What's New for DIBELS® 8th Edition?

In many ways, the 8th Edition of DIBELS does not look all that different from prior editions of DIBELS, including DIBELS Next. But DIBELS 8th Edition has a lot to offer that no other curriculum-based measurement (CBM) system ever has before. In fact, DIBELS 8th Edition is more useful for more students in more grades than ever before. Read on for details about some of the most exciting new features.

Available NOW

- **New grade levels.** DIBELS has been extended through the end of eighth grade.
- **Consistent subtests within grade.** Subtests relevant to a given grade are offered at every benchmark period.
- **New and revised subtests.** DIBELS now includes word reading fluency and existing subtests have undergone extensive improvement efforts to maximize their usefulness.
    - **Expanding the safety net.** DIBELS now offers a word reading fluency measure that can help to identify students with poor sight word and irregular word reading skills that other subtests miss.
    - **Expanding the utility.** DIBELS forms now have items that progress in difficulty beyond risk cut-points that provide data teachers can use in planning instruction for *all* students.
- **Dyslexia screening.** DIBELS subtests offer efficient and cost-effective measures of processing speed, phonological awareness, and the alphabetic principle for dyslexia screening purposes.

Coming in 2019

- **Equated scores.** DIBELS will offer equated scores for subtests within a grade level.
- **New composite scores.** DIBELS composite scores are also getting an overhaul to make them better than ever at predicting risk.

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New Grade Levels and Greater Consistency

DIBELS 8th Edition offers consistent subtests across all three benchmark periods within each grade. That means you can track students' progress in multiple skills over the course of a year. Even better, DIBELS 8th Edition now extends all the way through eighth grade. That means you can screen and monitor student progress through the end of middle school.

New and Revised Subtests

DIBELS 8th Edition discontinues a few old DIBELS subtests, revises other existing subtests, and introduces a new subtest. The discontinued subtests – *First Sound Fluency (FSF), Initial Sound Fluency (ISF), Word Use Fluency (WUF),* and *Retell Fluency (RTF)* – have been dropped because historically they have yielded little additional useful information beyond what other subtests provide. DIBELS has added a new subtest: *Word Reading Fluency (WRF)*. The addition of WRF **expands the safety net** for identifying students at risk for not meeting proficiency standards in reading. Also, all of the other DIBELS subtests have undergone substantial revision to improve how informative DIBELS measures are. Items progress in difficulty past the risk cut-scores so that DIBELS subtests now provide instructionally relevant data for all students, thereby **expanding the utility** of DIBELS. DIBELS Maze (formerly DAZE) is still undergoing significant revision and will be available in 2019.

Letter Naming Fluency (LNF) **now accounts for how frequently letters appear in both upper- and lower-case forms.** To better control differences in difficulty between forms, consistent rules are used in both kindergarten and first grade regarding when less frequent letters can appear on the forms. Each form in both grades begins with a sampling of the 20 most frequently seen letters (Jones & Mewhort, 2004), thereby preventing students from getting frustrated by forms that begin with rarer letters, such as X or q. The kindergarten version of LNF also only assesses the 40 most commonly seen upper- and lower-case letters, while the first grade version assesses 49 upper and lower case letters.

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LNF *excludes* three letters on all forms: upper- and lower-case W and lower-case L. Although these are obviously important letters for students to know, they introduce real problems in a fluency assessment. W is the only letter with a multi-syllabic name: three syllables to be exact. As a result, any time W appears, it takes three times as long to name as other letters, which negatively affects a student's LNF score. The lower-case L (l) was eliminated because it is easily confused with both the upper-case I and the number 1. Not only does this visual similarity pose problems for students, but it has also historically created scoring problems for the adult administering the assessment. By eliminating these letters, each included item (or letter) is equally challenging, other than in terms of its frequency in printed language.

***Phonemic Segmentation Fluency (PSF)* now accounts for both word frequency and the number of phonemes in a word.** All forms draw only from the 2,500 most frequent words in English (Balota et al., 2007) to prevent vocabulary familiarity from interfering with student performance. In addition, to better control differences in difficulty between forms, consistent rules are used in both grades regarding where less frequent words can appear on the forms. Moreover, spelling patterns are ordered in terms of the number of phonemes, proceeding from two phoneme words to words with progressively more phonemes.

In kindergarten, the first 20% of items have two phonemes, while the remaining 80% have three phonemes. In this way, PSF now avoids the distinct floor effects (i.e., many students scoring zero) in kindergarten that have plagued previous versions and, thus, eliminates the need for a separate measure of initial sound fluency. In first grade, the progression in difficulty is a bit more rapid, with the first 13% of items having two phonemes and then increasing in phonemes with additional increases after every eight items.

