hope that all students will show meaningful growth between assessment periods—without measuring the growth of all students we will not be able to determine if this is happening.

38. Is it a good idea to assign assessment team members to specific classrooms so they assess the same students throughout the school year?

This idea has merit, but it is not necessary to obtain reliable and valid scores. The main advantage is that the team member has an opportunity to develop a comfortable rapport with the students as the assessment takes place each time.

39. What should be done if there is some reason to believe that the score obtained by a student is not an accurate reflection of the student's skill?

The best way to handle such a situation is to repeat the assessment on a different day, about one week later if possible. The repeated measure scores should be entered into the PMRN. Retest effects should be minimal in this situation. Another option is to administer two additional probes with different items (available from the Ongoing Progress Monitoring measures) and select the median score as the best indicator of proficiency.

40. It seems more efficient to test an entire classroom or group of children before taking the time to score each form. Is this acceptable?

It is best to score each student's performance as soon as the measure is completed. It is okay to prorate scores (such as on ISF) after completing the entire initial raw score calculations and noting the cumulative time. The important thing to remember with calculating scores is to double-check all scoring; and if the examiner determines scores at the conclusion of each testing, it is then possible to verify the scores before turning them in to the person responsible for entering the scores into the PMRN.

41. Is it permissible to have one member of the assessment team administer one of the measures to a student while another member follows up with the second or other measures?

This is probably not the most efficient method for conducting the assessments. In the first place, no two measures take the same amount of time so it is likely that the student or the other assessment team member will be waiting for the next step to take place. It is possible to assign team members to classrooms based on their skill in the particular measures so that individuals who are most competent in LNF and ISF might be assigned to the kindergarten classrooms; individuals who are proficient in ORF should be assigned to the third grade classrooms, etc. Since it will take at least three days to do the average sized school, the assessment team should be organized to be as efficient as possible so that student and staff time are maximized.

42. Is it permissible to administer DIBELS® during the 90-minute uninterrupted reading block?

Yes. Each student is only missing instruction for a very brief period of time over the entire school year. Consideration should be given to ensuring minimal distractions during this instructional time by working with the teacher on a testing process that addresses the class disruption issue.

43. After viewing reports for her students, a teacher does not agree with the student’s performance and requests that the student be retested. Is this permissible?

Yes. If the teacher questions a score as being invalid (i.e., inconsistent with all other information that the teacher has about the student), it would be permissible and recommended to retest with as much time as possible between the two assessments. The same measures can be used (you may get a slightly inflated score by this method) or two additional alternate measures may be downloaded off of the University of Oregon website or from the Ongoing Progress Monitoring materials. The median of the three assessments will provide the most reliable measure of the student’s skills. Best practices would suggest that the student be re-evaluated more than once, but this is probably not feasible because there would not be enough time within the testing window to do repeated testing over several weeks. If the student’s score was significantly lower than expectations, the reason for this should be explored. It could be that the student was not up to par on this day. Also there could be a test administration issue where the examiner may have erred in conducting the assessment or scoring the performance. If the teacher questions the score because it is much higher than expected, it would be advisable to first check for a scoring error. It may be that the examiner did not time correctly or did not score correctly, and this resulted in an inflated score. There is also the possibility, of course, that the student does possess these higher-level skills but is not demonstrating them on classroom work.

INDIVIDUAL DIBELS® MEASURES

44. What are some of the more common errors that might be made when first learning to administer the DIBELS® measures?

We have found that the most common administration and scoring requirements that are subject to error when first learning the DIBELS® measures are:

- a. Starting and stopping the stopwatch at correct times
- b. Reading the directions verbatim
- c. Following the discontinue rules
- d. Using the correct prompts when a student does not respond correctly to directions
- e. Conducting the measures where other children cannot overhear
- f. Avoiding interruptions and being able to hear the student clearly in a relatively noise-free environment
- g. Using the assessment time as a testing time, not a “teaching” moment
- h. Appropriately emphasizing the phonemes when administering phoneme segmentation fluency and initial sound fluency without overemphasis
- i. Calculating or transferring scores correctly
- j. Prorating scores and determining median scores

It is important that DIBELS® Facilitators provide technical assistance and support to individuals as they learn to administer the measures so that these and other errors are avoided.

