Chapter 4: Progress Monitoring with DIBELS 8th Edition

In this section, we discuss the specific use of DIBELS 8th Edition for monitoring student progress. Topics include recommendations regarding which subtest to use, frequency of progress monitoring, and decisions regarding when to monitor off-grade level and when to change progress monitoring subtest or intervention.

Choosing a Subtest for Progress Monitoring

One critical step in progress monitoring students who receive intervention is knowing which subtest to use. Generally speaking, best practice involves monitoring progress for the skill on which intervention is most focused. In no situation should student progress be monitored with a subtest on which they did not demonstrate risk, and LNF should never be used for progress monitoring. Nonetheless, many students will have multiple indicators of risk and receive multi-component interventions. Note that it may be advisable for students receiving multi-component interventions to have their progress monitored on more than one subtest. However, we offer guidelines for how to pick a single progress monitoring subtest to use under specific conditions.

As with prior editions of DIBELS, NWF and ORF are the strongest measures for capturing change over time. As a result, we recommend preferencing these subtests for progress monitoring in the grades in which these subtests are available and where a student has demonstrated risk on one of these subtests.

Beyond this general recommendation, we also suggest that the subtest used for progress monitoring be aligned to the focus of intervention for a student. Therefore, a student who is receiving intervention focused solely on phonological awareness, but not decoding, would be best progress-monitored with PSF. Similarly, we would recommend using WRF for a student who is receiving intervention focused on improving sight word recognition, but who is a strong decoder. However, we maintain that NWF and ORF are the best ways to monitor progress for most children.

As with previous editions, progress monitoring with LNF is not supported. LNF is best used as a risk indicator because it is not a foundational skill in reading in the same way that other DIBELS subtests are.

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For Maze, infrequent progress monitoring is recommended because reading comprehension does not improve rapidly enough, even with intensive intervention, to be observable after short intervals (e.g., Deno et al., 2008; Espin, Wallace, Lembke, Campbell, & Long, 2010; Shin, Deno, & Espin, 2000). Thus, we recommend Maze for progress monitoring no more than two to three times between benchmark occasions. Nonetheless, we offer enough forms to support progress monitoring up to five times between benchmark occasions.

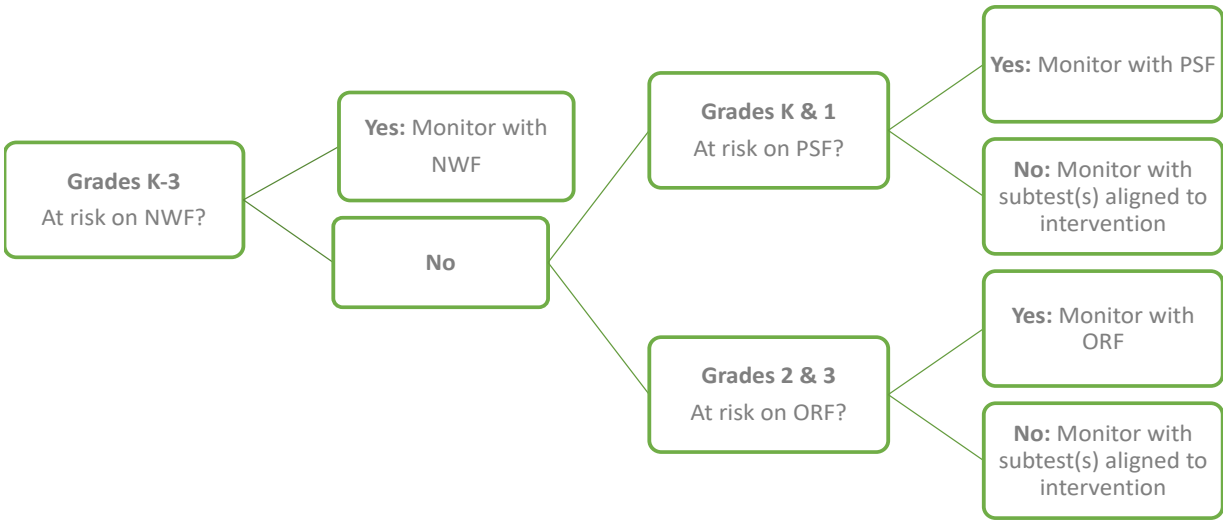

Figure 4.1 Decision tree for choosing a progress monitoring subtest.