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***Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF)* now accounts for the frequency of spelling patterns.** Forms account for the frequency with which spelling letter combinations appear (Jones & Mewhort, 2004; Norvig, 2012). As a result, all forms utilize only phonetically regular letter combinations that actually appear in English. Thus, students will no longer be asked to decode nonsense words like *fev* or *kaj*, and nonsense words like *kex* will appear less often than ones like *lat*.

We have also expanded the spelling patterns assessed beyond simply consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC). While kindergarten forms are limited to CVC patterns, the first grade forms also include vowel-consonant (VC) spelling patterns. In addition, the latter half of first grade forms include additional spelling patterns typically taught in first grade, thus increasing the instructional relevance of this DIBELS subtest. DIBELS 8th Edition also now offers NWF in second and third grade by including more complex phonics patterns in these grades. As a result, DIBELS NWF forms will provide instructionally relevant information even for students who are at minimal risk in kindergarten through third grade. New spelling patterns included in first through third grade appear in the table below.

Table 1. *Examples of First through Third Grade NWF Spelling Patterns*

Pattern	Grade introduced	Example non-word
CVCe	1	bace
CVr(C)	1	zart
CVCC	1	melb
CCVC	1	scap
CCVCC	1	brold
(C)CVVC(C)	2	geap
CVCCy	2	foddy
(C)V|CVC(C)	3	copalp
(C)VC|CVC(C)	3	fudpelm

Another improvement to NWF is that we have gone back to scoring words recoded correctly (WRC) rather than whole words read (WWR). Whereas with WWR children only earn credit if a nonsense word is read correctly at first sight (i.e., without sounding out), with WRC they also receive credit if they blend after sounding out a nonsense word. Since both methods of scoring predict student

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risk, in DIBELS 8th Edition, children get credit for blending nonsense words whether they sound them out first or not.

***Word Reading Fluency (WRF)* is now part of the DIBELS assessment system.** A part of reading not previously assessed in DIBELS is sight word reading out of context. While most CBM systems assess either nonsense word reading *or* real word reading, DIBELS 8th Edition offers tests of *both* NWF and WRF in kindergarten through third grade. WRF targets real words based on age of acquisition in children's vocabulary (Brysbaert & Biemiller, 2017) and their frequency in written text (Balota et al., 2007).

In DIBELS 8th Edition, WRF assesses only words that are typically acquired orally in or before a given grade. This innovation reduces the likelihood that children will encounter words on the assessment that they have never heard before and are not expected to know. In addition, each form starts with a sample of the most frequent words seen in text and then moves on to less frequent words in the latter half. In this way, WRF yields instructionally relevant information both for students at risk and students at minimal risk. Finally, DIBELS WRF accounts for word complexity, as measured by the number of syllables in a word. All forms include one-syllable words. Grades 1-3 include two-syllable words, and Grades 2-3 include three-syllable words. In Grade 3, we also included words with more than three syllables, but again only those that are typically acquired by Grade 3 and are frequently seen in print.

These features ensure the instructional relevance of DIBELS WRF results for all children. Importantly, our research has shown that the inclusion of WRF helps to identify students at risk who might otherwise be missed by other DIBELS subtests.

***Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)* only requires one passage per benchmark period and passages are now written by experienced authors.** DIBELS 8th Edition marks the first time that DIBELS ORF requires only *one* passage to be administered per benchmark period. Research has shown

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that administering more than one passage does little to improve the reliability and validity of ORF, meaning that the supposed benefits of administering three passages just does not pan out (Baker et al., 2015; Petscher & Kim, 2011). Instead, equating, which is described in the next section, is a more efficient means of reducing the impact of differences in difficulty across ORF passages on student performance (Albano & Rodriguez, 2012; Betts, Pickart, & Heistad, 2009; Francis et al., 2008; Stoolmiller et al., 2013).

An additional unique and exciting feature of DIBELS 8th Edition ORF passages is that they were written by published authors and elementary and middle school teachers, most of whom had previous experience writing for children. In addition, authors had diverse backgrounds, came from across the US, and had experience writing in a range of genres. In addition, *all* ORF passages were reviewed by a panel of parents and former teachers for developmental appropriateness and text complexity in the grades for which they were intended. Passages deemed inappropriate, too complex, or not complex enough for a given grade were either revised (and reviewed again) or discarded. As a result, ORF passages are not only more engaging for both children and test administrators, but also feel more authentic and appropriate for the grades in which they appear.

Maze (formerly known as Daze) passages are now written by experienced authors and include several other improvements. In 2019, DIBELS 8th Edition will offer new maze measures. The new version of maze will be based on research that has shown consistently that maze measures tend to get at only very low-level comprehension. To make DIBELS maze measures more informative, several innovations are underway. First, as with ORF, maze passages are written by published authors and experienced teachers. Second, more work has gone into the selection of distractors. Third, we have revised formatting to make reading the passages easier on the eye. Finally, maze measures will be available in second through eighth grade instead of only third through sixth.