45. When using the prorating formula because a student completes the LNF, PSF, NWF, or ORF in less than one minute, how should the score be reported if the result is not a whole number?

Only whole numbers are entered into the PMRN. Therefore scores should be rounded up to the next whole number if they are .5 or above. Scores should be rounded down to the next whole number if they are below .5.

LETTER NAMING FLUENCY

46. During administration of the LNF measure, a student reads the first five lines correctly and then re-reads line five a second time. Does the student receive credit for the second reading of the line?

No, you would not give the student credit for the repeated letters. Given this situation, it is recommended that the examiner redirect the student to the correct line when beginning to re-read a line. This will most likely result in the student only re-reading two to three letters rather than the entire line. Their overall score should not be adversely affected if redirected quickly in this manner.

47. If students read the first line of letters from left to right and then go to the second line reading from right to left, do we allow them to continue?

Yes, you would allow students to continue with the probe and keep your stopwatch running. When a student has completed reading the line, redirect the student to the next line by pointing to the first letter on the left.

48. Are Ongoing Progress Monitoring probes available for LNF on the University of Oregon website?

No, letter naming is not recommended for teaching as an isolated skill. It is included in the DIBELS® measures as an indicator of risk. Therefore, there are no Ongoing Progress Monitoring probes for the LNF measure.

49. Why would a kindergarten student who scored a '2' on LNF be considered at moderate risk when the target is 9? It seems as though the student should be considered high risk.

Students who score between 2 and 8 correct letter names fall between the 20th and 42nd percentiles. This is consistent with the National Reading Panel recommendations that students below the 20th percentile are at high risk and those at or above the 40th percentile are at low risk. Those in between, of course, fall in the moderate risk range.

The identification of two letters is right on the borderline of high risk, and indicates that the student has little knowledge of the names of letters. Once a student has been able to read nine, ten, or more letters correctly in a minute, they do have some letter naming ability even though it is quite modest. Research has shown that students at moderate or high risk on both ISF and LNF will benefit from intensive interventions in phonemic awareness and phonics to be successful in later reading tasks. If they are at moderate risk in both measures, they will benefit from additional support from the teacher to strengthen phonemic awareness and phonics skills.

INITIAL SOUND FLUENCY

50. If students are not familiar with the names that are provided for the pictures used in an ISF measure (e.g., frame, hamster), will this interfere with their ability to respond correctly?

Yes, this is very possible. Therefore, the examiner should spend a little time being sure that the student knows the labels that are being assigned to the pictures. This can be done before assessment begins by telling the student the name of the picture followed by asking the student to give the name. Once all pictures have been reviewed and the label seems to be known, the assessment can begin. This additional assistance is included in the Accommodations Recommendations.

51. Why is ISF administered only for the first two assessment periods in kindergarten?

This very early stage of phonemic awareness should be mastered by the third quarter of kindergarten. If students have not acquired competency in this skill and teachers are working on building recognition and production of beginning, ending and medial sounds, additional measures of ISF can be administered for information purposes (but not for entry into the PMRN). The procedures for this are available in the document entitled, "Determining Instructional Level and Conducting Ongoing Progress Monitoring," and the probes are available from the University of Oregon website: <http://dibels.uoregon.edu>.

52. One of our DIBELS® administrators accidentally left the stopwatch running during the entire Initial Sound Fluency measure. Should we record the scores in the PMRN, retest and edit the scores, or make an estimation?

Given the situation described, the students' scores will not provide an accurate representation of their skill levels. Since there is no procedure for estimating scores, the students will need to be retested. It is recommended that this retesting take place a week or more later, if possible. Once the new scores are obtained, they should be entered into the PMRN.

