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Interview and Focus Groups Analysis of Decreased Composite Benchmark Scores on Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills DIBELS from Kindergarten to First Grade Students

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INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUPS ANALYSIS OF DECREASED COMPOSITE
BENCHMARK SCORES ON *DYNAMIC INDICATORS OF BASIC EARLY*
LITERACY SKILLS (DIBELS) FROM KINDERGARTEN
TO FIRST GRADE STUDENTS

by

Loreen Flanary

A creative project submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

in

Special Education

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ABSTRACT

Interview and Focus Groups Analysis of Decreased Composite Benchmark Scores on
Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) from
Kindergarten to First Grade Students

by

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School districts in the state of Utah are required to use Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills (DIBELS) as an assessment of reading ability for students in kindergarten through fifth grade. The Logan City School District (LCSD) kindergarten end of year (EOY) Composite DIBELS data have been strong over the past 5 years with over 90% of students scoring at benchmark. In comparison, in each of those 5 years, first grade beginning of year (BOY) data drops considerably. LCSD is concerned with this trend because it is larger than the state trend of 13-14%, the trend is increasing, and this decrease is the biggest among all grade levels. The purpose of this study was to gather information from experts, a representative from DIBELS, and a representative from the DIBELS reporting company Amplify, in an interview; then the interview was shared along with the LCSD DIBELS data with three focus groups of administrators, kindergarten teachers, and first grade teachers, to analyze the data. The strongest

hypothesis of the focus groups for the reason for the large decrease from EOY kindergarten to BOY first grade Composite data on DIBELS for LCSD students was awareness of how proficient the student performance was at benchmark. The focus groups discussed possible hypothesis and made recommendations for the district on steps to take to further study the issue. This study has brought to the attention of administrators and educators the need to analyze LCSD DIBELS data more intently and to begin to effect change moving forward.

Introduction

The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) are tools used to measure early literacy skills for students from kindergarten to sixth grade. DIBELS includes numerous 1 min measures in areas such as alphabetic principle, phonemic awareness, accuracy and fluency with connected text. Scores received by students fall under three different categories or levels of performance: benchmark, below benchmark, and well below benchmark. The levels of performance are norm referenced and are used for screening, placement, and prediction of student early literacy achievement.

DIBELS were designed to use as a way to identify students who are struggling to gain early literacy skills in order to prevent significant reading difficulties in the future. The benchmark assessments are given three times a year, beginning of year (BOY), middle of year (MOY), and end of year (EOY). Between assessments, the benchmarks progress monitoring takes place to monitor if the student is on trajectory to meet benchmark on the following assessment.

The Utah State Board of Education (USBE) requires all school districts to use and report scores from the DIBELS measures for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades. USBE approved three contracting agencies to use in storing and generating DIBELS assessment data and reports: DMG Data System (DIBELS Net), V-Port, and mClass ran through Amplify Education, Inc. Reports of state DIBELS data were compiled by Amplify Education, Inc. and for Logan City School District (LCSD). Over the past 5 years, LCSD data for kindergarten students at EOY composite benchmark on DIBELS have been high in comparison to the state data. When one examines the state data of EOY kindergarten to

BOY for first grade, there is a 5-year trend of 13-14% drop in scores. When examining the same parameters for LCSD, the drop is significantly more.

LCSD uses DIBELS data to report composite score data to USBE and teachers within LCSD use the data to identify those you may be at risk in early literacy. The district has generated data showing benchmark, below benchmark, and well below benchmark scores in each of last 5 years. For 5 consecutive years, when looking at EOY kindergarten composite scores and BOY 1st grade data, scores have decreased from 18% to 29% (see Table 1). As shown in Table 1, the students on benchmark from year 2011-12 decreased 18% in 1st grade. In successive years, students on benchmark decreased 28%, 26%, 26%, and 29%. These decreased scores exceed the state trend of 13-14% and are consistent across 5 years. LCSD is concerned with the significant drop and is perplexed as to what is causing it. What is needed is (a) a systematic analysis of the persistent decrease in DIBELS scores among students entering 1st grade in LCSD, and (b) perspectives of a group of educators and experts to account for the decrease.

