

Chapter 5

Results and Discussion

5.1 Introduction

Assessment for formative purposes is intended to assist learning while teaching and learning are taking place so as to close the gap between a learner's current status and intended learning goals (Bell & Cowie, 2000; Black & William, 1998; Erickson 2007; National Research Council (NRC), 2001; Torrance & Pryor, 1998). By contrast, assessment for summative purposes helps determine whether a learner has achieved a certain level of competency after a particular phase of education, for example, a unit of study, a year of schooling, or 12 years of schooling (NRC, 2001). Assessment for formative purposes operates at a micro level and provides finer-grained data to inform decisions that are more proximate to immediate teaching and learning than data for summative purposes, which generally covers a more extended period of learning. In this chapter, the results of my action research study, focussing on progress monitoring assessment (i.e., formative assessment) are presented according to the steps in the action research spiral presented in chapter 4.

5.2 Identification of the problem area

When I decided to do a PhD, I was faced with the question, "What is currently a major issue within the South African education system worthy of investigation?" The following statement started my journey of exploration and research problem refinement:

The South African school system is manifestly underperforming (NEEDU, 2012, p. 11).

The challenge I was faced with was how to prioritise among the myriad needs requiring urgent attention. In view of the fact that the new Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) was instituted in Grades 1-3 in 2012, the Foundation Phase (FP) seemed a sensible place to start. However, the most compelling reason to focus on the FP is the fact that it is here that the base for all future learning is established. If the basics of learning to read are not firmly established by the end of Grade 3, then both learning opportunities and larger life chances of young citizens will be curtailed.

It is widely accepted that South African schools perform well below expectations. One international comparative measure after another confirms this. There is much talk today that this situation can be improved if only teachers, principals and departmental officials were somehow held more closely accountable for their actions and achievements. This is the course government has decided to adopt in attempting to improve the performance of the school system.

Following the general election in April 2009, the new cabinet adopted a set of 12 outcomes which captured a comprehensive set of targets for government, and which were included in the performance agreements signed by the President with each of his Ministers. The principal goal for the DBE is captured by Outcome 1: *“Improved quality of basic education”*. This goal was given flesh by the publication of the DBE’s *Action plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025*, which outlines 27 goals focused on raising learner test scores in Grades 1-9, increasing education and training opportunities beyond Grade 9, and improving the quality of teaching, school supervision and support (DBE, 2011b).

The first practical measure instituted in support of these accountability targets was the Annual National Assessment (ANA) exercise. The goals of the ANA are partly to expose teachers to better assessment practices, partly to serve as a systemic measure of performance and partly as an accountability measure for principals and teachers (DBE, 2010).

The response from academics, after the 2012 Annual National Assessment results were made public, included:

If these results were true, it would mean we have improved more in a single year than Colombia did in 12 years from 1995 to 2007 (Van der Berg & Spaul).

All the available evidence suggests that changes of this magnitude are simply not possible, locally or internationally (Van der Berg & Spaul).

The results from the Progress in International Reading Literacy study and the Southern African Consortium on Monitoring Educational Quality don’t even show improvements like this in five years (Surette van Staden).

We need to be sceptical of these results (Mary Metcalfe).

(Mail & Guardian, 2012).

The identification of my research problem started to take shape in the form of one word: ASSESSMENT. The goal of my action research study was to address a desire to make things better, improve assessment practice, and correct something that, seemingly, was not working as well as it should (cf. Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003).

Bearing in mind that two key elements of action research are participation and collaboration (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988), it was necessary for me to involve others in order to gauge their perceptions of and get their input on my proposed research problem. Mills (2011) refers to this preliminary information gathering as “reconnaissance”. During the reconnaissance part of the study, I had informal conversations with the Circuit Manager in the Cloudy District as well as with the Head of Department of the Foundation Phase at one school and several teachers teaching in the foundation phase. Some responses from these individuals included:

Our major problem is currently, assessment. We have to ensure that our learners in the district meet the targets set for learner achievement.

Assessment is becoming a major pain in the neck. We get exemplars to practice and we now also have Pre-ANA's. It seems as if we have to teach to the test. Our marks must go up!

I hate the word ANA!

We know we have a literacy problem, but please help us with interventions that will help the learners. We have the new CAPS, and workbooks, but we are not helping the learners to read. We don't know where to begin!

ANA results provide too little information far too late for planning teaching and providing support.

I then conducted a literature review of government documents and scholarly literature on assessment in order to determine what has been done and what needs to be done; to understand the nature of the problem; discover important variables relevant to the study; identify relationships between ideas and practice; identify areas of controversy in the research and establish and define the context of the problem. The following issues presented themselves:

In our current accountability environment, assessment is not regarded as a source of information that can be used during teaching. Instead, it has become a tool solely for

summarizing what learners have learned and for ranking learners and schools. In the process, the reciprocal relationship between teaching and assessment has been lost from sight. What is missing in assessment practice in South Africa is the recognition that, to be valuable for instructional planning, assessment needs to be a moving picture -- a video stream rather than a periodic snapshot. If assessment is used to inform effective teaching, then that assessment is quickly rendered out of date. Learner learning will have progressed and will need to be assessed again so that teaching can be planned to extend the learners' new growth.

Compounding these difficulties is the fact that assessment has traditionally not been a focus of pre-service and in-service courses. As Richard Stiggins (2002) laments, U.S. educators are "a national faculty unschooled in the principles of sound assessment" (p. 758). Moreover, their administrators also lack training in assessment and therefore do not have the skills to support the development of assessment competencies. Similarly, Nel (2011) found that pre-service teachers learn how to teach without learning much about how to assess.

Summative assessments, or high stakes tests, are what the eagle eye of our profession is fixated on right now, so teachers often find themselves in the tough position of racing, racing, and racing through the curriculum. The question is: What about informal or formative assessments? Are we putting enough effort into these?

Informal, or formative assessments are about checking for understanding in an effective way in order to guide teaching. They are used during teaching rather than at the end of a unit or theme of study. And if we use them correctly, and often, yes, there is a chance teaching will slow when we discover we need to re-teach or review material the learners wholly "did not get" -- and that's okay. Because sometimes we have to slow down in order to go quickly.

What this means is that if we are focused on getting to the end or through the curriculum, we may lose our audience, the learners. If you are not routinely checking for understanding then you are not in touch with your learners' learning. Perhaps they are already far, far behind. We are all guilty of this one -- the ultimate teacher copout: "Are there any questions, learners?" *Pause for three seconds. Silence.* "No? Okay, let's move on."

I came to the conclusion that there is a complete absence of a systematic, dynamic and effective **progress monitoring assessment system**, addressing the early literacy skills of the foundation phase at district, school and classroom level, which informs instructional decision making. Systematic, dynamic and effective progress monitoring assessment is now not simply a worthy aspiration but a statutory requirement by the Department of Basic Education. Districts, schools and teachers are increasingly being requested to monitor learner progress by collecting assessment data in order to guide planning and decisions related to teaching adjustments and learner support (DBE, 2010a). It has been noted that many districts, schools and teachers continue to struggle to find ways to effectively document learner progress and track development toward important outcomes.

With the general problem of assessment identified, the next step was to formulate specific research questions. The way I chose to do this was to gain a common understanding of the current progress monitoring assessment practices, if any, as well as instructional decisions made based on the assessment results at district, school and classroom level.

At the start of the action research project the general idea or problem was indeed “general” in the mind of the researcher. However, the process outlined above lead to the formulation of the following primary and secondary research questions:

Primary research question

What should a comprehensive and dynamic progress monitoring assessment system for the foundation phase consist of, and how should it be structured for implementation at district, school and classroom levels?

Secondary research questions

District Level

- How do districts set “benchmarks” (i.e., goals or targets) for literacy within the district?
- On what evidence (i.e., data) are instructional and support decisions based?
- What assessment documentation is provided to districts by schools?
- How are assessment results submitted by schools recorded?

- What do districts currently expect from schools and teachers in terms of learners' progress monitoring?

School level

- On what evidence does the school base its assessment targets?
- What will you do differently in order to achieve your targets?
- What progress monitoring guidelines are set for the foundation phase?
- How will the collected evidence (i.e., assessment data) be used to improve learner performance?
- Does the school make use of assessment data to recommend instructional changes to specific grades/classes?
- What kind of support is given to teachers in the underperforming grades/classes?

Classroom level

- What types of assessment do you use in your foundation phase classrooms?
- How do you monitor your learners' literacy progress in your classrooms?
- What core foundational literacy skills do you assess and monitor?
- How do you record learners' assessment results?
- What do you use the assessment results for?
- Do you make instructional adjustments based on the collected assessment data? If so, what and how are adjustments made?
- What type of support do you provide to your learners struggling with literacy skills?

The next step in the action research process was to determine what kinds of data I needed to collect as well as the methods I would use to collect the data.

5.3 Collection and organization of data

Data can be defined as bits and pieces of information found in the environment that are collected in systematic ways to provide an evidential base from which to make interpretations and statements intended to advance knowledge and understanding concerning a research question or problem (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). The next step in the process of conducting my action research study was focussed on:

- What kinds of data do I need to collect in order to answer the research question(s)?
- What kinds of data collection methods will be used to collect the data I need?
- How do the various data sources collected help in answering my research question(s)?

The data I collect should give an indication of the current assessment system or approach in place at district, school and classroom level. In order to collect this data, I decided to use the following data collection methods, namely **semi-structured individual interviews, focus group interviews, and documentation**. This manner of data collection would enable me to get a “video stream” of information concerning the assessment system or approach being implemented at “grassroot” levels of the education system. I would be able to corroborate the responses from individual interviews, and focus group interviews with documentation provided at district, school and classroom level.