53. On ISF Assessment 2, items 4 and 8 ask what sounds the words 'bridge' and 'crutches' begin with. Are we looking for the blends '/br/' and '/cr/?' Should responses of '/b/' and '/k/' also be marked as correct?

With test items such as "bridge" and "crutches," the desired response would be for the student to give the entire cluster (i.e., /br/ and /cr/). However, if the student responds with /b/ or /k/, they would also be given credit. This scoring procedure is described in the DIBELS® training manual using the word "clock."

54. When asked, "What sound does 'mule' begin with?" a student responded with "/m/-/ule/." Although the word was repeated, it also was segmented. How should I score this item?

It is probably best to mark the response of "/m-/ule/" as incorrect. It is likely, based on the response provided, that the student has a fairly good awareness of the individual sounds in words. However, they may have some confusion over the concepts "beginning" and "ending." It is better to score the items as incorrect (which may result in additional help for the student) than to give credit when the student may not have a strong grasp of the skill being measured.

If this was an isolated response to the ISF measure, it is not particularly significant. However, if it was a recurring pattern, the student may need to have additional instruction on the directions for the ISF measure.

55. The training manual states that the prompt, 'Remember to tell me a picture that begins with the sound / /' can be given once. Does this mean once for the entire test or once for each test item?

The prompting rule states that the prompt may be given only once for the entire ISF measure.

56. When asking a student to name the sound a test item begins with, is it appropriate to prompt them once to give the sound of the letter and not the name?

This prompt is related only to those questions where the student is asked to give the name of the picture or point to the picture. It does not relate to the fourth question in each set that asks, "What sound does ____ begin with?" There is no prompt for these test items. If a student responds with a letter name, the item must be marked as incorrect.

PHONEME SEGMENTATION FLUENCY

57. How would you score the following PSF responses: For the word 'arms,' the response was '/m/ /r/ /z/;' for the word 'smile,' the response was '/m/ /ie/ /s/?'

The student would only be given credit for the segments that are in the correct order or location. For example, for "arms," the student would get credit for /z/ but not the /r/ or /m/. For "smile," the student would get credit for /m/ /ie/ but not /s/. The scoring sheet would look like this:

- Arms /r/ /m/ /z/ (The /r/ and /m/ are crossed out because of mispronunciation errors.)
- Smile /s/ /m/ /ie/ /l/ (The /s/ is left blank as an omission error, and the /l/ is crossed out as a pronunciation error.)

58. On the PSF subtest, if students say all the sounds in the word but blend several of them together, would they receive all or only partial credit?

Students receive credit for every different, correct part of the word. Therefore, if there are 3 sound segments, students could score up to three points for segmenting the word (for example, cat = /k/ /a/ /t/). If they do not segment all of those sounds, the student receives one point for the incomplete segment (e.g. /k/ /at/ is one point for the /k/ and one point for the /at/). If students do not segment at all, i.e. repeats the word, 'cat,' they receive a score of '0' for that item.

59. On a recent administration of PSF, there was some confusion about how the word 'used' should be segmented. Should it be segmented as /y/ /oo/ /z/ /d/ as in, 'The store sold used books,' or /y/ /oo/ /s/ /t/ as in, 'We used to have to walk to school?'

The word "used" should be presented to the student as /y/ /oo/ /s/ /t/ as the segmented phoneme that accompanies the word on the scoring sheet has the /s/ /t/ sounds at the end. However, if the examiner

inadvertently gave the word with the /z/ /d/ sounds, the student should be given credit for providing the appropriate response to what the examiner said.

60. Why are kindergartners and first graders tested on phoneme segmentation? Isn't this a second grade skill?

The benchmark and ultimate goal for PSF is established at the end of kindergarten at 35 correct segments produced in one minute. Students at the middle of kindergarten should be able to isolate the beginning sounds in words. Therefore, on the phoneme segmentation task, we can expect that students will be able to begin providing the individual sounds in the words on three and four phoneme words. We don't want to wait to measure students at a time when the skill should be mastered because we will miss early risk indicators for this skill.