Literature Review

I used the search engines Google Scholar and EBSCOhost using in various orders the search terms: *DIBELS*, *summer slump*, *summer score drop/decrease*, *learning gap*, *learning decrease*, *score drop/decrease*, *achievement scores*, *early childhood*, and *kindergarten*. I was able to find many articles on the reliability and validity metrics of DIBELS but, when narrowing the topic to address the decrease in scores from the EOY kindergarten to the BOY 1st grade, the number decreases to seven.

Good, Kaminski, Simmons, Kame'enui, and Oregon School Study Council (2001) discussed using DIBELS to evaluate a program. The data that are generated from

DIBELS can be used in the Outcomes-Driven Model, a five-step process to make decisions: “(a) identifying need for support, (b) validating need for support, (c) planning support, (d) evaluating and modifying support, and (e) reviewing outcomes” (Good et al., 2001, p. 5-6).

DIBELS as screener assessments have been used across the nation to help identify students you might be at risk of reading difficulties. On the DIBELS website there is information on the statistics of the assessments, but as Curtis (2012, January 1) explains, you will not find studies on the perspectives of the practitioners that use it. Curtis conducted a study on teacher perspectives using DIBELS about effectiveness in identifying students at risk of reading difficulties and the skill deficits. To conduct the study, Curtis selected three Title I schools that had more than 70% of students with low socioeconomic status. Surveys were created and distributed to 51 educators at the three schools through the district mailbox system. The educators were classroom teachers including No Child Left Behind (NCLB) teachers, special education teachers, and kindergarten through 3rd grade teachers. All educators were trained in DIBELS and the three-tiered reading model. Two surveys were created: one to elicit responses by educators about their thoughts on DIBELS and one on the three-tiered reading model. Each survey consisted of 10 questions that had additional comment space per question. The surveys were collected with a response rate of 75%, and from the returned survey, 10 educators were selected to participate in an interview. Curtis conducted an open interview with four classroom teachers (one from each grade k-3rd), two special education teachers, and four NCLB teachers. Eight out of the 10 interviews were conducted face to face in the teacher’s classroom, the other two were conducted over the telephone. The

answers to the questions were recorded and repeated back to the interviewee for verification or editing. The findings from the study were overall that educators indicated DIBELS was beneficial as a quick screener but needed to be used with a more in-depth measure. Another positive expressed was that DIBELS was normed to allow the educator to provide data on student performance relative to grade level. Down sides expressed by the educators were that DIBELS teaches students to race the clock and does not measure comprehension well. Curtis (2012) stated that this study allowed educators to provide straightforward insight into DIBELS from people who were using it in the field.

The study conducted by Curtis (2012) gained teacher perspective on the use of DIBELS and teachers expressed the need to use more than one assessment to determine reading success. Coyne, Kame'enui, Simmons, and Harn (2004) research the effects of kindergarten intervention on first grade reading performance as an inoculation effect or an insulin effect. Coyne et al. refer to inoculation effect as the invention serving as a vaccination against later reading failure. Insulin effect as the intervention addresses the deficiency in the moment but is not maintained long term. The participants of the study were 60 first grade students from seven Title I schools that were the strongest responders to the kindergarten intervention. Thirty-six of the participants were males and 23 were females. The participants mean average age was 80 months. DIBELS were one of the test criteria the researchers used in addressing the effects of the kindergarten intervention.

The participants were placed in two groups. Both groups received 60-90 min of general classroom reading instruction. The experimental group received 30 min extra of small group reading intervention for 50 days. The intervention included 15 min of

phonological awareness and alphabetic principal instruction using the Write Well program. The Write Well program was used as it included the critical skills taught in kindergarten and on research based ideas in beginning reading. The last 15 min of intervention included practice in reading words and connected text. Researchers at the University of Oregon developed the program used for the last 15 min.

In February, posttests were given to the first graders in both groups. The results of the posttest for both groups did not expose any significant differences between the groups. The researchers compared both groups collectively to a national normed sample and found the group performed average in reading comprehension and above average in real and nonword reading. The researchers then compared the collective group to first graders throughout the district and found the overall performance in the average range.

