

DIBELS testing a successful tool

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

DIBELS (Dynamic Indicator Basic Early Literacy Skills) testing is used in Holyoke Elementary School as a tool for screening. It serves as an indicator of outcomes of students' reading, and is given to Holyoke students in grades 1-3.

Literacy coordinator Nancy Kennedy and Elementary Principal Kyle Stumpf outlined DIBELS testing at the Nov. 3 meeting of the Re-1J Board of Education.

With Read to Achieve grant funding coming to an end after this year, the level of value of DIBELS testing must be determined, as the program will need to be absorbed into the general fund if it's continued.

In serving as an indicator of outcomes, DIBELS testing is a tool for identifying specific needs, for monitoring progress and for evaluating success of interventions.

DIBELS measures five components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency and accuracy with connected text, vocabulary and language, as well as comprehension.

Teachers have been trained to monitor DIBELS testing in the exact same way. It serves as a reliable and validated predictor of reading success.

Kennedy pointed out Holyoke students who enter third grade reading 90+ wcpm (words correctly per minute) are very likely to be proficient or advanced on CSAP testing.

All but one student who entered third grade reading 90+ wcpm scored either proficient or advanced on CSAPs, in each of the years 2006, 2007 and 2008. In 2009, 100 percent scored proficient or advanced.

Read to Achieve is a Colorado-funded program targeting strategic students who are close to grade level.

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Citing Holyoke's success, the district was one of six out of 51 Read to Achieve schools that exceeded the goal of moving at least 65 percent of the strategic students to benchmark in every single grade level in the 2008-09 school year.

As a result, Kennedy and teacher Mary Austin have been asked to serve as presenters at two days of upcoming Read to Achieve training.

Kennedy cited seven factors which contributed to the reading success: dedicated teachers, in-school intervention and afterschool reading, school's disaggregation of data and response to information gathered, building leadership team and team meetings, Read Well onsite training and fidelity to the program, Read to Achieve consultant and parental support.

Holyoke's results from Read to Achieve showed 74 percent of identified strategic (close to grade level) students moved to benchmark.

In summary, Kennedy noted reading trajectories are established early. "Readers who start on a low trajectory tend to stay on a low trajectory, falling further and further behind UNLESS ... we do something to continue to intervene at an early age."

Department reports presented

Several other reports were presented at last week's school board meeting. Presenters included Maggie Busch, food service; Robert Jacobs, transportation; Perry Ingram, technology; and Susan Ortner, random drug testing policy.

Students can now type in their key code if they don't take their lunch card to scan, said Busch. This solution was found when concern was expressed for junior high kids not eating because they didn't have their cards.

Participation numbers in the breakfast and lunch programs are up from last year, noted Busch.

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Numbers of breakfasts served increased by 23 to an average of 134 per day, comparing August of 2008 numbers to September of 2009. Lunches served averaged one more this year, at 356 per day in September. The breakfast and lunch averages were both down slightly in October.

Transportation supervisor Robert Jacobs reported they're running seven rural routes again this year, ranging from 90-122 miles per day for a total of 732 miles. Last year's range was 86-130 for a total of 756. Earliest pick-up is 6:57 a.m., with latest drop-off between 4:35-4:45 p.m.

Technology coordinator Perry Ingram reported the biggest project over the summer was adding another T1 line for increased band width. As this will always be an ongoing project, Ingram said Supt. Bret Miles set up a couple of sub-committees, one of which is working with Computers Etc. on obtaining grant funding.

Miles said Lori Nelson at Computers Etc. invested her own money to be part of this, and he appreciates having a partner like Computers Etc.

Ingram noted the teachers' computers are the oldest in the district, and have the biggest need right now. Miles said he asked Ingram to build a six-year refresh schedule. He added the grant for the educational project is focused on connecting with other people.

Holyoke JR/SR High Principal Susan Ortner reported the random drug testing (RDT) policy is being reviewed by committee members who have met for about five weeks, each Tuesday morning for about an hour. Approximately eight to 10 of the original committee which studied the RDT policy show up each week.

Ortner noted the section on randomization is close to being cleared up. School district standard operating procedures (SOPs) have been developed, and the group is starting to look at Centennial Mental Health's SOPs to provide input.

She said the policy will need to go back through legal counsel, and the group has talked about having someone else take a second look, as well. Supt. Miles is on board as the district's secondary RDT coordinator.

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Holyoke is one of four school districts in Colorado that currently has a RDT policy.

Supt. Miles said he's asked the committee to evaluate how to make the best possible program—not whether or not there should be a RDT program. He said Ortner conducted a staff survey that has provided extra input that's been a welcome addition to the conversation.