

**Pilot Test of Dibels at
Arapahoe Ridge Elementary
Westminster, CO**

In the fall of 2004, our school was asked by our district to pilot test Dibels at each grade level for students in kindergarten through third grade. What follows is a description of our experience and findings. Since this was a pilot test, our conclusions are tentative. Schools considering or already using Dibels may want to conduct action research at their own schools to determine how well Dibels serves their needs.

To begin the project, classroom teachers selected 14 students at each grade level (kindergarten through third) to be involved in the project. Each group of 14 students included three above grade level, three at grade level, four below grade level, and four students who were significantly below grade level. A total of 56 children were selected. We also made sure that English Language Learners and special education students were a part of the groups.

After receiving a half day of training from a staff member who had gone through the district's Dibels training, our teachers practiced administering the test with several non-pilot students. These practice sessions were very important because teachers found it difficult to administer Dibels. In particular, they found it hard to use the stop watch properly while simultaneously scoring student's answers. After a few practice sessions, teachers were ready to administer Dibels to students in the pilot project.

It took approximately 20 minutes per child to administer the first round of Dibels testing to students. In every grade but third, teachers found it important to administer Dibels to students outside of the classroom to avoid disruptions in the testing process. As a result, teachers had to allow additional time for students to get to and from the testing area and had to find coverage for their classrooms.

Once the first round of testing was completed, the project coordinators elected to enter the data on-line at the Dibels' website. This added a cost of one dollar per child to the project but allowed the school access to graphs and charts of student results provided by the website.

After the data was entered, teachers were given charts and graphs of student and class results. Armed with this information, teachers were assigned the task of providing interventions for students identified by Dibels as of in need of assistance. Three weeks later, the teachers used Dibels' progress monitoring with identified students. These tests took approximately 15 minutes per student. Since Dibels had only identified half of the students of in need of assistance, there were fewer students to test at this stage. Finally, at the conclusion of the year, teachers re-tested all their identified students. This process took approximately 20 minutes per student.

During the entire course of the project, participating teachers were interviewed about how the process was going and what they were learning about their students. What follows are our findings:

1. The testing process confirmed what the teachers already knew about their students' reading ability.
2. The process helped teachers to see the importance of fluency and phonemic awareness.
3. The process did not provide teachers with next steps or reading levels.
4. The testing process was time consuming and took time away from instruction.
5. The value of the assessment was in teachers testing their own students. If they had only been presented with the results, its meaning would have been greatly diminished.
6. Overall, the teachers did not think the time spent on testing was worth the information they received because it did not provide them with next steps.

Given the small sample size of our pilot project, we urge caution when considering our findings. We would highly recommend that you create your own pilot test at your school to document the strengths and weaknesses of Dibels.

Marilyn Jerde, Principal