Coyne et al. (2004) added to the research literature by extending the findings that “kindergarten students that catch up by the beginning of first grade can continue to make acceptable reading progress through February of first grade without additional intervention” (p. 100). The researchers did not find a significant difference between the group of first graders that only received classroom instruction and the group that received added reading intervention. The researchers noted that this could be in effect of the district’s efforts to increase beginning reading skills district wide through alignment of reading instruction. One limitation to this study is the effects of the kindergarten intervention were only examined until the middle of first grade. The researchers suggested the approach to eliminate reading difficulties was to take a broader perspective, even schoolwide, regarding reading instruction, prevention, and intervention.

The study of Al Otaiba et al. (2011) extended the work of Coyne et al. (2004) by

predicting first grade reading performance from kindergarten data and examining not only the students' overall data at the end of kindergarten but also the growth required to get to that point. The researchers conducted a longitudinal observational study examining the participants over kindergarten and first grade. The participants of the study were 203 students and 21 licensed teachers from 20 classrooms within seven schools. Four schools were Title I and two were Reading First schools. Most of the student participants attended 1 year of preschool prior to entering kindergarten and all attended all day kindergarten with a minimum of 90 min of reading instruction. The teacher participants were female, taught for an average of 5.71 years and the majority had bachelor's degrees.

The researchers first addressed the effectiveness of the Tier 1 instruction. Kindergarten Tier 1 reading instruction was videoed three times in the year, fall, winter, and spring. The videotapes were coded; the coders used the English Language Learners Classroom Observation Instrument (Haager, Gersten, Baker, & Graves, 2003). The coders in the Al Otaiba et al. (2011) study focused on 15 target behaviors of code-focused and meaning-focused reading instruction. Code-focused components are letter sound, decoding, and phonological awareness. Meaning-focused components are vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. Student measures were conducted in a quiet area one on one in 30 min sessions. Each student had three sessions in the fall, one in the winter, and two in the spring.

The researchers found that kindergarten Tier 1 reading instruction scored a overall mean of 2.22 on a scale from zero to three on the Classroom Observation Instrument (Haager et al. 2003). This suggests the instruction is effective; the code-focused

instruction was more effective than the meaning-focused instruction. Al Otaiba et al. (2011) found the “student outcomes support that Tier 1 instruction was robust and that most students responded adequately to Tier 1 instruction” (p. 458). The students’ standard scores were in the 40th percentile nationally.

Al Otaiba et al. (2011) confirms as does Coyne et al. (2004) that end of year kindergarten data can be used to predict first grade reading performance but suggests that students that are good responders to kindergarten Tier 1 instruction are not inoculated and might require additional tiers of intervention in first grade to remain good responders. The researchers conducted a post-hoc analysis to examine the initial student characteristics related to student growth. Al Otaiba et al. (2011) data suggest, “it’s not just where you end but how fast you had to grow to get there that matters” (p. 467). The researchers found that the students who entered kindergarten with weaker readiness skills, such as fewer home literacy experience and less preschool, had to grow more than more affluent peers and “had weaker-than-expected fluency growth and comprehension outcomes in first grade” (Al Otaiba et al., 2011, p.467).

LCSD uses DIBELS alone to identify students who may be at risk of reading difficulties. All the researchers in the literature suggested the need for multiple measures to help identify students at risk of reading difficulties. There was also strong evidence that districts needed to look at more than just an end of year score but how the students arrived at that point. EOY DIBELS kindergarten data in LCSD show that 90% or more students are on benchmark every year. BOY DIBELS first grade data in LCSD do not hold to that mark. Collectively, researchers indicated that a district needs to take a board, schoolwide, even district wide approach to examine Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction to

determine if it is effective, whether a balance exists in code-focused and meaning-focused instruction, and to investigate the approach to meeting EOY DIBELS data.

Purpose Statement and Research Question

The purpose of this research was to investigate the reasons for a summer decrease in DIBELS Composite Benchmark scores for first grade students moving from kindergarten in LCSD. The research question investigated is as follows: Given EOY and BOY data on DIBELS for Logan School District student for five years showing 18% to 29% decreases in scores, what will an interview of experts and focus groups of teachers and administrators identify as potential reasons for the decrease?

