



DIBELS Recommendations for Steiner Schools

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Background Information

Standardized tests such as DIBELS are a wonderful resource for teachers, but they are designed for state schools that begin literacy instruction in Kindergarten. Steiner Schools begin literacy in class 1. Therefore, it is useful to adjust expectations for students in these schools until they catch up with their public-school peers, which should be by the end of class 3, according to Rudolf Steiner (Steiner 2003, 126–127). However, adjusting expectations in classes 1-3 invalidates the “standardized” part of these standardized tests as the results from the Steiner Schools can no longer be normed against the results reported by the test makers.

According to *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills 8th Edition Administration and Scoring Guide*, it is possible to use the DIBELS subtests for off-grade assessment, but they have not been validated for this use (Biancarosa, et al. 2020, 12). If teachers in Steiner Schools classes 1–3 keep this fact in mind, they can use the DIBELS subtests for screening, progress monitoring, and benchmark assessment (i.e., to make sure students are on track to catch up with their peers by the end of class 3). This off-grade assessment would allow teachers to use DIBELS until class 4, when all DIBELS tests can be administered as directed and interpreted as intended.

Modifications are given for both the DIBELS scoring booklets and the benchmark goals for DIBELS 8th Edition so the subtests can be used off grade. These modifications reflect the following facts:

1. Subtests for classes K-3 are used in classes 1-3.
2. Students are expected to be caught up by the end of class 3.

Request

If there are any statisticians among the Steiner Schools who would like to create standardized tests for classes 1-3 that are normed based on a one-year delay in literacy instruction, there is a great need. The same holds true for educational testing groups such as DIBELS—there is a need for hard science to provide benchmark goals for Steiner Schools. If anyone is interested in pursuing this work, please contact the author at <https://renewalofliteracy.com/>. The book *The Roadmap to Literacy: A Guide to Teaching Language Arts in Waldorf Schools Grades 1 through 3* could provide the scope and sequence for Steiner Schools 1–3.

Modifications for Timing of DIBELS Subtests for Steiner Schools Classes 1–3

DIBELS 8th Edition has eight subtests:

1. LNF = Letter Naming Fluency
2. PSF = Phonemic Segmentation Fluency
3. NWF-CLS = Nonsense Word Fluency-Correctly Letter Sounds
4. NWF-WRC = Nonsense Word Fluency-Words Read Correctly
5. WRF = Word Reading Fluency
6. ORF = Oral Reading Fluency
7. ORF-ACC = Oral Reading Fluency-Accuracy
8. Maze

These subtests are given three times a year: beginning, middle, and end. The schedule is modified for Steiner Schools to reflect a later start, as shown in tables 1.1 and 1.2.

Table 1.1: DIBELS Schedule for Subtests Kindergarten–Class 3

	LNF	PSF	NWF-CLS	NWF-WRC	WRF	ORF	ORF-ACC	Maze
Kindergarten	x	x	x	x	x			
Class 1	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Class 2			x	x	x	x	x	x
Class 3			x	x	x	x	x	x

Table 1.2: Proposed Schedule for DIBELS Subtests for Steiner Schools Classes 1–3

	LNF	PSF	NWF-CLS	NWF-WRC	WRF	ORF	ORF-ACC	Maze
Kindergarten		optional						
Class 1	x	x	x	x	x	end	end	NA
Class 2	beginning middle	beginning middle	x	x	x	x	x	middle end
Class 3			x	x	x	x	x	x

Note that this proposal results in more subtests given in certain classes because four years of academic instruction are condensed into three years.

Note also that PSF (Phonemic Segmentation Fluency) is the only subtest that could be administered in Kindergarten in Steiner Schools. Some Steiner Schools are teaching phonemic segmentation skills in Kindergarten. For these schools, it would not be amiss to assess their Kindergarten students' skills in phonemic segmentation. Schools that wait to teach this skill until class 1 are advised to begin assessment in class 1.

Recommendations for DIBELS 8th Edition Scoring Booklets and DIBELS 8th Edition Benchmark Goals for Steiner Schools 1-3

It is useful to modify both the DIBELS scoring booklets and the DIBELS benchmark goals in Steiner Schools classes 1–3. Tables 2.1–2.8 include the proposed adjustments for Steiner Schools.

Table 2.1: Letter Naming Fluency (LNF) Adjusted for Steiner Schools

Steiner Schools		Use the Following DIBELS 8 th Edition Scoring Booklet and DIBELS 8 th Edition Benchmark Goals
Class 1	Beginning	Kindergarten (Beginning) [optional]
	Middle	Kindergarten (Middle)
	End	First Grade (Beginning)
Class 2	Beginning	First Grade (Middle)
	Middle	First Grade (End)
	End	NA

Table 2.2: Phonemic Segmentation Fluency (PSF) Adjusted for Steiner Schools

Steiner Schools		Use the Following DIBELS 8 th Edition Scoring Booklet and DIBELS 8 th Edition Benchmark Goals*
Kindergarten		Optional
Class 1	Beginning	Kindergarten (Beginning)
	Middle	Kindergarten (Middle)
	End	First Grade (Beginning)
Class 2	Beginning	First Grade (Middle)
	Middle	First Grade (End)
	End	NA

*Some Steiner Schools are teaching phonemic segmentation in Kindergarten. Schools that are doing so should use DIBELS scoring booklets and DIBELS benchmark goals without making any modifications.