5.3.1 District level

A semi-structured interview was conducted with Mrs Detail the Coordinator of the General Education and Training band within the Cloudy District. The aim of the interview was to obtain information, from a management perspective, about the assessment approach and assessment practices within the district. In this section, the questions posed to as well as the responses of Mrs Detail are included:

What documents do the district use to guide their assessment approach?

Well, we primarily use the National Assessment Protocol (cf. Appendix A), the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement. Foundation Phase Grades R to 3 (cf. Appendix B), the Annual National Assessment Guidelines (cf. Appendix C), Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025 (cf. Appendix D) and the National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R -12 (cf. Appendix E).

How is the information in these documents used?

We read the relevant policy documents in order to identify what is expected of us at district level. We also receive shortened more specific guidelines related to

these policy documents from either the South African Department of Basic Education or from the provincial office. For example, we have now received the Annual National Assessment Guidelines 2013 which we are sending to the schools to ensure that they cover the aspects that will be asked in the ANA tests in September (cf. Appendix F).

How are benchmarks set for the district?

I don't know if they can be called benchmarks, rather goals or targets. The Windy City area office sets targets based on the entire district, provincial, and national guidelines. National guidelines basically determine what the province and the districts do in terms of goal setting. The goal is that by 2014 at least 60% of learners should achieve acceptable levels of competency (i.e., 50% and above) in Language and Mathematics.

Schools are allowed to set their own targets; there are no benchmarks for early literacy skills, but a general target that at least 60% of the learners should achieve more than 50% for literacy (cf. Appendix D).

How are assessment results submitted by schools recorded?

Assessment results are typed on an Excel spread sheet by an assistant within the Windy City area office. This is then saved on Subject Advisors' computers and distributed to the Coordinator of the GET band and the Circuit Manager.

The data is analysed by using a coding procedure to group the learner data. This data is then presented in bar graph format.

- *Code 1: 1-34% (Not achieved)*
- *Code 2: 35% to 49% (Partially achieved)*
- *Code 3: 50% to 69% (Achieved)*
- *Code 4: 70% to 100% (Outstanding)*

This is similar to the cumulative record card in the National Protocol for Assessment (cf. Appendix A).

The results of Grades 3, 6, and 9 for each school are then submitted to the North West Provincial Department of Education for decision making purposes, and for further submission to the South African Department of Basic Education.

What decisions are made based on the submitted assessment results?

We typically use the assessment results to identify schools needing support in specific subject areas.

Does the district provide the schools and/or teachers with feedback related to the assessment results they have to submit?

Schools receive feedback related to their specific ANA results. They receive feedback from the subject advisors who help them identify areas needing attention, such as phonics. They also receive feedback on their assessment files – has everything been included, have the tasks and activities been moderated, are learner scripts marked regularly; you know things like that.

The schools also receive feedback on the North West provincial assessment common papers written in November. It is basically the results they are given.

A focus group interview was held with the home language and first additional language subject advisors (i.e., English, Afrikaans and Setswana). The aim of the focus group interview with the subject advisors was to obtain any additional information in terms of what they do more specifically when working with the schools and teachers on the topic of assessment. In this section, the questions posed to the subject advisors as well as their responses are included:

What assessment documentation should be provided by schools to the district?

Schools should submit a quarterly analysis of learner performance from Grade 1 to Grade 3 (cf. Appendix G). The Grade 3 results are also submitted to the North West Province. They now also have to provide us with their Pre-ANA analyses for Grade 3's (cf. Appendix H), as well as ANA learner report analyses (cf. Appendix I).

What does the district expect from schools in terms of learner progress monitoring?

Progress is monitored by the submission of yearly subject improvement plans. In these improvement plans the schools give us an indication of what their targets for literacy will be for the next year and what they will do to ensure this.

The ANA results are an important aspect that guides performance in terms of progress. The ANA results are analysed question by question and problem areas are identified (cf. Appendix J). Schools must then address these issues. They must indicate to us whether they have covered the content as specified in the Annual National Assessment Guidelines document.

What do you use the submitted assessment results/analyses, from schools, for?

We put the information into graph format in order to get an idea of the learner performance per grade, per subject. We then identify schools that need help with specific aspects and then we visit the teachers to help them with things like ‘how to set tests’, ‘what type of tasks to use’, and ‘how to allocate marks’.

What support do you provide to schools in terms of assessment?

We help the dysfunctional schools set an assessment programme. We provide them with assessment tasks of an appropriate standard. We help with assessment rubrics. We also give them feedback on their ANA results and help them to identify the areas their learners are having problems with.

Would you consider implementing a system-wide progress monitoring assessment system which provides accurate and usable assessment results at district, school and classroom level? Motivate your answer.

We’ll that’s what we use the ANA for. The teachers are already so overloaded that a new or different system will only confuse them. We know what the problems are; the children can’t read properly; the problem is with phonics. More assessment won’t help, we need to put interventions in place. The teachers don’t know what to do if learners have problems. They can just stick to the CAPS. Our results are accurate, we know exactly which schools have problems.

There is no time to do more testing. We must test what the CAPS specifies and also do the ANA’s - that’s enough.

What is the main challenge you face relating to assessment?

Well, we think we know where the problems are – you know which schools – we can also identify the problem areas by using our analysis of the ANAs. What we don't know is how to support the schools; what interventions must be given. This is what we need urgently!

5.3.2 School level

A **focus group interview** was held with the school management team. The aim of the focus group was to determine how a school manages and implements assessment practices, specifically within the foundation phase. In this section, the questions posed to the school management team members as well as their responses are included:

On what evidence does the school base its assessment targets?

We look at the previous year's results and then formulate targets. We are also guided by the district. We usually aim to have at least 95%, if not higher, of the learners achieve competence in literacy.

How will the collected evidence (i.e., assessment data) be used to improve learner performance?

We might change the teachers around for the next year or look at ordering different or more books. We also sometimes use different and more activities.

Does the school make use of assessment data to recommend instructional changes to specific grades/classes?

No, not really. We usually leave that to the teachers. We try to encourage them to use the ANA results to identify the problem areas and then zoom in on those. We have to stick to the CAPS document, so the only thing we really change is the number or type of activities. For the foundation phase we currently use the Platinum series which we find gives the teachers good guidance and it is aligned with CAPS.

What kind of support is given to teachers in the underperforming grades/classes?

The Head of Department will usually talk to the teachers and try to identify problem areas; she might help with planning or give extra or different types of

tasks and activities to try. The planning is usually done if teachers still don't get CAPS and how to use the document for their planning; some have difficulty linking activities to the tasks and so on.

How do you plan assessment?

We ask teachers to set up an assessment programme for each term – you know, the subject and the date on which it will be written. At the beginning of each term the assessment programme is given to the learners and their parents.

5.3.3 Classroom level

A **semi-structured interview** was held with the Head of Department of the Foundation Phase in order to get information on assessment practices as they relate to the entire foundation phase.

What type of support is in place for foundation phase learners not making progress on the core foundational skills?

There is no formal support structure in place to assist the learners. We try to help the learners on an individual basis or we try to remediate in class as we go. Everything depends on what we can do in the limits of a school day. We usually give them additional work to do, or different types of activities to fit with their developmental level.

How do you plan assessment?

We use the CAPS document as a guide. The number of tasks to be completed by each grade is specified in the CAPS document (cf. Appendix B). Each formal assessment activity we then divide into smaller tasks (cf. Appendix K; Appendix L), and we plan our teaching and assessment on a weekly basis (cf. Appendix M). We also rely heavily on the Platinum series that we use and how it structures the assessment requirements – you know it is linked to CAPS (cf. Appendix N).

Each teacher in a specific grade gets the responsibility for planning the formal assessment in one of the core subjects in the foundation phase (i.e., Maths, Language and Life Skills). The reason for this is time constraints and workload.

Do teachers in the foundation phase make instructional adjustments based on the collected assessment data? If so, what and how are adjustments made?

I think it only really happens in Grade R. Due to the informal nature of the Grade R programme, the teacher tries to accommodate learners experiencing difficulties with specific skills. For example, individual attention or different types of activities. However, teaching time is severely restricted.

How do you set benchmarks or targets for literacy achievement in the foundation phase?

Well, I try to tell the teachers that we should try for a 100% pass rate, and also 100% on the ANAs or at least close to that. We are also guided by what the area office wants. Currently, we have to ensure that at least 60% of the learners achieve 50% and above. Our targets as I mentioned are much higher – we aim for at least 98%.

A **focus group interview** was held with all teachers responsible for teaching in the foundation phase, Grade R to Grade 3. The aim of the focus group interview was to get information on assessment practices and responsibilities in the classroom and how it relates to learners specifically.

What types of assessment do you use in your foundation phase classrooms?

The majority of our tasks are work-sheet based. We also use informal observation and recording (cf. Appendix O). In other words, we make notes next to a child's name if we notice something.

How do you record learners' assessment results?

The results are documented on a class list per class, a column for every task. It is recorded firstly by marks (percentages) and then later converted to the 7-point scale (Appendix P).

What do you use the assessment results for?

To provide an analysis to the district of learner performance per grade per school – this is the quarterly analyses. We also need the results for report and

promotion purposes (cf. Appendix Q). We also identify learners who may need additional support.

**Do you make instructional adjustments based on the collected assessment data?
If so, what and how are adjustments made?**

We don't have time. If we get a gap we try to help learners on an individual basis by giving them additional worksheets or sitting with them to help. We just don't know what we can do more – time is the problem and the full curriculum, and the Pre-ANAs and then the ANAs. We are just 'ANA-ing' at the moment.