Method

Participants and Setting

Participants for the interview and focus group study included two experts in psychometric assessment and 12 educators familiar with DIBELS. Eleven of the 14 participants were female and three were male. Participants ranged in ages from 25-65 years. Years of experience in the participants' current positions range from 2 years to 26 years (see Table 2). In the interview portion, there were two psychometric assessment expert participants that were interviewed separately by the researcher. The first was from Amplify Education Inc. to represent data extraction. Amplify Education Inc. is the company that LCSD and the state uses to report DIBELS data. The second participant for the interview was an expert from DIBELS. The remaining 12 individuals comprised three focus groups. One focus group consisted of four principals of elementary schools from LCSD. A second focus group consisted of five kindergarten teachers from LCSD. A third focus group consisted of three first grade teachers from LCSD. The researcher, who

is a Preschool Teacher Specialist/Instructional Coach with LCSD, contacted all participants via phone, through email, or face-to-face conversations about being involved in the research. Participants were asked to read and sign an informed consent form before participation. The researcher had 88% participation ($n=14$).

The setting for the interviews and focus groups was an Adobe Connect room with live audio/video broadcast. Participants accessed a computer at their office or home for the scheduled interview or focus group. Computers had speakers and a microphone.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable was interview and focus group themes derived from audio transcriptions. Themes were defined as explanations (i.e. individual or consensus hypotheses accounting for changes in student achievement data), factors suspected to correlate with changes in the data, or influence variables (Creswell, 2009). The researcher took notes about focus group explanations and contacted individual members with the notes for corrections or changes.

Design

Consistent with the naturalistic inquiry of qualitative research (Creswell, 2009), this project sought the insights of individuals in position to understand the problem. The researcher used interview procedures (individual and focus group) to perform triangulation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Specifically, the researcher used two analysts to triangulate the issue of decreased test scores. The committee chairperson served as the second analyst. In Phase I, the researcher conducted interviews with experts. A semi-structured interview was conducted with two experts separately, one representing DIBELS, and one representing Amplify Education Inc. The experts

examined data of LCSD kindergarten students' EOY composite benchmark scores and first grade students' BOY composite benchmark scores over the last 5 years, and gave their expert opinions on what they have could be the cause of such a drop in scores. The information collected from the semi-structured interviews was presented to the focus groups to give the participants a broader perspective of the data that were analyzed. In Phase II, three focus groups were conducted; one of LCSD administrators, one of LCSD kindergarten teachers, and one of LCSD first grade teachers. In the focus groups, the participants first examined the data of LCSD kindergarten students' EOY composite benchmark scores and first grade students' BOY composite benchmark scores over the last 5 years. For each group, the researcher of this project introduced the issue, monitored discussion, and analyzed the responses of the focus groups for the possible reasons for the changes in the students' DIBELS data. The interviews conducted in Phase I were then shared with the focus groups and were asked if hearing the experts interview would cause them to change their responses.

Phase I Interview Procedures

The two participants of the interview received, prior to the meeting, the DIBELS data to be discussed and a list of questions that was addressed in the group prior to the interview. The DIBELS data included charts and graphs. Questions included the research question (i.e., given EOY and BOY data on DIBELS for Logan School District student for five years showing 18% to 29% decreases in scores, what will an interview of experts and focus groups of teachers and administrators identify as potential reasons for the decrease?). Additionally, questions included the following:

1. What is your impression of the decreased test scores over a 5-year period?

2. Is the drop from EOY kindergarten to BOY first grade in LCSD on DIBELS Composite scores similar to what you have seen in other districts?
3. What would you account for the reason for such a drop?
4. Did DIBELS take into account a summer slide when creating the benchmarks? If so, how?
5. What might Logan City School District do to investigate this further? (see Appendix A)

The questions were included in the materials given prior to the meeting to provide the participants time to reflect and formulate hypothesis on the reason for the data. The information was shared through email.