Frequency of Progress Monitoring

Another important step in progress monitoring students who receive intervention is knowing how often to monitor progress. In general, the more foundational the skill and the more intensive the intervention, the more frequent progress monitoring should be. However, it is rarely advisable to progress monitor more than once a week. In fact, to avoid excessive assessment, we recommend progress monitoring every two weeks in kindergarten through third grade. Depending on the intensity of intervention, progress monitoring could be as frequent as every second or third week in Grades 4 and up. The additional elapsed time in these grades is recommended based on the slower ORF growth typically observed in the upper grades (e.g., Christ, Silberglitt, Yeo, & Cromier, 2010; Nese,

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Biancarosa, Anderson, Lai, Alonzo, & Tindal, 2012; Nese, Biancarosa, Cummings, Kennedy, Alonzo, & Tindal, 2013). For students at some risk and receiving strategic support, progress monitoring every four weeks (or four to five weeks in Grade 4 and up) is generally adequate.

The exception to these guidelines is progress monitoring with Maze. Unfortunately, even under intensive intervention, reading comprehension is difficult to improve rapidly. As a result, we recommend that progress monitoring with Maze occur no more than once to twice between benchmark periods (i.e., monthly assessment; e.g., Deno et al., 2008; Espin et al., 2010; Shin et al., 2000). Nonetheless, beginning in 2021, we provide 10 progress monitoring forms per grade, allowing for more frequent progress monitoring where necessary.

Table 4.1. Recommended Progress Monitoring Frequency

Grades	Subtests	At Risk (red)	At Some Risk (yellow)
K-3	PSF, NWF, WRF, ORF	Every 2 weeks	Every 4 weeks
4-8	ORF	Every 2-3 weeks	Every 4-5 weeks
2-8	Maze	Up to 2 times between benchmarks	Up to 2 times between benchmarks

Determining Response to Intervention

A challenging aspect of progress monitoring students who receive intervention is knowing how to judge whether a student is responding to intervention. In the past, researchers have recommended as many as eight or more assessment occasions before deciding (e.g., Christ, 2006; Christ, Zopluoglu, Long, & Monaghen, 2012). However, sixteen weeks, if monitoring is conducted as recommended, is simply too long to wait to determine if very vulnerable learners are responding to intervention. Moreover, the research literature relies on model-based estimates of growth, which is not how schools analyze data to make decisions about students at risk.

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As a result, we base DIBELS 8 recommendations for determining response to intervention relative to goals for student growth. Specifically, we recommend setting an end of year goal for a student, where the default goal will typically be the end of year benchmark cut-score. When graphed, student scores on progress monitoring administrations should be mapped relative to an aimline, which is drawn from the benchmark result that occasioned intervention to the end of year goal. So long as student scores hew closely to or above the aimline, the student shows signs of response to intervention.

However, if a student obtains four consecutive data points below the aimline, it indicates the need for either a change in intervention or, in Grades 1 and up, the potential need for off-grade level monitoring (see next section). This guidance applies to all progress monitoring subtests except ORF. Due to the exceptional reliability of ORF and its more frequent use in upper grade levels, only three data points below the aimline are required for this determination when ORF is the progress monitoring subtest.

We do not offer guidance for discontinuing intervention altogether. That decision will depend on a combination of how far a student has progressed, local need, and resources available. However, if a student reaches the end of year benchmark goal on a subtest, it is common-sense to discontinue intervention at that point.

Off-grade Progress Monitoring

One additional challenge in progress monitoring students who receive intervention is determining when students are so far below grade level that progress monitoring is best conducted using off-grade-level forms. For Grade 1 to 8 students who begin the year at or below the 10th percentile rank based on national DIBELS 8 norms, schools may want to consider progress monitoring with an off-grade-level form, especially for older students who have a history of risk. Begin by going one grade down and go further down if needed using the same criteria (i.e., at or below the 10th percentile rank for the new grade). More conservatively, the decision to move off-grade level for progress monitoring will rely on the guidelines expressed in the previous section. That is, when three or more ORF observations or four or more observations on other subtests fall below the aimline, either a change in intervention or off-grade-level monitoring is necessary. You can find the 10th percentile document on the Research page on the DIBELS website: https://dibels.uoregon.edu/research.

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For benchmarking students, always use on-grade-level forms regardless of whether their progress is monitored with off-grade-level forms. In addition, when a student is demonstrating progress on off-grade-level forms, we advise occasionally administering an on-grade-level progress monitoring form every 4 to 6 weeks. Once a student meets the end of year benchmark goal for the off-grade level with which they are being progress monitored, the student should be moved to on-grade-level progress monitoring.

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