Due to the diverse nature of the learners and their different needs it becomes a very difficult task to really adjust our instruction. We don't have the 'woman power' to do so.

We've very often asked ourselves the question: 'What does making instructional adjustments mean?' At university, we were taught – try different things, use different methods or use different activities. I think we just don't understand a lot of these things – top-down, bottom up or what. What does it look like in practice?

How do you monitor learners' progress on the core literacy skills?

By utilising their summative and formative assessment marks which have been recorded on a self-developed score sheet (cf. Appendix P). We also use informal assessments like walking around and watching the learners while they are busy with an activity.

I do more or less the same thing. For example, I ask the learners to tell me stories, I noticed that one learner would always tell me a story that he saw on television. On the assessment sheet, I will then write that he only tells stories related to a TV story; this to me could be a warning sign that he spends too much time in front of the TV and that he can't tell stories related to 'real life'. I also think this affects his vocabulary; he uses the same words over and over again.

What is your opinion on assessment in the foundation phase?

Well, we face a number of challenges. Firstly, practicing ANA exemplars, pre-ANA assessments, and then ANA assessments – and then of course analysing the pre-ANA results. This takes away a lot of our teaching time. If we don't do it

they come and check. In addition, to all this ANA testing we do our own informal assessments and the formal assessment tasks as specified in the CAPS document. ANA seems to be driving the education system. We are told to do our best so that we don't disappoint the district officials and the province. We need to get good results!

Yes, exactly. This is what the education system has become. Getting good results to ensure that people are not disappointed and that the province is doing well. What rubbish; don't they think of the children! For everything that we assess they now want to allocate a mark even if it is 3 marks for identifying the beginning sounds. Everything should add up to 100 for a task – really!

One thing we definitely are not doing – and this is because of time constraints – using the assessment results to make changes to our instruction. We can't do this; we have to keep up with the pace of the CAPS. We try our best, but some children really need a lot of extra support. We don't know what will work for them; what do we change; when do we change; how do we change? I'm telling you, the system is letting our children down – my own too!

5.3.4 Documents

The documentary evidence that all stakeholders referred to in the semi-structured interviews and the focus group interviews (cf. sections 5.3.1, 5.3.2 and 5.3.3) are provided as appendices. In this section, **extracts** are given from the documents referred to by the stakeholders. These extracts relate to the purpose of the study – obtaining information on how assessment is conducted, recorded, reported, and managed at district, school and classroom levels. I have included the extracts from the documents in **box format**, and I have organised them under headings related to themes identified during the semi-structured interviews and the focus group interviews.

5.3.4.1 Challenges

In this section the focus is on the challenges, as they relate to assessment, facing all stakeholders at the various educational levels.

Extracts from the Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025 (cf. Appendix D)

Challenges

Improving the quality of education in schools in the sense of improving learning outcomes stands out as the greatest challenge. Without substantial improvements in learning outcomes, the future development of the country will be seriously compromised.

The 2009 Medium-term Strategic Framework (MTSF), which spells out government's overall strategies for the 2009-to-2014 term, stresses the importance of knowing how well or how poorly we are doing through the ongoing monitoring of education quality and participation in standardised international testing programmes, such as SACMEQ and TIMSS. In his 2010 State of the Nation Address, the President made a commitment towards an ongoing system of standardised testing in Grades 3, 6 and 9.

If improving learning outcomes is the key challenge facing South African schools, then how could this be achieved? The many different studies that attempted to answer this question tend to point to the same underlying problems. In particular, it is clear that in many schools and classrooms the way that teaching takes place must change.

The Minister agreed with the President on prioritising four overarching 'outputs', all of which are covered by the 27 goals. The four outputs are as follows:

- Output 1: Improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- Output 2: Undertake regular assessments to track progress.
- Output 3: Improve early childhood development.
- Output 4: Ensure a credible outcomes-focussed planning and accountability system.

The four outputs fall under government's 'Outcome 1: Improved quality of basic education'. Output 1, on improving the quality of teaching and learning, is reflected in almost all of the 27 goals of this plan. Output 2 relates to the Annual National Assessments programme, which is explained in section 5 and is required for the monitoring of several of the output goals and indicators put forward in section 6. Output 3 is dealt with specifically under goal 11, which reads: 'Improve the access of children to quality early childhood development (ECD) below Grade 1'. Finally, output 4 is centred

around the development and maintenance of Schooling 2025; in other words, the plan contained in this document.

5.3.4.2 Planning assessment

This section includes extracts that focus on aspects related to planning assessment. For example, what skills should be assessed? How should the skills be assessed? When should the skills be assessed?

Extracts from the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (cf. Appendix B)

The CAPS document provides the requirements for each Formal Assessment Activity. In Term 1 there is only one Formal Assessment Task (made up of a number of parts dealing with different aspects of Language) in Grades 1-3. Schools are encouraged to conduct a baseline assessment in the first term. In addition, suggestions are given for informal assessment that will inform daily teaching and learning but will not be formally recorded.

GRADE	SUBJECT	TERM 1	TERM 2	TERM 3	TERM 4	TOTAL
1	Home Language	1	2	2	2	7
2	Home Language	1	2	2	2	7
3	Home Language	1	3	3	2	9

Grade 1 Term 1

Suggestions for Informal Assessment Activities:

Phonics: (oral and/or practical)

- Distinguishes aurally between different initial sounds of words
- Participates in whole class phonemic awareness activities: blending sounds (*c-a-t* into *cat*) ; segmenting words (*cat* into *c-a-t*); consonant and vowel substitution word play (replace the 'h' in *hat* with 'b' to make *bat*)
- Recognises and names some letters of the alphabet (2 vowels and at least 6 consonants)
- Begins to build up short words using sounds learnt(e.g. *c-a-t* - *cat*)
- Begins to use blending to make words such as 'at' *c-at*, *m-at*, identifying the rhymes

Formal Assessment Activity 1

Phonics (oral and/ or practical and/or written)

- Identifies letter-sound relationships of some single letters, for example, l, o, h, m, a, b, t, c. There should be 2 vowels and at least 6 consonants
- Begins to build up short words using sounds learnt (e.g. c-a-t - cat)

Suggestions for Informal Assessment Activities

Reading (oral and/or practical)

Emergent reading skills to be taught in Shared and Guided Reading lessons.

- Holds the book the right way up and turns pages correctly
- Interprets pictures to make up own story, that is, 'reads' the pictures
- Collects and reads logos and other words from environmental print
- Recognises own name and names of some peers
- Reads labels and captions in the classroom
- Discusses book handling and care
- Develops basic concepts of print including:
- Concept of book: cover, front, back, title
- Concept of text: word, some words, letter, names of some letters, one-to-one correspondence
- Directionality: starts reading at front, ends at back, reads from left to right and top to bottom of a page, first, last, middle words or letters or position on a page
- Punctuation: capital letter, lowercase letter, full stop, comma, question mark

Shared Reading

- Reads enlarged texts such as poems, big books, posters and electronic texts as a whole class with teacher

Group Guided Reading

- Reads both silently and out loud from own book in a guided reading group with teacher, that is, whole group works on the same story

Formal Assessment Activity 1

Reading (oral and/ or practical)

Emergent reading skills

- Uses pictures to predict what the story is about. For example, reads picture books
- Listens to and discusses stories and other texts read aloud

Shared Reading

- Reads as a whole class with teacher enlarged texts such as poems, posters, big books and class stories developed in shared writing sessions

Group Guided Reading

- Reads aloud from own book in a guided reading group with teacher, that is, the whole group reads the same story

Term 2

Suggestions for Informal Assessment Activities

Phonics: (oral and/or practical)

- Identifies letter-sound relationships of all single sounds
- Participates in whole class phonemic awareness activities: blending sounds [*h-op* into *hop*]; segmenting words [*hop* into *h-o-p*]; consonant and vowel substitution word play [replace the 'h' in *hop* by 'm' to make *mop*]
- Builds words using sounds learnt (e.g. -at, -et, -it, -ot, -ut, -ag, e.g. -ig, -og, -ug, -an, -en, -in, -un, -am - at least two word families per week)
- Builds up and breaks down simple words beginning with a single consonant into onset (the initial sound) and rime (the last part of the syllable) , e.g. h-en, p-en; t-in, p-in, identifying the rhymes
- Groups common words into sound families such as hot, hop, hob
- Reads phonic words in sentences and other texts

Formal Assessment Activity 1

Phonics (oral and/ or practical and/or written)

- Distinguishes aurally between different beginning and end sounds of words
- Identifies letter-sound relationships of most single letters
- Builds words using sounds learnt (e.g. -at, -et, -it, -ot, -ut, -ag, e.g., -ig, -og, -ug, -an, -en, -in, -un, -am - at least two word families per week)

Formal Assessment Activity 2

Phonics (oral and/ or practical and/or written)

- Identifies letter-sound relationships of most single letters
- Builds words using sounds learnt (e.g. -at, -et, -it, -ot, -ut, -ag, e.g. -ig, -og, -ug, -an, -en, -in, -un, -am - at least two word families per week)

- Groups common words into sound families (e.g. hot, hop, hob)

Suggestions for Informal Assessment Activities

Reading (oral and/or practical)

Shared Reading

- Reads with the whole class big books or other enlarged texts
- Uses clues and pictures in the text for understanding
- Discusses the story, identifying the main idea in the text, the main characters etc.
- Answers a wide variety of types of questions based on the texts read including higher order type questions
- Discusses the use of capital letters and full stops

Group Guided Reading

- Reads aloud from own book in a guided reading group with teacher, that is, the whole group reads the same story
- Begins to monitor self when reading, both word recognition and comprehension

Paired/Independent Reading

- Reads to a partner from prepared or known texts to develop fluency
- Rereads familiar texts such as those read in Shared Reading sessions

Formal Assessment Activity 1

Reading (oral and/ or practical)

Shared Reading

- Reads with the whole class big books or other enlarged texts
- Uses pictures to predict what the story is about
- Uses clues and pictures in the text for understanding
- Discusses the story, identifying the main idea in the text, the main characters etc.