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Dyslexia Screening

DIBELS 8th Edition is also undergoing study as a dyslexia screener. DIBELS cut-scores detect risk for reading problems, including dyslexia, making DIBELS measures an efficient and cost-effective way to screen for dyslexia. In addition, to improve DIBELS 8th Edition's validity for these purposes, the LNF, PSF, and NWF measures are being validated against other measures of rapid automatized naming (RAN), phonological awareness, and the alphabetic principle that are typically used in dyslexia identification. As a result, DIBELS users can be confident that their screening measures are just as trustworthy for dyslexia screening as they are for detecting risk of not meeting end-of-year proficiency expectations.

Equated Scores

DIBELS 8th Edition offers not only raw scores, but will also offer equated scores starting in 2019. Equated scores are a solution for a well-known problem among all CBMs: differences in difficulty between forms (Albano & Rodriguez, 2012; Betts et al., 2009; Francis et al., 2008; Stoolmiller et al., 2013). The point and promise of equating are illustrated using a weight-lifting analogy and then ORF as an example, but it applies across DIBELS subtests.

In weight-lifting, it is generally accepted that lifting more weight takes more effort (and may proceed more slowly) than lifting less weight. If we assume the number of successful lifts is the metric of interest, then a person lifting 100 pounds would be expected to do more poorly than a person lifting 10 pounds. We would give the person lifting 100 pounds a lot more credit for each lift than the one lifting 10. Equating is a statistical way of giving more credit when tasks are more difficult, so that scores (here number of successful lifts) can be compared more fairly. A very simple way to equate (though not necessarily the best way) would be to give the person lifting 100 pounds 10 times the credit for each lift

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as the person lifting 10 pounds gets for each lift. Then, if the person lifting 100 pounds only completes 10 lifts, that person would get credit for having completed the equivalent of 100 ten-pound lifts.

For anyone who has ever administered ORF to students, differences between passages are particularly obvious. Without equating, differences between performances on two passages could be due to:

1. Genuine student growth (or decline),
2. Student background knowledge and vocabulary, and/or
3. Differences in the difficulty of the passages.

For example, the fourth grade winter benchmark for DIBELS 6th Edition included three passages entitled *The Lion and the Mouse* (a fable), *Airplane History* (an expository passage), and *The Tenth Birthday Party* (a modern-day narrative). Although these passages were chosen for being "fourth-grade level" based on readability formulas, there is much more that goes into passage difficulty than what readability formulas can capture. In fact, those who have administered these passages know that students tend to perform best on *The Tenth Birthday Party* and worst on *Airplane History*. These differences have more to do with genre and specialized background knowledge than with readability and is what the Common Core State Standards refer to as text complexity.

Equating is a statistical approach to taking the differences in difficulty between passages (and forms of the other DIBELS subtests) into account when looking across multiple scores. When students read a more difficult passage more slowly on average than an easier passage at the same grade level, scores are adjusted to reflect the greater difficulty of the form read more slowly. By equating, we better assure that differences in scores reflect genuine change over time and genuine differences between students rather than differences between forms. When we know the average difficulty of reading a specific passage aloud (or completing a form of any other DIBELS subtest), we are able to interpret

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scores more fairly. Thus, we can translate the score of a student who reads a difficult passage at 120 correct-words-per-minute (CWPM) and the score of a student who reads an easy passage at 150 CWPM onto the *same scale*. This kind of scaling is especially important when we are trying to understand whether and how much students have progressed in their reading skills.

In 2019, DIBELS 8th Edition will offer equated scores across benchmark assessments within a grade, which makes interpreting change in performance over time much more straightforward. For subtests that offer progress monitoring measures, these will also have equated scores, meaning progress monitoring becomes more reliable than in the past. It also means that benchmark assessment of ORF can be done even more reliably with a single passage.

New Composite Scores

In 2019, DIBELS 8th Edition will also offer new composite scores. A major drawback of the old composite scores was that the composite scores were only about as accurate in predicting risk as the predominant measure for a given benchmark period. The new DIBELS 8th Edition composite scores are being designed to offer increased value in terms of not only risk prediction, but also progress and growth monitoring.

DIBELS Innovations Continue

As we hope this summary makes clear, the Center on Teaching and Learning (CTL) of the University of Oregon has been hard at work making the 8th Edition of DIBELS better than ever before. The changes described here reflect our long-standing commitment to lead the field in providing schools and teachers with the most reliable and valid reading CBMs possible. Research and development are ongoing, and we will continue working diligently to provide you with the best and most informative data on your readers possible.

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