Table 2.3: Nonsense Word Fluency-Correctly Letter Sounds (NWF-CLS) Adjusted for Steiner Schools

Steiner Schools		Use the Following DIBELS 8 th Edition Scoring Booklet and DIBELS 8 th Edition Benchmark Goals
Class 1	Beginning	Kindergarten (Beginning) [optional]
	Middle	Kindergarten (Middle)
	End	First Grade (Beginning)
Class 2	Beginning	First Grade (End)
	Middle	Second Grade (Middle)
	End	Second Grade (End)
Class 3	Beginning	Third Grade (Beginning)
	Middle	Third Grade (Middle)
	End	Third Grade (End)

Table 2.4: Nonsense Word Fluency-Words Read Correctly (NWF-WRC) Adjusted for Steiner Schools

Steiner Schools		Use the Following DIBELS 8 th Edition Scoring Booklet and DIBELS 8 th Edition Benchmark Goals
Class 1	Beginning	Kindergarten (Beginning) [optional]
	Middle	Kindergarten (Middle)
	End	First Grade (Beginning)
Class 2	Beginning	First Grade (End)
	Middle	Second Grade (Middle)
	End	Second Grade (End)
Class 3	Beginning	Third Grade (Beginning)
	Middle	Third Grade (Middle)
	End	Third Grade (End)

Table 2.5: Word Reading Fluency (WRF) Adjusted for Steiner Schools

Steiner Schools		Use the Following DIBELS 8 th Edition Scoring Booklet and DIBELS 8 th Edition Benchmark Goals
Class 1	Beginning	Kindergarten (Beginning) [optional]
	Middle	Kindergarten (Middle)
	End	Kindergarten (End)
Class 2	Beginning	First Grade (Beginning)
	Middle	First Grade (End)
	End	Second Grade (Beginning)
Class 3	Beginning	Second Grade (End)
	Middle	Third Grade (Beginning)
	End	Third Grade (End)

Table 2.6: Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) Adjusted for Steiner Schools

Steiner Schools		Use the Following DIBELS 8 th Edition Scoring Booklet and DIBELS 8 th Edition Benchmark Goals
Class 1	Beginning	NA
	Middle	NA
	End	First Grade (Beginning)
Class 2	Beginning	First Grade (Middle)
	Middle	First Grade (End)
	End	Second Grade (Beginning)
Class 3	Beginning	Second Grade (End)
	Middle	Third Grade (Beginning)
	End	Third Grade (End)

Table 2.7: Oral Reading Fluency-Accuracy (ORF-ACC) Adjusted for Steiner Schools

Steiner Schools		Use the Following DIBELS 8 th Edition Scoring Booklet and DIBELS 8 th Edition Benchmark Goals
Class 1	Beginning	NA
	Middle	NA
	End	First Grade (Beginning)
Class 2	Beginning	First Grade (Middle)
	Middle	First Grade (End)
	End	Second Grade (Beginning)
Class 3	Beginning	Second Grade (End)
	Middle	Third Grade (Beginning)
	End	Third Grade (End)

Table 2.8: Maze Adjusted for Steiner Schools

Steiner Schools		Use the Following DIBELS 8 th Edition Scoring Booklet and DIBELS 8 th Edition Benchmark Goals
Class 1	Beginning	NA
	Middle	NA
	End	NA
Class 2	Beginning	NA
	Middle	Second Grade (Beginning)
	End	Second Grade (Middle)
Class 3	Beginning	Second Grade (End)
	Middle	Third Grade (Beginning)
	End	Third Grade (End)

Conclusion

It is important that students in Steiner Schools are caught up with their peers in basic literacy skills by the end of class 3. The curriculum in Steiner Schools changes from skills blocks to subject blocks. Teachers who are still teaching basic literacy skills in class 4 do so at the expense of the rest of the Steiner School curriculum.

Literacy is more than just being able to read, write, and spell. It includes historical literacy, geographic literacy, the great works of literature, natural science literacy (zoology, botany, and mineralogy), as well as mathematical literacy and scientific literacy. The curriculum in the Steiner Schools excels in these other types of literacy, but only if students have mastered basic literacy skills in classes 1–3.

DIBELS is a good tool to make sure that Steiner School students are on track to make the great shift from skills blocks to subject blocks which occurs in class 4. Students who do so can achieve a level of literacy that goes beyond mere proficiency in a handful of literacy skills—they can become literate in every sense of the word.

Sources

Biancarosa, Gina et al., 2020. *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills 8th Edition Administration and Scoring Guide*. Warman, Maureen and David Larsen, editors. Eugene, OR: University of Oregon.

Steiner, Rudolf. 2003. *Soul Economy: Body, Soul, and Spirit in Waldorf Education; Lectures Presented in Dornach, Switzerland December 23, 1921–January 5, 1922*. Translated by Roland Everett. Anthroposophic Press.