Group Guided Reading

- Reads aloud from own book in a guided reading group with teacher, that is, the whole group reads the same story
- Uses phonics, context clues and sight words when reading

Formal Assessment Activity 2

Reading (oral and/ or practical)

Shared Reading

- Reads with the whole class big books or other enlarged texts

- Interprets pictures to make up own story, that is, 'reads' the pictures
- Uses clues and pictures in the text for understanding
- Answers a wide variety of types of questions based on the texts read including higher order type questions

Group Guided Reading

- Reads both silently and out loud from own book in a guided reading group with teacher, that is, whole group works on the same story
- Uses phonics, context clues and sight words when reading

Term 3

ASSESSMENT

Suggestions for Informal Assessment Activities

Phonics: (oral and/or practical)

- Identifies letter-sound relationships of all single letters
- Uses consonant blends to build up and break down words (r and l blends, e.g. black, fl-op, sl-ip etc.)
- Recognises common consonant digraphs (sh, ch and th) at the beginning of a word (e.g. sh-ip, ch-ip, th-ink)
- Reads phonic words in sentences and other texts

Formal Assessment Activity 1

Phonics (oral and/ or practical and/or written)

- Identifies letter-sound relationships of all single letters
- Revises word families using short vowel sounds learnt (e.g. bus, mum, run, hip, hop etc.)
- Builds 3-letter words using all single letters
- Uses consonant blends to build up and break down words (e.g. r blends - cr-ack, dr-op, tr-ip etc.)

Formal Assessment Activity 2

Phonics (oral and/ or practical and/or written)

- Builds 3-letter words using all single letters
- Uses consonant blends to build up and break down words (e.g. l blends - bl-ack, fl-op, sl-ip)

- Recognises common consonant digraphs (sh, ch and th) at the beginning of a word (e.g. sh-ip, ch-ip, th-ink)
- Groups common words into sound families

Suggestions for Informal Assessment Activities

Reading (oral and/or practical)

Shared Reading

- Reads big books or other enlarged texts as a whole class with teacher
- Answers higher order questions based on the passage read (e.g. “Do you think...?” “Why did...?”)
- Gives an opinion on what was read
- Recognises cause and effect in a story (e.g. The boy fell off his bike **because** he rode too quickly down the steep hill)

Group Guided Reading

- Monitors self when reading, both word recognition and comprehension.

Paired/Independent reading

- Reads books read in Shared Reading sessions and books from the classroom reading corner

Formal Assessment Activity 1

Reading (oral and/ or practical)

Shared Reading

- Reads big books or other enlarged texts as a whole class with teacher
- Identifies the sequence of events and the setting of the story
- Uses cover of book to predict ending and storyline

Group Guided Reading

- Reads both silently and out loud from own book in a guided reading group with teacher i.e. whole group works on the same story
- Uses phonics, context clues, and structural analysis and sight words when reading

Formal Assessment Activity 2

Reading (oral and/ or practical)

Shared Reading

- Reads big books or other enlarged texts as a whole class with teacher

- Identifies the sequence of events and the setting of the story
- Answers higher order questions based on the passage read (e.g. “*Do you think...?*” “*Why did...?*”)
- Interprets information from posters, pictures and simple tables such as calendar

Group Guided Reading

- Reads aloud from own book in a guided reading group with teacher, that is, the whole group reads the same story
- Reads with increasing fluency and expression

Paired/Independent reading

- Reads aloud to a partner

Term 4

ASSESSMENT

Suggestions for Formal Assessment Activities

Phonics: (oral and/or practical)

- Recognises plurals (e.g. ‘s’ and ‘es’)
- Revises common consonant digraphs (sh, ch and th) at the beginning of a word (sh-ip, ch-ip, th-in)
- Reads phonic words in sentences and other texts

Formal Assessment Activity 1

Phonics (oral and/ or practical and/or written)

- Recognises common consonant digraphs (sh, ch and th) at the end of a word (fi-sh, mu-ch, wi-th)
- Uses consonant blends to build up and break down words (sp-o-t, fr-o-g, dr-i-nk, st-i-ck)
- Builds words using sounds learnt
- Groups common words into sound families

Suggestions for Informal Assessment Activities

Reading (oral and/or practical)

Shared Reading

- Uses book cover to predict what the book is about

- Identifies the initial problem in a story that sets the story in motion
- Uses clues and pictures in the book for understanding
- Interprets information from posters

Group Guided Reading

- Uses phonics, context clues, structural analysis and sight words when reading
- Monitors self when reading, both word recognition and comprehension
- Shows an understanding of punctuation when reading aloud

Paired/Independent reading

- Reads own writing, starting to correct errors

Formal Assessment Activity 1

Reading (oral and/ or practical)

Shared Reading

- Reads big books or other enlarged texts as a whole class with teacher
- Identifies the sequence of events in what was read
- Recognises cause and effect in a story. The girl got into trouble **because** she broke a window
- Answers open-ended questions based on the passage read

Group Guided Reading

- Reads aloud from own book in a guided reading group with teacher, that is, the whole group reads the same story
- Uses phonics, context clues, structural analysis and sight words when reading
- Reads with increasing fluency and expression

Paired/Independent reading

- Reads books read in Shared Reading sessions and books from the classroom reading corner

5.3.4.3 Setting goals, indicators or targets

This section includes extracts that focus on the setting of targets, goals or milestones as they relate to assessment and the requirements at national, provincial, district and school levels.

Extracts from the Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025 (cf. Appendix D)

There are four key elements in the accountability system of this plan: **goals**, **indicators**, **targets** and **milestones**.

Goals. There are 27 goals in this plan. The first 13 deal with outputs or with getting as many learners as possible to reach particular levels of learning. The other 14 goals deal with ways in which the improved outputs may be achieved. These 14 goals can therefore be seen as dealing with the inputs and processes needed. The relationship between the 13 output goals and the remaining 14 goals is complex. There is not a simple one-to-one relationship between them. One could, of course, identify many more than 27 goals, but too many goals would make the plan too complex. In selecting goals, the emphasis was on issues that a wide range of stakeholders could, in some way, become involved in, and issues that are likely to be important for many years to come. Therefore, more short to medium-term goals, such as the roll-out of the 2011 curriculum reforms, were not included. Moreover, activities in which the general public is unlikely to become directly involved, for instance the development of the new LURITS system for tracking learners, are not referred to in the goals (though obviously such activities feed into the goals). As far as possible, goals that did not overlap too much with each other were selected. Hence, providing e-Education is not a goal in itself, as e-Education is something that features in many of the selected goals and is best not considered as a goal on its own.

Indicators. An indicator is something like the ‘Percentage of Grade 3 learners performing at the required literacy level according to the country’s Annual National Assessments’. Each goal has one or, in some cases, two indicators. In most cases, an indicator has a national value and nine provincial values for each year. A **baseline** value is the 2009 value, or the value for a year as close to 2009 as possible. This indicates to us the starting point for improvements beyond 2009.

Each future year has **target** values, at both national and provincial level. As we move forward, we need to measure what the **actual** values are and see how far these are apart from the target values.

In some cases it is not possible to obtain a value for an indicator every year; for example where international testing programmes are not run every year. Here we should set targets for those years in which we know the testing will take place. It is obviously important to do the measuring in the same way in different years and in different provinces. If not, it becomes difficult to make comparisons. Not all indicators will work properly starting from 2009. In some cases part of the challenge lies in getting new indicators to work, by collecting the right information (and, in some cases, for instance the Minimum Schoolbag, confirming what information should be collected). If indicators do not work fully, this does not mean we have no information to do planning. There has been at least some information available on every goal in the plan since 2010, and it is important to make use of this.

Targets. Targets need to be set very carefully. As mentioned above, if targets are impossible, one makes failure inevitable. What is obviously important is that national targets should equal the combination of all nine provincial targets. This means that one cannot change a provincial target without also changing the corresponding national target, or by changing the targets in other provinces. The targets indicated in this plan were mostly set nationally first, and then translated to provincial values, using a variety of methods that recognise the different burdens of poverty and levels of capacity found across the nine provinces. In some cases, provincial and national targets were adjusted after consultation between the national and provincial departments of education. For certain targets, values were agreed upon after consultation between the education departments and other organs of government. Clearly, the outcomes of the education system are not only of concern to those inside the system, but to the country as a whole. Not all targets are to everyone's liking and many have indicated that some targets are overly ambitious. This is probably inevitable in a country like South Africa where the education challenges are major and the expectations surrounding quality education are high. There is probably no government in the world that reaches every target it sets for itself. The important thing with regard to the targets in this plan is, firstly, *that there should be continuous movement towards the targets, year after year* and, secondly, *that the improvements we see should be the best that were possible, given the people and resources available.*

It is highly possible that some targets in the plan can and should be exceeded. Importantly, targets should not be regarded as a ceiling for future improvements, nor as an excuse for mediocrity where individual provinces, districts or schools find it is possible to progress beyond the targets.

