

Sample Parent Announcement Letter

The following is a sample letter that can be used to introduce parents and guardians to *DIBELS* testing.

This is only an example, and each school is encouraged to provide accurate and understandable information to parents and guardians in a manner appropriate to the school community.

Dear Parents and Guardians,

The teachers and administrators at our school are committed to helping your child become a successful reader. As part of this commitment, our school has chosen to use a test called *DIBELS* to help us examine how your child is doing in learning important reading skills.

DIBELS stands for *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills*. *DIBELS* tests four skills that are necessary for learning to read. Children who learn these skills become good readers. The skills are:

- **Phonemic Awareness:** Hearing and using sounds in spoken words
- **Phonics:** Knowing the sounds of the letters and sounding out written words
- **Accurate and Fluent Reading:** Reading stories and other materials easily and quickly with few mistakes
- **Reading Comprehension:** Understanding what is read

DIBELS is made up of six short individual tests. Because each test focuses on a different reading skill, your child may be given two to four *DIBELS* tests depending on his or her grade level.

Each test takes approximately 1 minute because the tests are used only as *indicators*. Much like using a thermometer to take a child's temperature is an indicator of overall health, each test is an indicator of how well a child is doing in learning a particular early reading skill. *DIBELS* is used to determine the reading skills of millions of children throughout the United States. The scores tell us whether a child is likely to be "on track" for learning to read or whether a child may need some help in learning important reading skills. Your child's teacher will use the information to better help your child. For example, a *DIBELS* test may tell us that we need to spend more time teaching your child how to "sound out" unknown words.

DIBELS is used to identify children who may need extra help to become good readers and to check up on those children while they receive the extra help to make sure they are making progress. *DIBELS* also may be used to make decisions about how well our school's overall reading program is working for all children. *DIBELS* will not be used to grade your child.

We are working hard at school to make sure that every child is on target for success, and we thank you for your efforts at home. Together, we will help your child become a successful reader.

Sincerely,

Letter Naming

Kindergarten and first grade students are given a page with letters and asked to name each one. This test tells us if the child is likely to struggle or be a successful reader in the future. It only takes one minute to give this test.

Initial Sounds

By the middle of kindergarten, children should be able to say or recognize the beginning sounds in words automatically. To measure this with DIBELS™ students are given a page with four pictures. They are asked to find the picture that starts with a particular sound or to say the beginning or initial sound in a word. It takes about three minutes to give this test.

Phoneme Segmentation

This is a measure of children's awareness of the many sounds that make up words we speak. It is given to kindergarten and first grade students and is a skill that should be mastered by the end of kindergarten. The child is told a word like "cat" and asked to say all of the sounds in the word. There are three sounds in "cat." It takes only one minute to give this test.

Nonsense Words

The ability to blend together the sounds represented by letters to make words is an important skill in learning to read. This skill helps children in kindergarten, first and second grade to use their knowledge of the relationship between letters and sounds to read unfamiliar words. Children are shown a page of make-believe words, like "tob" or "min," and asked to read them by saying the individual sound of each letter in the word or the whole word itself. It takes only one minute to give this test.

Oral Reading

This is a measure of how fluently and accurately children can read passages written at their grade level. This is given throughout the first, second, and third grades. Children are given three passages and asked to read each one aloud for one minute. Children who read accurately and fluently are better able to understand what they read.



If your child is just beginning to learn to read

- *Practicing the sounds of language.* Read books with rhymes. Teach your child rhymes, short poems, and songs. Play simple word games: How many words can you make up that sound like the word "bat"?
- *Helping your child take spoken words apart and put them together.* Help your child separate the sounds in words, listen for beginning and ending sounds, and put separate sounds together.
- *Practicing the alphabet by pointing out letters wherever you see them and by reading alphabet books.*

If your child is just beginning to read

- *Pointing out the letter-sound relationships your child is learning on labels, boxes, newspapers, magazines and signs.*
- *Listening to your child read words and books from school.* Be patient and listen as your child practices. Let your child know you are proud of his reading.

If your child is reading

- *Rereading familiar books.* Children need practice in reading comfortably and with expression using books they know.
- *Building reading accuracy.* As your child is reading aloud, point out words he reread and help him read words correctly. If you stop to focus on a word, have your child reread the whole sentence to be sure he understands the meaning.
- *Building reading comprehension.* Talk with your child about what she is reading. Ask about new words. Talk about what happened in a story. Ask about the characters, places, and events that took place. Ask what new information she has learned from the book. Encourage her to read on her own.