NONSENSE WORD FLUENCY

61. If a student sounds out each letter of the word correctly then follows this by blending the sounds incorrectly, how should the item be scored?

The student should get full credit for the correct sounding out of the letters. If this is a recurring pattern, it may be mentioned to the teacher that the student needs additional skill building on the blending of words after decoding.

62. Why don't we use real words for decoding skills assessment rather than non-words?

The nonsense words are used because students differ on their sight word recognition skills. By using non-words, we can more accurately assess their ability to match letters to sounds and their ability to decode an unknown word when it is presented.

63. Should the prorating formula be used when a student completes the NWF measure in less than one minute?

Yes, you would multiply the number correct by 60 and divide that sum by the number of seconds that it took for the student to complete the entire probe. You can use this formula on any of the one-minute measures if they are completed in less than one minute. This will give you a one-minute fluency rate and provide an accurate representation of the student's fluency skills.

64. Why is NWF given to kindergartners during the third nine weeks? Isn't it too early to be testing this skill?

NWF is introduced in kindergarten because phonics instruction is initiated at this time. This information will give teachers a baseline when the skills are first being introduced and allow them to see progress until the end of the kindergarten year and continuing into first grade.

65. Several first grade students scored lower in NWF on the second DIBELS® assessment. After the classroom teacher retested one particular student, the student's score jumped from 27 to 49 in 2 days. Can such a drastic change in data occur within a two day period?

Based on the test-retest reliability of DIBELS®, you should not expect to see such a large jump in the scores. First, you must establish that both the original examiner and the classroom teacher were administering the test the same way. It is necessary that both examiners follow the standardized test procedures, such as waiting three seconds before prompting and timing and scoring appropriately. If it can be determined that both examiners are consistent in their test administration, it would be beneficial to administer another probe (selected from the Ongoing Progress Monitoring measures) and take the median score of the three administrations. This may help you to obtain a score that is more representative of the student's abilities. Although highly unusual, it can be anticipated that unique situations like this can occur, and the best way to obtain a reliable score for the individual student is to record the median of three administrations.

ORAL READING FLUENCY

66. In the ORF subtest, do the reading levels at each grade stay constant throughout the year of testing? How are the reading levels determined?

The reading levels for each of the ORF measures remain relatively constant throughout the year at each grade level. The readability of all passages was estimated using the Micro Power and Light readability software that provides nine readability indices. The Spache readability was selected as it best represented all nine methods. The following readabilities of the stories were found using the Spache: First grade story readabilities were 2.0 – 2.3, Second grade readabilities were 2.4 – 2.7, and third grade readabilities were 2.8 – 3.1. Stories are randomly selected and, therefore, can vary slightly across the year. There is no planned method used to increase the readability of passages as the year progresses. The entire technical report that describes this determination can be obtained from the University of Oregon's DIBELS® website at http://DIBELS.uoregon.edu/techreports/DORF_Readability.pdf.

67. How is a student's ORF calculated when a student skips an entire line? Are the words in the omitted line counted as errors or is the omitted line ignored in the calculation of the fluency score?

With Oral Reading Fluency, if a student skips an entire line of text, each word in the line is counted as an error. This scoring rule is in contrast to the rule for skipped lines with the Letter Naming Fluency measure. With LNF, an entire line that is skipped is not counted as letters read correctly or incorrectly. The rationale for counting skipped lines as errors of omission with ORF is based on the fact that omitting words when reading text significantly impacts comprehension. The words read correctly score does not change if the skipped line is ignored or counted as an error. However, the error rate is a helpful number in determining a student's instructional level in reading.

68. Some people may fail to use the discontinue rule for the Oral Reading Fluency section and continue to administer the second and third passages. Do you take the score from the first passage since the administration should have been discontinued or take the median score from all three passages?

