

DIBELS Tips for Families

Why DIBELS?

DIBELS stands for Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills. DIBELS is a series of short, quick assessments that some schools use to determine if students may be struggling with reading and need additional help. Teachers use DIBELS to inform their reading instruction. In other words, DIBELS tells teachers if students are at risk in reading and the type of help they may need.

What are Risk Categories?

Results of DIBELS subtests are categorized according to the risk, or likelihood, that students will meet end-of-year grade-level goals in reading. The categories were determined based on research in which DIBELS and end-of-year reading tests were administered to many students across the country.

Blue - Negligible risk: Students with negligible risk are on track for reading success and should continue to receive the instruction they are getting – sometimes called “Core Support.” We might call these students “Above Benchmark.”

Green - Minimal risk: Students with minimal risk are on track for reading success and should continue receiving the instruction that they are getting – sometimes called “Core Support.” We might call these students “At Benchmark.”

Yellow - Some risk: Students with some risk may be struggling with one or more components of reading. They need additional instruction, usually in a small group setting. Their progress should be monitored in the area in which they are struggling. In other words, these students need “Strategic Support.”

Red - At risk: Students at risk are struggling with reading, either scoring well below the benchmark or struggling with more than one component of reading. They need extra instruction in a small group or one-on-one setting. Their progress should be monitored in the areas in which they are struggling. In other words, these students need “Intensive Support.”

What About Percentiles?

First, percentiles are not like grades. If your child’s score is at the 40th percentile, that’s not the same as getting 40% on an assignment at school. If your child’s score is at the 40th percentile on DIBELS that means they scored as well as or better than 40% of students in the same grade at the same time of year. Scoring 40% on an assignment means your child got 40% of the points possible on that assignment.

Most students who fall in the 40th percentile or above on DIBELS are in the minimal or negligible risk categories. That means with regular instruction in reading, they are likely to be a successful reader.

Sometimes percentiles can be confusing if your child is a very good reader – say in the 90th percentile for Oral Reading Fluency Words Correct – but has a much lower percentile in Accuracy – say the 43rd percentile. Many students have excellent accuracy (99-100%) so even if your child has very good accuracy, their percentile could look lower than you expect because most students are also very accurate. Rest assured, in second grade and beyond, if your student's accuracy is high – say above 96% – the percentile on accuracy is not cause for concern.

Should I Be Worried if My Student is at Risk?

The best answer we can provide is maybe. If your child is at risk or at some risk based on their DIBELS scores, there is reason to be watchful. We recommend talking with your child's teacher. Here are some things to ask about:

- The instruction your child is receiving.
- The intervention provided for students who struggle with reading.
- How they monitor students' progress in reading.
- How you can support your student's progress.

Partnering with the school is one of the best ways to ensure your student's success in reading.

My Student Failed DIBELS! What Should I Do?

Don't panic! DIBELS is an indicator of risk, but it's not a test with a grade. Put another way, students cannot "fail" DIBELS. DIBELS gives teachers information, so they know how to proceed with instruction. It can be thought of as one indicator of reading health, just like taking your student's temperature is an indicator of their physical health. If your student is "at risk" or "at some risk" that tells you and the teacher that your student needs additional or more explicit reading instruction.