Milestones. Whilst targets are mostly set across many years and take the form of statistics, milestones are generally achievements envisaged for a specific year, and mostly not expressed in statistical terms. For example, having a new teacher training facility up and running in, for example 2013, is a milestone. Whilst targets were generally set over the long term, up to 2025, milestones generally focus on desired achievements in the medium term (up to five years into the future). Moreover, milestones were only set for goals 14 to 27; in other words the goals dealing with the *how* of achieving goals 1 to 13, which deal with outputs.

Indicators with national baseline and target values

As can be seen in Appendix A, values that are at least indicative or approximate exist for virtually all indicators. In the table that follows, the extent to which national baseline and target values are filled in depends on the degree of quality of available values, or the extent to which the available values approximate the formal indicator.

	<i>Indicator</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2012</i>	<i>2013</i>	<i>2014</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2024</i>
GOALS AND INDICATORS RELATING TO OUTPUTS BEGIN HERE									
Goal 1: Increase the number of learners in Grade 3 who by the end of the year have mastered the minimum language and numeracy competencies for Grade 3.									
1.1	Percentage of Grade 3 learners performing at the required <i>literacy</i> level according to the country's Annual National Assessments.	48	50	53	55	58	60	75	90

Appendix A: Provincial indicator values

1.1. Percentage of Grade 3 learners performing at the required <i>literacy</i> level according to the country's Annual National Assessments.			
	2009 baseline	2014 target	Baseline values are based on the 2007 Systemic Evaluation results and use a 'partly achieved' threshold of 35% for each learner as the minimum level required.
EC	45	58	
FS	67	76	
GP	49	61	
KZN	52	64	
LP	34	45	
MP	37	49	
NC	44	57	
NW	44	56	
WC	75	83	
SA	48	60	

5.3.4.4 Recording and reporting of assessment

This section focuses on the requirements of recording and reporting assessment results.

Extracts from the National Assessment Protocol (cf. Appendix A)

Chapter 1

1. PURPOSE OF THE DOCUMENT

(1) The *National Protocol for Assessment Grades R - 12* standardises the recording and reporting processes for Grades R – 12 within the framework of the *National Curriculum Statement Grades R – 12*, which comprises the:

- (a) National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements for all subjects listed in the *National Curriculum Statement Grades R – 12*; and
- (b) Policy document, *National policy pertaining to the programme and promotion requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R – 12*.

(2) The document also provides a policy framework for the management of school assessment, school assessment records and basic requirements for learner profiles, teacher files, report cards, record sheets and schedules for Grades R – 12.

The requirements for, as well as examples of the design of learner profiles, teacher files, report cards, record sheets and schedules are provided.

(3) This policy document focuses on assessment policy for both internal assessment comprising School-Based Assessment and Practical Assessment Tasks where applicable, and the end-of-year examinations.

CHAPTER 2

ASSESSMENT OF THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM STATEMENT GRADES R - 12

4. TYPES OF ASSESSMENT

(1) Classroom assessment should be both informal and formal. In both cases it is important that learners know what knowledge and skills are being assessed and feedback should be provided to learners after assessment to enhance the learning experience.

(2) Informal (assessment for/learning) or daily assessment is the monitoring and enhancing of learners' progress. This is done through teacher observation and teacher-learner interactions, which may be initiated by either teachers or learners. Informal or daily assessment may be as simple as stopping during the lesson to observe learners or to discuss with the learners how learning is progressing. It should be used to provide feedback to the learners and teachers, close the gaps in learners' knowledge and skills and improve teaching.

(3) Formal assessment (assessment of learning) provides teachers with a systematic way of evaluating how well learners are progressing in a particular subject and in a grade. Teachers must ensure that assessment criteria are very clear to the learners before the assessment process. This involves explaining to the learners which knowledge and skills are being assessed and the required length of responses. Feedback should be provided to the learners after assessment and could take the form of whole-class discussion or teacher-learner interaction.

(4) Examples of formal assessments include projects, oral presentations, demonstrations, performances, tests, examinations, practical demonstrations, etc.

(5) The forms of assessment used should be appropriate to the age and the developmental level of the learners in the phase. The assessment tasks should be carefully designed to cover the content of the subject. The design of these tasks should therefore ensure that a variety of skills are assessed as contemplated in *chapter 4* of the various National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements.

(6) Progression (Grades R-8) and promotion (Grades 9-12) of learners to the next grade should be based on recorded evidence in formal assessment tasks. This means that those tasks that are used for formal assessment are recorded and should be used to decide whether a learner should progress or be promoted to the next grade.

(7) Teachers are required to record learner performance in all formal assessment tasks. They are not required to record performance in informal or daily assessment tasks. Teachers may however, choose to record performance in informal or daily assessment tasks in some cases to support the teaching and learning process.

(8) The teacher must submit the annual formal programme of assessment to the School Management Team (SMT) before the start of the school year. This will be used to draw up a school assessment plan in each grade. The school assessment plan should be provided to learners and parents in the first week of the first term.

8. COMPILATION OF THE SCHOOL-BASED ASSESSMENT AND PRACTICAL ASSESSMENT MARK

(1) Both School-Based Assessment and the Practical Assessment Task components must:

(a) comprise assessment tasks that constitute the learners' School-Based Assessment and Practical Assessment mark as contemplated in *chapter 4* of the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements;

(b) include a mark awarded for each assessment task and a consolidated mark;

(c) be guided by assessment components as specified for each subject in *chapter 4* of the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements as contemplated in *chapter 4* of the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements;

(d) be available for monitoring and moderation; and

(e) be evaluated, checked and authenticated by the teacher before being presented as the learner's evidence of performance.

- (2) The teacher file of assessment tasks must –
- (a) be a complete record of assessment in that particular subject;
 - (b) be maintained by the teacher for every subject taught in respect of the *National Curriculum Statement Grades R - 12*; and
 - (c) be available for monitoring and moderation purposes at every level.

CHAPTER 5

RECORDING AND REPORTING LEARNER PERFORMANCE

15. RECORDING

(1) Recording is a process in which the teacher documents the level of a learner's performance. In South African schools, this should indicate the progress towards the achievement as stipulated in the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements of all subjects listed in the *National Curriculum Statement Grades R - 12*. Records of learner performance should provide evidence of the learner's conceptual progression within a grade and his or her readiness to progress/promotion to the next grade.

(2) Records of learner performance should also be used to verify the progress made by teachers and learners in the teaching and learning process. Records should be used to monitor learning and to plan ahead.

16. REPORTING

(1) Reporting is a process of communicating learner performance to learners, parents, schools and the other stakeholders such as the employers, tertiary institutions, etc. Learner performance can be reported in a number of ways. These include report cards, parents' meetings, school visitation days, parent-teacher conferences, phone calls, letters, class or school newsletters, etc.

(2) The main purpose of reporting is to:

- (a) provide learners with regular feedback, this feedback should be developmental;
- (b) inform parents/guardians on the progress of the individual learner; and
- (c) give information to schools and districts or regional offices on the current level of performance of learners.

(3) Recorded information should:

- (a) inform teachers and others about the performance of learners;
- (b) be used to provide constructive feedback to learners about their progress;
- (c) be used to provide feedback about the performance of learners to parents, and other role-players;
- (d) inform the planning of teaching and learning activities; and
- (e) inform intervention strategies.

(4) The language in which recording and reporting is done should be in accordance with the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) as informed by the *Language-in-Education Policy* of 1997. In the case of dual medium schools, one of the languages used as LoLT should be utilised for reporting purposes, while the language of recording should be any of the languages used for learning and teaching.

17. PRINCIPLES FOR RECORDING AND REPORTING

The following principles underpin the approach to both recording and reporting:

(1) Recording of learner performance is against the assessment task and reporting is against the mark obtained in a term, semester or year.

(2) Teachers should show in their files that they have covered all the formal tasks set.

(3) National codes and/or marks, percentages and comments can be used for recording and reporting purposes.

(4) The following is applicable to recording and reporting per phase:

(a) Foundation Phase (Grades R – 3): Record and report in national codes and their descriptions.

(b) Intermediate Phase (Grades 4 – 6): Record and report in national codes and their descriptions and percentages.

(c) Senior Phase (Grades 7 – 9): Record and report in national codes and their descriptions percentages.

(d) Grades 10 – 12: Record in marks and report in percentages.

(5) The schedule and the report card should indicate the overall level of performance of a learner.

(6) In the case of Languages, each language that the learner offers should be recorded and reported on separately according to the different levels on which they are offered. For example, Home Language – English, First Additional Language – IsiXhosa, Second Additional Language – Afrikaans Second Additional Language.

(7) The number of formal assessment tasks to be recorded in each phase is provided in *chapter 4* of the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements.

(8) The recorded pieces of evidence should reflect a variety of forms of assessment. More information on this is provided in *chapter 4* of the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements.

(9) Teachers must report regularly to learners and parents on the progress of learners. Schools are required to provide feedback to parents on the programme of assessment using a formal reporting tool such as a report card. In addition to the report cards, other reporting mechanisms such as parents' meetings, school visitation days, parent-teacher conferences, phone calls, letters, class or school newsletters, etc. may be used. The school will determine the format of these reporting strategies.

18. RECORDING AND REPORTING IN GRADES R – 3

(1) The national codes and their descriptions provided in Table 1 should be used for recording and reporting learner performance in the Foundation Phase (Grades R – 3). Comments should be used to describe learner performance.