Each participant of the interviews was sent an invitation to the Adobe Connect room and logged on at the specified time determined by the interviewee. The researcher first conducted a quick overview of the Adobe Connect navigation and made sure that all participants were comfortable and understood how to respond in ways that allow audio, video, or transcription. Second, the researcher reminded the participants that the interview was being recorded for future review and would be shared with the focus groups. The DIBELS data were viewed and the researcher led the interview asking participants to provide their perspectives on the data.

The researcher recorded the interview meeting in the Adobe Connect room to play it back at a later time to identify hypotheses, themes, or repeated topics in the discussion. Data were also shared with the focus groups. Notes were written and shared with the participants to review and make any necessary adjustments or additions before they were shared with the focus groups. The researcher adjusted the notes to reflect edits or

disagreements by the participants and a final copy was sent to the participants for final approval. The researcher used the final notes to share with the focus groups, to write the results section, and to draft recommendations for LCSD.

Phase II Focus Group Procedures

Participants of the focus groups received, prior to the meeting, the DIBELS data and a list of questions to be addressed in the group. The DIBELS data included charts and graphs. Questions included the research question and additional questions listed above. (see Appendix B) The questions were included in the materials given prior to the meeting to give the participants time to reflect and formulate hypothesis on the reason for the data. The information was shared through email or given in person.

Participants were invited to their respective group: administration, kindergarten teachers, or first grade teachers. The focus group participants were sent an invitation to the Adobe Connect room and logged on at the specified time determined by the focus groups. The researcher first conducted a quick overview of the Adobe Connect navigation and made sure that all participants were comfortable and understood how to respond in ways that allow audio, video, or transcription. Second, the researcher reminded the participants that the focus group was being recorded for future review. The DIBELS data were viewed and the researcher led the discussion on what the participants see in the data and possible hypotheses for the decrease in data. Then information (hypotheses, possible explanations) from the interview of the DIBELS and Amplify Education Inc. representatives was presented to each of the focus groups.

The researcher recorded the audio of the focus group meetings to play it back at a later time to identify hypotheses, themes, or repeated topics in the discussion. Notes

were written and shared with the participants of the focus groups in order for participants to review and make any necessary adjustments or additions. The researcher to reflect edits or disagreements by the participants adjusted notes and a final copy was sent to the participants for final approval. The researcher used the final notes to write the results section and to draft recommendations for LCSD.

Data Analysis

Responses of focus group participants were analyzed by the researcher of this project to record themes and hypotheses for the reasons for the decrease in the DIBELS data. The researcher determined individual or consensus hypotheses about the decrease in DIBELS data, themes derived from group discussion, and repeated topics identified in the focus groups. The chairperson served as a second reviewer of all transcripts to triangulate themes. The data from the focus groups were used to draft recommendation for LCSD to address the DIBELS data decrease.

Results

Themes identified in this project included: (a) DIBELS did not take into account a summer slump when creating the composite benchmarks; (b) interviewees interpreted decreased scores and what to investigate going forward; (c) focus group participants were surprised at large decrease in DIBELS composite scores in LCSD between EOY kindergarten to BOY first grade in comparison with state and nation; (d) hypotheses were generated by the focus groups regarding reasons for the decrease in DIBELS composite score data; and (e) focus groups suggested steps for LCSD to investigate the issue further. Representative comments regarding each of these themes from focus group members are shown in Table 3.

Summer Slump

The interview participants both explained that DIBELS did not take into account a summer slump of regression. When the authors of DIBELS created the benchmarks, they looked at students within a grade level year, not across grade levels. The BOY composite benchmark score in first grade being lower than the EOY composite benchmark in kindergarten is not calculated because of a summer slump, the score is the lowest score that still gives a first grade student an 80-90% odds of meeting later benchmark goals and reading outcomes.

Interviewees' Interpretation of the Decreased Scores

When examining the data for LCSD over the past 5 years, both interview participants were not surprised that there was a decrease in students at benchmark between the kindergarten and first grade year. They reported that they had seen it with other districts and were aware that it was natural to see a decline in skills that are not practiced. The participant from Amplify did express that the amount of the decrease in LCSD was larger than what was typically seen nationally. It was pointed out by both participants that the number of students at composite benchmark in BOY first grade over the 5 years in LCSD was consistent, high 50% to low 60%, the increase in the decline of students at benchmark was due to the increase of the number of students reaching benchmark at the end of kindergarten, increasing from 72% to 90%.

