

Data-Informed Decision Making in the Past, Present, and Future: Experts Discuss the Critical Nature of Assessment

A Conversation with the Authors of *Acadience Reading K–6*

Many educators are curious about the state of assessment in the midst of the pandemic. Many want to know exactly what happened to *DIBELS Next*[®], the assessment so many have relied upon for years. To dive deeper into these questions, we talked to the authors of *Acadience*[®] *Reading K–6* (previously published as *DIBELS Next*), Dr. Roland Good and Dr. Ruth Kaminski, to get the story and to understand the critical nature of assessment overall. In this enlightening interview with the trailblazers behind the assessment and the founders of Acadience Learning, you will learn what is ahead for assessment and what to look for in your next assessment.

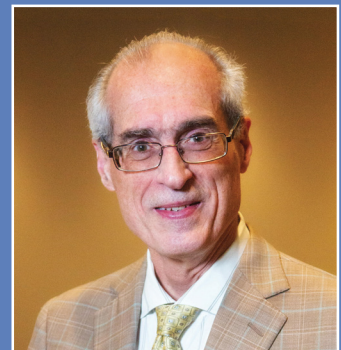
Q: 2020 was a year like no other. Can you both tell us why assessments are so crucial in a school year with unique challenges?

Dr. Ruth Kaminski: Assessments are always crucial in helping us know which students are on track and making adequate progress toward reading goals and which students may need additional instructional support. This assessment information has never been more important than it is at this time, when instruction has been disrupted in unprecedented ways. We must find effective means to provide instructional support to our most vulnerable students, and assessment is the first step in doing so.

Dr. Roland Good: In this unprecedented time of COVID, when student education is compromised by school closures and remote learning, it is critical that we have fast, accurate information about the educational needs and progress of each student and that our instruction is as powerful and effective as possible. Screening and diagnostic assessment tell us what skills a student has and which skills the student has yet to learn. With this information, we can provide targeted instruction to best meet the student's needs. Setting an individual student learning goal that is ambitious, meaningful, and attainable is part of making any curriculum, instruction, or intervention more effective.

Q: How can assessments be used to help pinpoint where students are struggling?

Dr. Roland Good: It is important to focus assessment and instruction on



Dr. Roland Good



Dr. Ruth Kaminski

the essential early literacy and reading skills: (1) vocabulary and oral language, (2) phonemic awareness, (3) phonics, (4) accuracy and fluency with connected text, and (5) reading comprehension. *Acadience Reading K–6* provides brief powerful indicators in these essential skills. I've created this chart to make it easy to review those indicators:

ESSENTIAL EARLY LITERACY/READING SKILL	ACADIENCE READING MEASURE
Phonemic Awareness	First Sound Fluency Phoneme Segmentation Fluency
Alphabetic Principle and Basic Phonics	Nonsense Word Fluency
Advanced Phonics and Word Attack Skills	Oral Reading Fluency Accuracy
Accurate and Fluent Reading of Connected Text	Oral Reading Fluency Words Correct
Reading Comprehension	Reading Composite Score Oral Reading Fluency Words Correct Oral Reading Fluency Retell Maze
Vocabulary and Oral Language	Word Use Fluency—Revised

Q: When it comes to assessment, what is the reality of some students being in person and others being remote, or a blend of both?

Dr. Ruth Kaminski: The reality is that assessment has been disrupted in a major way. Assessment has occurred and is occurring in a variety of ways different from the past and different from the ways the assessment was intended to be conducted. Educators are doing the very best they can to meet the challenges, but the reality is that we won't know about whether scores obtained using different assessment methods are comparable. It is important to provide instruction within the guidelines for safe instruction in each community, and it is essential to understand where each student is and what skills they need to learn and to practice using whatever means are available.

Q: What should educators consider when assessing students this year, and how does inequity factor into those considerations?

Dr. Roland Good: We are greatly concerned about the potential inequity due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We think the research is too preliminary to draw

firm conclusions, but it seems reasonable to expect the negative impact of the pandemic to be more pronounced for those students who do not have access to high-speed Internet, and who may not have home and community support to access remote learning. For these students, it is especially important that instruction be carefully targeted to their individual needs.

Q: What happened to *DIBELS Next*? Where can educators find it and is it the same product educators have trusted for years?

Dr. Roland Good: *DIBELS Next* has a new name: *Acadience Reading K–6*. My colleague, Ruth Kaminski, and I are the lead authors of *DIBELS* 6th Edition, *DIBELS Next*, and all prior versions of *DIBELS*. We have renamed the assessment to *Acadience* because we feel we have outgrown the old name. Our family of assessments now includes *Acadience® Reading Pre–K: PELI®*, *Acadience® Reading 7–8*, *Acadience® Reading Survey*, *Acadience® Reading Diagnostic*, and *Acadience® Math* and are all available through Voyager Sopris Learning®, now a part of Lexia® Learning.

Q: What do you think assessment will look like in the spring and fall of 2021?

Dr. Ruth Kaminski: I don't think any of us can predict what assessment will look like in the spring and fall of 2021. What we do know is that all of us—assessment developers and researchers, educators, leaders, and parents—are learning immensely and will all get better at doing what we do. At *Acadience Learning*, we are actively conducting research to evaluate the viability of our assessments as they are used for remote testing. We are looking at the impact of the COVID-19 disruption to learning on student outcomes.

IN CONCLUSION:

Looking forward to 2021, experts agree assessment continues to be an essential part of instruction. Setting an individual student learning goal that is ambitious, meaningful, and attainable is a vital part of making any curriculum, instruction, or intervention more powerful and effective. As the new year unfolds, it is critical to have the assessment tools in place to give all students their best chances at success.



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