**Table 1: Codes and descriptions for recording and reporting
in Grades R - 3**

ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL	ACHIEVEMENT DESCRIPTION	MARKS %
7	Outstanding Achievement	80 – 100
6	Meritorious Achievement	70 – 79
5	Substantial Achievement	60 – 69
4	Adequate Achievement	50 – 59
3	Moderate Achievement	40 – 49
2	Elementary Achievement	30 – 39
1	Not Achieved	0 – 29

(2) In the Foundation Phase, the recording and reporting of learner performance should be against the four subjects offered, that is Home Language, First Additional Language, Mathematics and Life Skills.

National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R -12 (cf. Appendix E)

PROMOTION REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADES 1 -3

(1) Promotion from grade to grade through this phase within the appropriate age cohort should be the accepted norm, unless the learner displays a lack of competence to cope with the following grade's work. A learner, who is not ready to perform at the next level, should be assessed to determine the level of support required.

(2) The following are guidelines for determining a learner's progress in Grade R:

- (a) Adequate Achievement (Level 4) in one official language at Home Language level as contemplated in *paragraph 6(1)(a)*; and
- (b) Moderate Achievement (Level 3) in Mathematics as contemplated in *paragraph 6(1)(b)*.

(3) The following are guidelines to determine whether a learner should be permitted to progress from Grade 1 to 3 in the Foundation Phase:

(a) Adequate Achievement (Level 4) in one official language at Home Language level as contemplated in *paragraph 6(2)(a)*;

or

(b) Moderate Achievement (Level 3) in the second required official language at First Additional Language level as contemplated in *paragraph 6(2)(b)*; and

(c) Moderate Achievement (Level 3) in Mathematics as contemplated in *paragraph 6(2)(c)*.

(4) A learner who does not meet the requirements for promotion can be progressed to the next grade in order to prevent the learner being retained in the Foundation Phase for longer than four years, excluding Grade R.

8. ASSESSMENT

(1) Learners will be assessed internally according to the requirements specified in the policy document *National Protocol for Assessment Grades R – 12* and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements of the required subjects as contemplated in *paragraph 6*.

(2) The School-Based Assessment (SBA) mark as determined during the school year will be 100% of the total mark.

9. RECORDING AND REPORTING

(1) Seven levels of competence have been described for subjects listed in the *National Curriculum Statement Grades R - 12*. The various achievement levels and their corresponding percentage bands are shown in Table 4 below.

**TABLE 4: SCALE OF ACHIEVEMENT FOR THE NATIONAL
CURRICULUM STATEMENT GRADES R - 3**

ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL	ACHIEVEMENT DESCRIPTION	MARKS %
7	Outstanding Achievement	80 – 100
6	Meritorious Achievement	70 – 79
5	Substantial Achievement	60 – 69
4	Adequate Achievement	50 – 59
3	Moderate Achievement	40 – 49
2	Elementary Achievement	30 – 39
1	Not Achieved	0 – 29

5.3.4.5 Interpretation and use of assessment results (i.e., decision making)

In this section the focus is on how stakeholders at the various educational levels should interpret and use the assessment results. This includes the ANA results as well as school-based assessment results.

Annual National Assessments 2012: A guideline for the interpretation and use of ANA results (cf. Appendix C)

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to provide a guide on ***how to interpret*** and ***use*** the results of the Annual National Assessments (ANA). ANA is an important strategy of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to improve the quality of learning outcomes in the education system.

The results of ANA will enable the education sector to increase feedback evidence on how the various strategies and interventions that the Department puts in place impact on the critical aspect of education, viz. learner performance. The results of ANA should be seen as complimenting and further supporting the assessment programmes used by schools to continuously assess the progress of learners. The ANA results will form an important part of the school academic performance improvement plans (APIP).

The guidelines outline the purpose of ANA, the manner in which the results have been presented and should be interpreted and used. Both the broad and specific purposes for which the results should be used at different levels of the system are given. Finally and most importantly, the guidelines outline how ANA results should be integrated into all the programmes in the schooling system.

2. PURPOSE OF ANNUAL NATIONAL ASSESSMENTS

The purpose of ANA is to track learner performance each year in Literacy and Numeracy as the Department works towards the goal of improving learner performance in line with commitments made by government. The ANA results will be used to monitor progress, guide planning and the distribution of resources to help improve Literacy/Language and Numeracy/Mathematics knowledge and skills of learners in the Grades concerned. Among other things the results of ANA should:

- a. Provide the DBE with important information that will help the Department to identify areas where urgent attention is required in order to help improve learning success levels of learners;
- b. Assist provincial departments, including district offices, to make informed decisions about which schools require urgent attention in terms of providing necessary resources to improve learner performance in these subjects/ learning areas;
- c. Inform Government and the South African public as to how well the schools are serving the country's children where it matters most, namely, the attainment of functional literacy and numeracy skills that will enable them to study successfully in all subjects;
- d. Provide teachers with essential data about the Literacy/Language and Numeracy/Mathematics capabilities of learners in each Grade and thereby help them make informed decisions when planning teaching programmes;
- e. Inform individual teachers about how close or far they are to or from realizing the target goals they seek to attain through their teaching, and inspire them to realign their teaching strategies towards accomplishing such goals.
- f. Provide parents with a better picture of the levels of learner performance in the schools so that parents are better informed when they become involved in efforts to improve performance, for instance through decision-making in the school governing body and support to learners in the home.

- g. Provide an appropriate benchmark for teachers in the development of assessment tasks that form part of their school-based assessment programmes.
- h. Assist school management teams to select and implement school-based interventions for improving learner performance in Languages and Mathematics.

3. THE PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

The results have been presented in both quantitative and qualitative terms as follows:-

3.1 Quantitative information

The following are the quantitative measures of performance that have been reported:-

(a) Average mark

The average performance refers to a single mark that summarises the performance of all the learners in a particular test, for a particular group of learners. The average mark is determined by finding the sum of all marks and dividing the sum by the number of candidates in the group (see **Table 1** below). In **Table 1** an example of the average mark is indicated, for the group in a particular class. The table includes the mark obtained by each learner and the average mark of the class group is **10.4**.

Table 1: The average mark of learners

No.	Name of Learner	Mark of learner
1.	Mary	11
2.	Sipho	16
3.	Anne	7
4.	John	5
5.	Ron	13
Average		10.4

It is important to note that some learners shall have performed above and others below the average mark. In the above table, three learners (Mary, Sipho and Ron) scored above the average mark while two learners (Anne and John) scored below the average mark. It can, therefore, be observed that more learners scored above the average mark than below. If the total mark of the test is 20 marks, the average percentage score is calculated as $10.4 \div 20 = 52\%$. This implies that the overall performance of the class is, mediocre.

(b) Median mark

The median mark is the middle mark, after all marks are ranked from highest to lowest. In **Table 2** an example of a median mark is indicated. In **Table 2** five scores have been listed from the highest to the lowest. The middle mark is the 3rd score. Therefore, the median mark is 11.

Table 2: The median mark of learners

No.	Learner marks in rank order
1.	16
2.	13
3.	11
4.	7
5.	5

In the above table there is an odd number of marks (viz. 5). Two learners scored above the median and two learners scored below the median. If the total number of candidates is an even number, then the middle mark is determined by adding the 3rd and 4th score and dividing 2. The median in **Table 2** indicates that 50% of the learners attained a mark above a score of 11, and another 50% attained a mark below 11. The median mark can also be reflected as a percentage i.e. $11 \div 20 = 55\%$. This, therefore, implies that 50% of the learners attained a mark below 55%.

(c) Acceptable performance levels

The National Curriculum Statement (NCS) for the General Education and Training (GET), grades learner achievement on a seven-point scale as follows:

Level 1, (0 to 29%) labelled as “Not achieved”

Level 2, (30% to 39%) labelled as “Elementary Achievement”

Level 3, (40% to 49%) labelled as “Moderate Achievement”.

Level 4, (50% to 59% and) labelled as “Adequate Achievement”.

Level 5, (60% to 69% and) labelled as “Substantial Achievement”.

Level 6, (70% to 79% and) labelled as “Meritorious Achievement”.

Level 7, (80% to 100% and) labelled as “Outstanding Achievement”.

In terms of the above grading, “adequate achievement” or acceptable level of performance is associated with a mark of 50% and above, since a mark of 50% and above is referred to as “achieved”.

Acceptable learner performance in ANA is, therefore, reported in terms of the number of learners that obtained a mark of 50% and above.

3.2 Qualitative information

For meaningful interventions to improve teaching and learning, an analysis of the specific knowledge and skills that learners were able or not able to demonstrate in the tests should be carried out at school level by subject teachers. Qualitative information consists mainly of brief descriptions of specific knowledge and skills that learners were not able to demonstrate in the tests. This will also include knowledge and skills that learners were able or not able to demonstrate at acceptable levels of performance. This information is obtained from analysing performance of learners in each question in each test.

After having established the concepts, skills and content areas that are problematic, the teacher must do the following:

- Ensure that his/her grasp of the concepts, skills and knowledge is correct.
- Seek additional help from the Head of Department, Subject Head or district subject specialist, if there is doubt.
- Develop and use appropriate methods to teach the concepts, skills and content. Exposing learners to the variety of techniques might be a useful approach.
- After having re-taught these concepts, knowledge and skills, conduct a re-test of these areas to establish whether there has been an improvement.

5. THE USE OF THE ANA RESULTS

The results will be used for both broad and specific purposes and at different levels of the system to realise improvements in the levels and quality of learner performance.