These data led both interview participants to suggest that LCSD needed to examine the performance of the kindergarten students. To do this they suggested: (a) to investigate some administration aspects within the district, such as when does each school administer the test at the beginning of the year; (b) to examine where the

kindergarten students fall within the composite benchmark (i.e., were they just over the benchmark line or were they well above benchmark?); (c) to break the composite score up into the individual measures (i.e., to ask whether there was an individual measure where the decrease in students at benchmark was more significant than the other demonstrating a need to change instruction?).

Surprise Reaction of Focus Groups

Participants in all focus groups reacted with surprise at the amount of the decrease but not at the decrease itself. Participants anticipated that they would see a drop over the summer but were perplexed at the amount. Remarks were expressed about the consistency of the decreased scores and the size of the decreases in relation to state and national averages. LCSD over the last 5 years has seen a growing decline in the number of students at benchmark from the students' kindergarten to first grade year, an 18% to 29%. Data from the State of Utah shared with the researcher showed a consistent decrease of 13-14%. Datum shared with the researcher by the representative from Amplify on the national average was a decrease of 15% for the same time frame.

Focus Group Hypotheses for Decreased Scores

Both principal and teacher focus groups discussed similar hypotheses for the decrease in scores. Hypotheses generated by the focus groups included: (a) typical summer slump regression, not enough practice; (b) population of students in the district, students' moving schools between kindergarten and first grade, low socio-economics; and (c) the administration of the test throughout the district and state (see Table 3). The researcher played the interviews for the focus group participants and shared the literature reviewed in this study. Members were asked if they would change their hypothesis for

reason for the decreased LCSD scores. Hypotheses were generated by the focus groups based on the data presented, the literature reviewed in the study, and the insights from the group participants' expertise in their individual fields. The modified hypotheses include: (a) summer slump, not enough practice; (b) the administration of the test throughout the district and state; (c) instruction not meeting the needs; and (d) proficiency of students' performance (see Table 4). The researcher determined consensus hypotheses when all three groups had the same hypothesis.

Although most of the discussion and hypotheses derived from this study were consistent between all the focus groups, each group had a hypothesis that the other groups did not come up with or discuss. In the administration (principal) focus group, the hypothesis of the possibility of the lack of working in background knowledge and vocabulary was discussed. In the first grade focus group, a hypothesis for the decrease in scores being from items competing or distracting students from reading such as technology devices was offered. The kindergarten focus group discussed a hypothesis for the reason kindergarten students were leaving kindergarten in LCSD above the national average and that number was increasing because all schools within the district had phonics programs. It was also discussed that DIBELS is just an indicator and is one snapshot and does not show the whole picture of students' abilities or lack thereof.

Focus Group Suggestions

Focus groups suggested investigating further the decrease in students at benchmark between kindergarten and first grade by examining (a) when the test was administered at each school (do first grader students get to refresh skills at each school before the test is administered?); (b) what instruction was given at the beginning of the

year (does it match the data?); (c) where the students fell within the composite benchmark range (how proficient are they, is there a school that doesn't have as big of a decrease and what are they doing?); (d) what schools were doing within the district to encourage summer reading; and (e) the individual test scores (was there one test where the decrease was greater, did instruction need to change?). The suggestions stemmed from the discussion of the data and literature reviewed along with the information from the interview of experts, and the discussion from the focus groups.

Discussion

This study investigated the reasons for a summer decrease in DIBELS Composite Benchmark scores for first grade students moving from kindergarten in LCSD. The researcher identified the strongest hypotheses based on consensus discussion and amount of time allocated to discussion. The strongest hypothesis was awareness of how proficient the student performance was at benchmark. LCSD kindergarten EOY Composite data were strong with over 90% of students reaching benchmark. Of the students within that 90% at composite benchmark, questions were raised (e.g., Where do they fall, right over the line or well above benchmark? How is the instruction helping them to be proficient to make it an inoculation effect and not just an insulin effect? Is there a balance of the code-focused and meaning-focused instruction? The second strongest hypothesis from the focus groups was administration features of the test. When was the test given at each school? Were first grade students given instruction to refresh early literacy skills? Were there schools that did not have comparable decreases in scores and what were they doing to help the students be solid in the skills?

