

Position Paper on Use of DIBELS for Diverse Learners: Are DIBELS Appropriate for All Students?

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DIBELS are appropriate for all students for whom a goal is learning to read in English *with a few exceptions*: a) students who are deaf; b) students who have fluency-based speech disabilities, e.g., stuttering, oral apraxia; c) students who are learning to read in a language other than English; d) students with severe disabilities.

Students who are deaf. DIBELS were developed based on the research examining the process of learning to read for hearing students. For most students who are deaf, the ability to use phonological representations of letters is seriously compromised (Leybaert & Charlier, 1996; Moores, 1996); therefore the core competencies assessed by DIBELS, phonemic awareness and alphabetic principle, may not apply for students who are deaf and are learning to read. For children who are deaf and can read orally, oral reading fluency may be used; however the benchmark goals would not apply. DIBELS would be appropriate for children with mild to moderate hearing impairments who have residual hearing and who are learning phonemic awareness and phonics skills.

Students who have fluency or oral motor speech disabilities. Speech fluency is compromised in students who stutter or have oral motor speech disabilities, such as oral apraxia. Given that the nature of such disabilities is slow and/or dysfluent speech, (Paul, 2001) the use of fluency-based measures for these students would not be appropriate.

Students who are learning to read in a language other than English. DIBELS are designed to provide

information about the progress of children in acquiring literacy skills for reading in English. For children who are learning to read in languages other than English, it would be most meaningful and appropriate to assess their reading skills in the language in which they are being instructed. For English language learners who are learning to read in English, DIBELS are appropriate for assessing and monitoring progress in acquisition of early reading skills. DIBELS have been used successfully with English language learners (Haagar & Windmueller, 2001). In addition, research findings on English learners indicates that children who are non-English speakers can learn to read as well in English as their English-speaking peers (Chiappe, Siegel, & Wade-Wooley, 2002; Geva, Yaghoub-Zadeh, & Schuster, 2000) and, in fact, often outperform their peers in phonemic skills (Lesaux & Siegel, 2003).

Students with severe disabilities for whom a) reading is not on the IEP or b) reading is on the IEP but the long term goal is functional use of environmental print. There are a small number of students for whom learning to read connected text may not be an appropriate goal. For these students, it would be most meaningful and appropriate to use curriculum-based assessment strategies to monitor progress toward individual goals and objectives.

Use of DIBELS is appropriate for all other students, including those in special education for whom reading connected text is an IEP goal. For students receiving special education, it may be necessary to adjust goals and timelines and use out-of-grade level materials for progress monitoring.