5.1 Broad Application

The ANA results provide valuable information for the system to benchmark performance in both Literacy and Numeracy and provide a measure so as to track progress over the years towards the achievement of set targets.

One level of use will be to equip education officials and teachers to interpret the information presented and use it to develop interventions to address areas of poor performance.

In areas of particular weakness, the results will give clear indication of any additional learning materials to be developed both by the teacher or subject specialist to support classroom teaching and assessment.

Districts will develop focused interventions, based on what the results show, for schools that need them the most. Schools will be able to set annual targets in relation to the national benchmark of 60% of learners achieving acceptable levels in literacy and numeracy by 2014.

For learners, information will be provided on the skill areas where they are strong and where they experience challenges. Information from ANA will be used to direct teachers towards particular kinds of teacher development programmes and to engage seriously with school principals around what the problems in the school are.

ANA results will enable districts, parents and schools to have a standard source of information to determine which schools, learners and teachers are most urgently in need of support. They will be alerted, for instance to programmes that may not be working as intended or the need to fill critical teaching posts, and ensuring that schools receive the full allocation of resources in line with the funding policy.

However, ANA results will not be used as a basis for providing more than the normal amount of resources for a school as this could produce a situation where schools deliberately perform poorly in order to attract additional resources. Instead, the current approach of providing more resources to poorer school communities to compensate for home background disadvantage should be continued.

5.2 Specific use at different levels of the system

The information emanating from ANA must filter through every level of the system and must direct teaching and learning. This requires a continuous engagement with the information by all officials and educators, together with parents. It is therefore proposed that ANA results be used as follows at each of the levels:

5.2.1. School level

At the heart of all school improvement efforts is the important understanding that learning can and should improve on a continuous basis.

Learners come to school to learn, to find new challenges and to gain new understandings. The role of schools and classrooms is to create environments that enable learners to learn meaningfully using **evidence** to guide all decisions about learners and learning. The information that is generated from assessments is **key evidence** to continuous improvement in learning and teaching. It must be used to inform all decisions, plans and programmes for improvement.

(a) Teaching and learning

Decisions and plans on what, when and how to teach must be informed by the **evidence** that comes out of the assessments, both school-based and ANA assessments. In particular, **evidence** from ANA tests will help answer the following key questions for teachers:-

- **“What is the overall level of literacy/numeracy competency of my class?”**

To answer this question on the basis of **evidence**:-

- Calculate the **average percent** obtained by the learners in each of the literacy and numeracy tests (Sum of the marks obtained by individual learners divided by the number of learners and **expressed as a percentage**).
- If the average mark in the subject is equal to or greater than half of the total expected score (50% of or above the total test score), then the class as a whole has achieved the “acceptable” level of performance in that particular subject (literacy or numeracy), BUT some individual learners may not have achieved the acceptable level. Remember, we must have **evidence** that every learner succeeds!
- If the average mark in the subject is less than half of the total expected test score, then the class as a whole has NOT achieved the “acceptable” level of performance in that particular subject, ALTHOUGH some individual learners may have achieved the acceptable level.
- Decide whether the **evidence** suggests that it is the whole class or part of the class that requires focused attention to help them improve their performance.

i.) “Which learners in my class have not achieved the acceptable levels of performance in each of literacy and numeracy?”

To get **evidence** for answering this question:-

- Find out who the specific learners are that need focused attention so that you can develop appropriate interventions i.e. all those who have attained a score below 50%. Remember, **one-size-fits-all** intervention strategies will not give you the expected results!
- Find out, from other sources of **evidence** that exist within the school, what characterises the identified underperforming learners. Are they mostly girls or boys? Are they learners who are often absent from school (from attendance registers)? Are they learners who receive little or no educational support at home? Are there learners who consistently under-perform in their school based assessment? Is there anything common among the underperforming learners that require interventions at school level rather than just specific teaching strategies at classroom level?

ii.) “What were the knowledge and skills that the underperforming learners could not demonstrate in the tests?”

To get **evidence** for answering this question:-

- Find out in which individual test questions learners obtained the lowest scores in each subject, i.e. challenging questions, as indicated by the **Question Analysis** data.
- Use your professional knowledge of the subject to find out the knowledge and skills that the learners required in order to answer **each** of the challenging questions correctly.
- Develop focused teaching strategies to teach the knowledge and skills that the **evidence** at hand shows were lacking among the learners and, as a result, they found specific questions challenging. For example, learners who could not answer questions that required knowledge of operations on different **types of fractions** may be lacking either the **conceptual knowledge** of fractions or the

techniques required for this purpose or **both**. In literacy, learners who could not answer questions based on **reading comprehension** passages may be lacking '**reading fluency**' skills.

- Decide whether you will need any **specific** professional support in order to effectively teach the identified knowledge and skills which your learners lack, e.g. a workshop on how to teach operations (i.e. addition, subtraction, division or multiplication) on different types of fractions, or expert guidance on how to teach '**reading fluency**'. If so, decide if the specific professional support you require is available within the school or in the district and submit a request to the School Management Team (SMT).
- Decide if there are any specific **resources** that you will need to enable you to teach the knowledge and skills that **evidence** shows are lacking among your learners. If so, decide if the required resources are readily available at school or need to be obtained from outside the school and submit your request to the SMT.

iii.) "How will the collected evidence be used to improve learner performance?"

To use the collected **evidence**:-

- Record the **average** percent of your class in each subject as **baseline information**, i.e. the starting point towards improvement, and set a **target percentage**.
- Decide on the amount (as a percentage) by which you want the **average mark** percent of your class to increase in the next round of assessment. For instance, if the current average mark of your class is 45% (**baseline**), you may decide that you want this mark to increase by 5% to 50% (**target**).

iv.) "What are you going to do differently to achieve your target?"

In order to have **evidence**-based confidence that you will achieve your target:-

- Develop teaching strategies that will ensure that each of your learners learns effectively.
- Set tests of high quality that include questions which challenge learners in the target knowledge and skills that you want them to improve and **assess regularly**

through **both** informal formative assessment and summative assessment (e.g. weekly, monthly and quarterly tests) to monitor if average class marks (in percentage) increase.

- Ask your learners to set personal improvement targets as well and provide them with continual feedback at individual level, i.e. discuss with each of them whether their scores are improving, remaining the same or decreasing.

(b) Management

SMTs are responsible for the overall school improvement plan, based on evidence. The test marks provide the key **evidence** that SMTs need to monitor if learning in the school remains unchanged, improves or declines. In particular, **evidence** from ANA tests will help SMTs answer the following key questions for school management that will improve learner performance:-

(i) “What is the baseline performance of our school in literacy and numeracy?”

To get an **evidence-based** answer to this question for **each** subject:-

- Collect mark schedules from class teachers and find out what the **average marks** (in percentages) in each Grade are.
- If the average mark in a Grade is equal to or greater than half of the total expected score (50% of or above the total test mark), then the Grade as a whole has achieved the “acceptable” level of performance, BUT some individual learners may not have achieved the acceptable level. Remember, we must have **evidence** that every learner succeeds!
- If the average mark in a Grade is less than half of the total expected test mark, then the Grade as a whole has NOT achieved the “acceptable” level of performance, ALTHOUGH some individual learners may have achieved the acceptable level.

(ii) “What kind of support needs to be given to teachers in the underperforming Grades?”

To have **evidence-based** answers to this question:-

- Discuss with the affected Grade teacher(s) which learners in the Grade are underperforming. Are they mostly girls or boys? Are they learners who are often absent from school (from attendance registers)?

Are they learners who receive little or no educational support at home? Is there anything common among the underperforming learners that require interventions at school level, e.g. policies regulating learner attendance, parental involvement, etc.?

- Discuss with the affected Grade teacher(s) the specific professional support that they have identified as their need and assist to get the assistance within the school or from the district.
- Pool the resource needs identified by Grade teachers and **prioritise** these in the school budget on short-, medium and long-term basis. Short-term could be six months or less, medium-term one year and long-term two years.

(iii) “How will the collected evidence be used to improve learner performance?”

To answer this question:-

- Discuss with all Grade teachers what they propose as improvement targets based on the current baseline average marks.
- Ensure that targets are realistic. For instance, it would be helpful to find out how the school performance compares with well-performing schools which are in similar circumstances in the district.
- Ensure that targets are meaningful. For instance, targets that that can be achieved easily without challenging the learning abilities of learners are not helpful.
- In collaboration with Grade teachers, identify individual learners who may have been provided with or may need more learning support (especially in the case of a learner with identified learning barriers).

(iv) “What are you going to do differently to achieve your targets?”

To answer this question:-

- Identify areas of weakness and develop appropriate school remedial programmes
- Ensure that school remedial programmes address teacher development, learner support, subject support, material support or possible re-organisation.

(c) Governance

School Governing Bodies will:-

- Make informed decisions, based on the results, on how schools and communities should cooperate to improve learner performance
- Provide support to ensure school functionality.

5.2.2. District level

(a) Management support

The circuit manager will:-

(i) Analyse performance of all the schools in his/her circuit. This will entail looking at the average mark per school, per subject, per Grade, together with the acceptable level of performance of each school, per subject, per Grade.

(ii) Every school that has an average mark of below 50%, and an acceptable level of performance, below 50%, in a particular subject and Grade, must be regarded as under-performing.

(iii) After having identified the under-performing schools, the circuit manager must evaluate other evidence at his disposal regarding the schools, which must include:

- Management competency of the principal.
- Collective management competency of the SMT.
- Vacant posts at the school, which includes SMT.
- Qualifications and experience of the teachers, in the subjects where poor performance is noted.
- Availability of LTSM at the school, in the identified subjects (e.g. Mathematics).
- Whether teachers have spent the required time on the subject.