Given the results from focus groups, this study adds to the literature by confirming what Curtis (2012) determined in her study of teachers expressing the need to use more than one assessment (not exclusively DIBELS). Across the teacher focus groups, statements were made for periodic assessment using other psychometric assessments. The interview participant from DIBELS emphasized that DIBELS tests are just indicators and are not the end of the teaching sequence. Educators need to understand that if they just teach the skills that DIBELS assess, for instance Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF), that is not the end of the sequence of phonological awareness. Educators need to finish the sequence. Results from this study also add to the literature by Coyne et al. (2004) and Al Otaiba et al. (2011) regarding the need to assess the overall classroom instruction, ensuring the balance of code-focused and meaning-focused reading instruction to make instruction an inoculation effect and not an insulin effect.

One limitation of this study was not examining individual students or group of students to investigate whether results would extend research of Al Otaiba et al. (2011) who found that the amount of growth required to reach a certain criterion affects the outcomes of students' scores over a long break in instruction. Another limitation was not doing a systematic study on the instruction within the kindergarten classrooms in LCSD and on the individual measures within the DIBELS assessment. Future research on performance of LCSD students should include a systemic study on the reading instruction and a more focused examination of the individual groups of students along with the individual measures within DIBELS. Adding these aspects to a study will address the limitations within this study.

In summary, this study generated potential hypotheses from interviews of experts and three focus groups of educators to explain the 5-year pattern of decreased scores surpassing typical summer slumps seen elsewhere. Additionally, the study raised awareness regarding the decreased scores among key stakeholders. Specifically, this study has sparked an interest into teacher groups and administrators within LCSD to look deeper into the DIBELS data that are so prevalent. It made the participants to look at the data with a broad perspective. An administrator participant expressed after hearing the interviews of experts that “maybe we were taking too simplistic of a view, there is a lot of complexity to it.” The administrator focus group expressed the desire to have the study shared with all the principals. Both teacher focus groups have begun to look deeper and more strategic at their own data as well as discussing it with other teachers. All participants of this study, experts and educators, want to dig deeper and effect change. The researcher will share results with LCSD and has a position within the district that will allow the researcher to work to break down the DIBELS data and begin to answer questions that were derived from this study.

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Table 1

DIBELS EOY and BOY Composite Data

Year	Well Below Benchmark	Below Benchmark	Benchmark
2011-12*	18%	-2%	-18%
2012-13*	20%	7%	-28%
2013-14*	18%	7%	-26%
2014-15*	20%	5%	-26%
2015-16*	20%	9%	-29%

Note. *1st grade BOY minus Kg EOY

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Interviewees					
Alias	Position	Age	Gender	Years in Current Position	
Mr. A	Amplify Inc. Representative	45	M	7	
Ms. B	DIBELS Representative	51	F	9	
Principal Focus Group					
Alias	School	Age	Gender	Years in Education	Years in Current Position
Principal A	School A	56	F	33	21
Principal B	School B	36	M	11	3
Principal C	School C	57	F	35	17
Principal D	School D	45	M	19	10
First Grade Focus Group					
Alias	School	Age	Gender	Years in Education	Years in Current Position
Teacher A	School A	52	F	19	14
Teacher B	School C	27	F	6	5
Teacher C	School F	36	F	13	8
Kindergarten Focus Group					
Alias	School	Age	Gender	Years in Education	Years in Current Position
Teacher D	School B	31	F	7	7
Teacher E	School C	48	F	11	2
Teacher F	School D	25	F	5	2
Teacher G	School E	65	F	31	26
Teacher H	School F	58	F	31	14