The purpose of the discontinue rule is to stop testing when there is little chance that you will gain additional, meaningful information from continued testing. In the case of ORF, if the student scores less than “10” on the first passage, he or she is more than likely going to read somewhere in that range on the other passages. This student is essentially a non-reader, this experience is frustrating, and continued testing with additional passages is probably not going to yield different results.

However, if one does go ahead and administers the other two passages, it makes sense to take the median score; and this is recommended in this situation.

69. The scoring form for ORF indicates that the 'middle score' is recorded as the student's score. Is the 'middle score' the same as the 'median?'

Yes. We often had confusion on the more technical term, “median,” and chose to use the words “middle score.” This score is obtained by recording the three scores, crossing out the lowest and highest scores, and the remaining score is the “middle” or “median” score representing the student's ORF. Adjustments have been made to the 2005-2006 scoring forms to help eliminate this confusion.

70. The Scott Foresman Oral Reading Fluency target for the end of first grade is 60 Correct Words Per Minute. The DIBELS® ORF target for end of first grade is 40 or higher. Please clarify why these targets are so different.

The Scott Foresman recommendations were based on a large sample of students on a wide variety of reading materials. The end-of-year fluency norms (correct words per minute) obtained from the study were then used to generate a rule-of-thumb for estimating end-of-year desired reading rates for these students as follows:

Grade 1: 60

Grade 2: 90

Grade 3: 120

The end-of-year reading fluency scores that are associated with the DIBELS® are based on large samples of students who were administered the DIBELS® oral reading fluency measures, their performance on subsequent early literacy skills, and the odds that they would or would not be successful on these subsequent skills. They do not necessarily represent the desired targets but establish a minimal score where later reading success is highly likely. It is interesting to note that the average performance (the 50th percentile) of first grade students taking the DIBELS® at the end of the first grade year is 60 correct words per minute. The cutoff scores established at the University of Oregon were based on the odds of a student being able to achieve subsequent early literacy goals and outcomes. These odds then translate into the risk categories. The low risk level represents those students at or above the 40th percentile. The moderate risk are those that fall generally between the 20th and 40th percentiles, and the high risk are those that are roughly equivalent to those at the 20th percentiles.

In summary, the Scott Foresman recommendations are desired levels of performance, the DIBELS® levels of performance are a minimal requirement to have a high probability of later reading success. Teachers should strive to have all students perform well above the minimum levels on all DIBELS® measures, including ORF.

71. On the ORF assessment, if a student scores a ten or above on the first passage, then below ten on the next story, do you discontinue testing?

No, if a student scores ten or more on the first passage, both the second and third passages should be administered. The discontinue rule only applies when a student scores below ten on the first passage. After the remaining passages are administered, the median score can be obtained. For example, if a student scores “11,” “5,” and “6,” the median score would be “6.”

72. If a student finishes the ORF passage in under a minute, but skipped one or two lines, do you still use the prorating formula?

Yes, you would use the prorating formula by multiplying the correct number of words by 60, then dividing this product by the number of seconds taken by the student to read to the end of the passage.

73. If students read the title of the passage incorrectly on the ORF test, should they be corrected?

No. If they read the title incorrectly, just ignore this error and don't start the stopwatch until the first word in the story is read. If a student struggles on one of the words in the title, simply direct the student to the first word in the story by saying, 'Begin here.'

74. What do you do if a student does not read an ORF passage appropriately, but reads random words from the story instead?

It is the responsibility of the test administrator to make sure that all students understand what they are being asked to do on these measures. It may be necessary to “train” students to perform certain tasks before proceeding. In the case of ORF, remind students that they must read each word in the story and let them know, again, that you will tell them any word they do not know. It may help to direct them to place their finger under each word as they go across the page. If it is deemed an appropriate accommodation for a particular student, place a ruler under each line of text to aid in tracking.

75. Is it appropriate to translate the ORF passages into Spanish for an ESOL student?

No, it is not appropriate to translate the English version of the DIBELS® passages into Spanish. The goal is for the student to learn to read in English. However, it is acceptable to read the directions for the measure in Spanish, to be sure that the student understands the task.

