

What are DIBELS?

DIBELS are measures that help teachers and schools determine how students are performing on important reading skills. DIBELS stands for *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills*. These measures are designed for students in grades K-8.

What skills are measured by DIBELS and why are they important?

The critical skills necessary for successful beginning reading include: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The DIBELS measures assess students on four of these five critical skills, which are often referred to as the “Big Ideas” of reading. The table on page 2 describes each big idea of reading and lists the corresponding DIBELS measure.

Which tests will be given to my son or daughter?

Each student will complete the tests depending on his or her grade and the time of year. The table on page 2 shows the timeline for assessing your student on the big ideas of reading across grade levels.

How often are students assessed?

All students in a school building are given the DIBELS test three times each year; usually this occurs in the fall, winter, and spring. This school-wide testing is called benchmark assessment. School personnel may also regularly check on the progress of students who receive extra reading help to make sure their reading skills are improving. These regular checks are called progress monitoring. Students who are progress monitored may complete one or two of the individual DIBELS tests as often as once a week or as little as once every 6 weeks depending on school resources and the needs of the student.

How much time does it take?

Each of the DIBELS tests only takes about one minute to complete. DIBELS tests are “indicators” of the student’s overall reading status, and are not intended to be in-depth or comprehensive measures of reading. Just like using a thermometer to take your child’s temperature, which provides a quick indicator of your child’s general health, these quick DIBELS tests provide teachers with information about your child’s reading health and how well he or she is progressing on a particular early reading skill. Benchmark assessments generally take 2 to 6 minutes to give, depending on the grade of the student and time of year. Teachers only need about 1 to 2 minutes to progress monitor students at each testing time. DIBELS measures allow teachers to get valuable information about students’ reading skills without using large amounts of instructional time.

How will the results be used?

A student’s scores on the DIBELS measures give the school information about whether or not a student is on track for grade-level reading success. A school can quickly identify students who do not meet the goals on each DIBELS measure and provide extra help. For example, if your child is reading words accurately, but slowly, the teacher can provide extra practice re-reading stories and passages to improve his or her reading rate or fluency. The teacher can use the progress monitoring scores to make sure your student receives extra help to improve other reading skills during the school year.

Teachers can review scores on DIBELS measures for all the students in a class to make decisions about how to prepare their day-to-day reading lessons. School and district staff can also study the test scores across classrooms and grade levels to make decisions about how to best use resources to make sure that every child in the school, including your child, is on track to become an accurate and fluent reader.

Please explore the University of Oregon’s DIBELS Data System website at <http://dibels.uoregon.edu> to learn more about the importance of early literacy instruction and assessment.

The DIBELS measures include six individual tests that focus on the big ideas and critical skills of beginning reading.

Big Ideas	What is it? Why is it important?	DIBELS Measures	Grades Assessed					
			K	1	2	3	4-6	7-8
Phonemic Awareness	Phonemic awareness refers to your child’s ability to hear and manipulate sounds in spoken words only. This skill is a powerful predictor of future reading success. It is a skill that is typically assessed early in a child’s schooling (i.e., kindergarten), but it is also used with older children who are experiencing difficulty reading.	First Sound Fluency (FSF) or Initial Sound Fluency (ISF)	√					
		Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF)	√	√				
Phonics	Phonics refers to the ability to learn the individual sounds in spoken language and map those sounds to specific written letters in the English language. Students who have strong phonics skills are able to connect individual sounds with letters and use those sounds to read words.	Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF)	√	√	√	√		
		Word Reading Fluency (WRF)	√	√	√	√		
Reading Fluency	Reading fluency refers to your child’s ability to read text accurately and automatically so that students can understand what they are reading.	Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)		√	√	√	√	√
		Word Reading Fluency (WRF)	√	√	√	√		
Vocabulary	Vocabulary refers to your child’s knowledge of the meanings of individual words being read. Vocabulary knowledge is important to a student’s ability to read and comprehend what is read.							
Reading Comprehension	Reading comprehension refers to your child’s ability to understand what he or she reads. It is the ultimate goal of reading instruction.	Maze Daze			√	√	√	√
					√	√	√	√

Test of Related Early Literacy Skills

	Letter Naming Fluency assesses a student’s ability to say the “names” of upper and lowercase letters in the English alphabet. This skill is a strong predictor of future reading success in young children.	Letter Naming Fluency (LNF)	√	√				
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