Table 3

Focus Groups' Hypotheses of Decreased Scores Before Sharing of Interviews

Hypotheses of Decreased Scores	Examples of Principal Comments	Examples of First Grade Teacher Comments	Examples of Kindergarten Teacher Comments
Typical summer slump regression, not enough practice	“Leaving kindergarten high, start first grade not retaining the skills.” “Don’t practice everyday in the summer, no daily review.”	“Didn’t keep skills over the summer.” “Still acquiring skills, they need a lot of practice to maintain the skills.”	“Summer slump, what is the typical regression rate?” “Practice the skills everyday and then 3 months of nothing.”
Population of students in the district, students’ moving schools between kindergarten and first grade, low socio-economics	“Not the same students, a lot of move outs and move ins.”	“Population of our district over the last 5 years has it changed, more poverty?” “Population we serve has quite a range of ability.”	“Move ins, move outs, how many do we have?” “Our population doesn’t have a lot of parent support over the summer.”
The administration of the test throughout the district and state	“We test early in the BOY, children haven’t settled into school.” “Are other districts testing later?”	“When do schools test DIBELS? Did first graders get a couple of weeks to refresh skills before test was administered?”	“Test DIBELS too soon.” “When do other schools give the test?”

Table 4

Focus Groups' Hypothesis of Decreased Scores After Sharing of Interviews

Hypothesis of Decreased Scores	Examples of Principal Focus Group Comments	Examples of First Grade Focus Group Comments	Examples of Kindergarten Focus Group Comments
Summer slump, not enough practice	“What are we offering as a district to have social interactions and reading through the summer?”	“Still think it is a lack of practice but information adds more to the puzzle.”	“Combination of summer slump and how solid are they.”
The administration of the test throughout the district and state	“Need time to process and look at what we are doing.”	“We take DIBELS as a cold test, if we changed testing to after having a tiny bit of practice would it show in the scores?” “After progress monitoring, it is like the learning is there, they just don't know how to access it at the very beginning.”	“Wondering of the consistency of testers.”
Instruction not meeting the needs	“Is there a school that does it better than others.” “Are there pockets, schools, where the decrease is not as large.” “Is our instruction really giving what our students need?” “What do we do with our data when we get it in the fall? Does it change our instruction?” “Look at Tier I instruction, not	“Interesting that the number of first graders at BOY is the same year to year even with kindergarten improving, why aren't there more first graders?”	“Too much drill and kill-skills are not sticking with them.” “Which area has the biggest deficit, letter naming, phoneme segmentation, or nonsense words.” “How does each school teach the skills?”

	more of the same.” “Lets learn what practices we can improve or change.”		
Proficiency of students’ performance	<p>“How independent are they with these skills?”</p> <p>“Perhaps we are not solid, maybe out kids on benchmark aren’t as solid as we think”</p> <p>“Need to look at the research, look at data, what did they do to get long term effects, are we doing them?”</p> <p>“Look at growth.”</p> <p>“Shift from looking at outcomes to looking at processes.”</p>	<p>“It is about stickiness.”</p> <p>“Look at students that are on benchmark, where do they fall within benchmark?”</p>	<p>“How many of the 90% at benchmark were really green in all the subtests, are they solid in all three?”</p> <p>“DIBELS might not be showing if they really have it.”</p> <p>“Combination of summer slump and how solid are they.”</p> <p>“It takes every ounce that we have to get them to benchmark, what can we do to get them to stay there?”</p>

Appendix A

Questions for Interview

- (a) What is your impression of the decreased test scores over a 5-year period?
- (b) Is the drop from end of year (EOY) kindergarten to beginning of year (BOY) first grade in Logan City School District on DIBELS Composite scores similar to what you have seen in other districts?
- (c) What would you account for the reason for such a drop?
- (d) Did DIBELS take into account a summer slide when creating the benchmarks?
 - a. If so, how?
- (e) What might Logan City School District do to investigate this further?

Appendix B

Questions for Focus Group

- (a) What is your impression of the decreased test scores over a 5-year period?
- (b) What would you account for the reason for such a drop?
- (c) After listening to the interviewees' responses, would you change your reasons for the drop?
- (d) What might Logan City School District do to investigate this further?