The University of Oregon does have a version of the DIBELS® in Spanish that can be downloaded from the respective website. Should the teacher want to have information on the reading skills of a student with Spanish text, this is an appropriate way to gain this information. The Spanish measures are IDEL – Indicadores Dinamicos del Exito en la Lectura.

76. There is a discrepancy in the training manual on the discontinue rule for ORF. The directions for scoring state, 'If the student does not read any words correctly in the first row, discontinue.' However, in the DIBELS® ORF assessment Integrity Checklist it states that the examiner should follow the discontinue rule if the student does not get any words correct in the first five words. Which rule should I follow?

Follow the rule of none correct in the first row. The authors of the DIBELS® materials have been notified of this discrepancy and confirm that the first row rule is the correct one.

77. If a student reads the words 'did not' as 'didn't,' would this be counted as an error?

Yes, forming a contraction from two words would be considered a word substitution error and, therefore, scored accordingly.

78. If a student pronounces the word 'read' as /reed/, as in the sentence, 'I like to read,' and it is supposed to be pronounced /red/ as in, 'I read a book yesterday,' would this be considered an error?

Yes, this mispronunciation changes the word from present tense to past tense and would be considered an error.

POTENTIAL USES AND MISUSES OF DIBELS®

79. How will parents, teachers, principals, district administration, and FCRR use the data from DIBELS®?

DIBELS® was developed to identify students at risk of reading failure so that appropriate interventions could be put into place that would prevent further decline in skills and remediate deficiencies. In that spirit, the information gained from DIBELS® assessment should be used to support children in their acquisition of reading skills, to determine how children can best be served within their classroom, to evaluate the effectiveness of remedial instruction, and to determine the resources and staff development needs of teachers to achieve success for all students. FCRR, each school district, and the state will consider DIBELS® data while evaluating the effectiveness of the state's *Reading First* grant to accomplish the goals set forth in Florida's application for federal funding.

80. Should DIBELS® be used to make decisions about student promotion or retention, to evaluate teachers, or to determine if a teacher should receive merit pay based on student performance on DIBELS® measures?

DIBELS® was not designed for any of these purposes. Certainly the performance of a student on any measure of reading readiness or reading achievement is an important consideration when determining how a student's educational needs can best be met in future years. However, the DIBELS® subtests should only be one aspect of a broad array of information that is used for making these important decisions.

Teachers should be supported for using DIBELS® as a reading progress monitoring measure, for applying the DIBELS® data to decisions about grouping, instruction, and remedial strategies and for taking frequent DIBELS® measures during the implementation of interventions. The use of individual or group DIBELS® data as a teacher evaluation information source should be avoided.

81. The DIBELS® materials are accessible through the University of Oregon website. How can the measure drive instruction when screening material can be "taught" to students in advance? Is this a situation the school and administration must monitor?

It is true that the materials posted on the University of Oregon website are the same as those used for screening and progress monitoring in Florida. DIBELS® measures were also developed for weekly and/or biweekly monitoring of progress, and there are twenty alternate forms for this purpose. If a teacher uses DIBELS® to monitor more frequently the progress of high-risk students, this is totally appropriate to use the measures provided by the developers and posted on the website. The chance of the teacher using the same probe for progress monitoring and the *Reading First* assessment interval during the same week is extremely small.

The concern that teachers may pre-teach the DIBELS® probes is certainly valid. However, we do not want our teachers teaching DIBELS®; we want them using it to make decisions about student progress. Remember, DIBELS® is not “high stakes” testing. This information is used to make instructional decisions. It is the role of the reading coach to work with teachers to share activities that can be used to increase a student’s skills in phonological awareness, phonics, and fluency as well as vocabulary and comprehension. So, yes it is something that the school and administration should monitor because practicing the measures can lead to inflated scores that might prevent a student from getting the instructional support that is needed to prevent later reading problems.