(iv) The under-performing schools must be targeted for special intervention which includes the following:

- A visit by the circuit manager and the subject specialist.
- During the school visit the school principal, SMT and the teacher must be interviewed to establish the specific reasons for the under-performance.

- Collectively, an improvement plan must be established, targeting the specific areas of under-performance and clear improvement strategies.
- Together with the management and the teacher, a school target must be set for the school in the specified subject.
- The circuit manager and the subject specialist must on a continuous basis support the school in terms of the implementation of the improvement plan and monitor the improvement.
- The monitoring of the improvement will be based on performance in tests set by the school

(v) In addition to the above the circuit manager must

- Guide schools to include information from ANA in their annual reporting templates
- Collect all annual reports from schools in his/her circuit.
- Cluster schools and identify common areas of support.
- Develop a circuit intervention plan based on plans submitted by the schools in the circuit with clearly defined targets.
- Support schools in providing identified needs such as textbooks and resources.

(b) Subject support

The subject specialist, must:

(i) Work in conjunction with the circuit manager to analyse the quantitative data per school and identify schools that demonstrate poor performance, in specific subjects.

The quantitative analysis will include:

- comparing school performance to other similar schools
- comparing school performance to circuit, district and provincial performance

(ii) Identify the reasons for poor performance at the identified schools, based on the evidence that he/she has available regarding the school. This will include the factors listed in (a) (iii) above and more specifically the teaching competency of the teachers where under-performance is identified.

(iii) Together with the circuit manager visit the school and identify the reasons for the poor performance.

(iv) Take responsibility for addressing all the subject related issues, which may include:

- Knowledge and skills deficiency in particular aspects of the subject.
- Planning a teaching programme and preparation for a lesson.
- Development of an assessment programme.
- Development of assessment tasks that are of appropriate standard.
- Marking of assessment tasks.
- Training of the teachers in conducting item analysis at school level.
- Development of remedial programme targeting specific areas of weakness.

(v) Conduct a question analysis on a sample of scripts from across the schools in the circuit or from the item analysis reports of the schools, identify the common areas of weakness across the district/circuit.

(vi) Based on the common areas of weakness that exist across the circuit/district, the subject specialist will plan a circuit/district intervention, which may include:

- A training session for teachers in the identified areas of weakness.
- Development of support material.

(vii) Monitor and support the under-performing schools and teachers and provide them with feedback with progress made, based on their agreed target.

5.2.3 Provincial level

The provincial education department (PED) must:

- Analyse the quantitative data per district, to identify poor performing districts and schools.
 - Support poor performing districts in developing their remedial programme.
 - Identify areas of weakness relating to particular learning areas and Grades. The PED must develop special support programmes directed at these specific learning areas.
 - Agree on targets for each district and monitor these districts with regard to reaching these targets.
-
- Conduct monitoring on sample of schools across districts to evaluate intervention strategies employed to effect school improvement

- Write district wide reports with clear improvement plans
- Must use the ANA results to inform the APIP.

5.2.4. National level

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) must:

- Monitor the national progress on learner achievement in mathematics and languages against set targets.
- Use the ANA results as a systemic tool for the development of policy, review and support.
- Write annually, a national report that informs parents and relevant stakeholders on the results of learners.
- Write and amend guidelines on the utilisation of results.
- Construct a management plan for the interventions based on the results.

5.3.4.6 Support to stakeholders

In this section the focus is on determining the kind of support that should be provided to stakeholders at various educational levels, and specifically as the support relates to assessment issues.

Extract from the Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025 (cf. Appendix D)

How is ANA intended to make a difference?

Testing on its own is, of course, not a guarantee that learning outcomes will improve. The mechanisms by which ANA will impact on outcomes must be made very clear, partly because this influences the way in which ANA is carried out. ANA is expected to improve learning in four key ways:

Exposing teachers to best practices in assessment. Until recently teachers, in particular teachers below Grade 9 level, were not given much practical guidance on how to assess learners. This, of course, varied across schools and provinces, with some school principals or provincial departments providing more guidance than others. Where the provincial department implemented province-wide standardised assessments, this has been found to change teacher practices for the better.

What ANA does is that it exposes all teachers across the country to what national experts consider best practice in assessments. This will give all teachers a clearer idea of how to proceed when they develop their own assessments at critical points in the school year.

Targeting interventions to the schools that need them most. Before ANA, there was almost no information that districts could use to determine which primary schools were experiencing the most serious teaching and learning problems. Even where districts collected pass rates and year-end marks from primary schools, these were not standardised so it was difficult to use this information to determine which schools were performing poorly. With ANA, districts have a standard source of information to determine which schools are most urgently in need of support. Information from ANA should be used to direct teachers towards particular kinds of teacher development programmes and to engage seriously with school principals on what the problems in the school comprise. Poor ANA results can also alert districts to the fact that some things are not working as they should. For instance, critical teaching posts may have been left empty or the school may not have received its full school allocation in line with the funding policy. However, ANA should not be used as a basis for providing more than the normal amount of resources for a school, as this could produce a situation where schools deliberately perform poorly in order to attract additional resources. Instead, the current approach of providing more resources to poorer school communities to compensate for a home background disadvantage should be continued.

Giving schools the opportunity to pride themselves in their own improvement. ANA makes it possible for primary schools to do what secondary schools with Grade 12 have been able to do for many years: Take pride in knowing that efforts to improve the teaching and learning situation in the school have paid off. It is important that schools should be in a position to know how well they perform in all the phases of the curriculum that they offer. Moreover, if districts know which schools are successful, it becomes easier to identify model schools in the district, which can be used to guide practices in other schools in the district.

Giving parents better information on the education of their children. Parents invest much effort and money into ensuring that their children attend school regularly and are given support in the home.

Parents have a right to know how well the schools they send their children to perform. Obviously, ANA cannot tell parents everything they need to know about their school, but it will provide critical information about two vital areas: results in languages and results in mathematics. It is widely recognised that, if schools fail to provide a good education in these two areas, then the overall education of the child is compromised. The intention is for ANA to assist parents in supporting their children. If the results of individual children are poor, then more encouragement from the home could help. If the average result in the school is below what it should be, then ANA provides a good basis for parents to ask the school questions about what is wrong and to become involved in putting together a plan for the school that will improve the situation.

5.3.4.7 Progress monitoring

In this section, the focus is on determining what is regarded as progress monitoring and how it should be done using assessment results.

Extract from the Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025 (cf. Appendix D)

Output goals that look at learning outcomes and coverage (Goals 1 to 13)

Goals 1 to 13 deal with the outputs that we want to see. Goals 14 to 27, on the other hand, deal with the mechanisms for achieving the desired outputs. Goals 1 to 6 focus on the percentage of learners achieving specific minimum levels in specific subjects.

These goals are thus largely focussed on addressing improvements at the lower end of the performance spectrum. Goals 7 to 9 deal with the *average* performance in key subjects. These goals therefore focus on improving performance across the whole performance spectrum. If any learner performs better, then the overall average rises. Every school and every learner therefore has a role to play in terms of Goals 7 to 9. Finally, Goals 10 to 13 deal with the attainment of, or attendance in, specific levels of the schooling system, with no reference to subject. These goals are thus strongly focussed on access to education.

Goal 1: Increase the number of learners in Grade 3 who, by the end of the year, have mastered the minimum language and numeracy competencies for Grade 3.

Problem statement

UNESCO's Education for All campaign includes six global goals for schools. The sixth goal focuses on 'Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills'. This reflects the universal recognition that it is not enough to focus on getting all children into school. The learning outcomes achieved in the school system must be of an adequate standard and should, moreover, be measured. This informs many of the goals contained in this Action Plan. South Africa's Systemic Evaluation programme, which tested Grade 3 learners, using standardised tests, in 2001 and 2007, found that in both years the performance of learners was well below what it should have been. In 2007, only 48% of learners were found to have reached a basic level of competency in language. The figure for numeracy was even lower, at 43%. Why do learners in South Africa do so poorly in the Foundation Phase (Grades 1 to 3)? The available studies generally point towards similar key problems in the classroom. The capacity of teachers to identify and apply appropriate teaching methods is limited. Very often they had insufficient training on what standards to aim for. Instead, teachers were expected to establish standards in their assessments of learners in relative isolation from other teachers.

Pacing, or the speed with which teachers move from one topic to the next, was too slow, which was partly due to insufficient teacher capacity, but also because teachers must often face large classes with many learners experiencing learning difficulties related to difficult home circumstances. In reading and writing, there was too much focus on single words, as opposed to whole sentences. In numeracy, learners were generally given too few opportunities to solve problems on their own.

As pointed out by the 2009 curriculum review, school principals and teachers were too often faced by a curriculum that was unclear, partly because the national curriculum was re-interpreted at provincial level and even at district level, leading to a profusion of sometimes inconsistent curriculum documents. Clearly, the policy on what must be taught has to be very clear and should not give rise to confusion.

The review also indicated that very little guidance has been given to teachers of multi-grade classes, despite the fact that such classes are a widespread phenomenon. Of all learners in primary schools, 13% find themselves in schools where multi-grade teaching takes place in one or more grades. (The figure is 6% for secondary schools.) Multi-

grade teaching exists in all provinces. The percentage of all learners who are in a school that practices at least some multi-grade teaching is over 5% in all provinces. This figure is especially high in the Eastern Cape, however, at 22%¹⁴. Teachers who do multigrade teaching need special guidance with the curriculum and in the in-service training they receive.

Government's response

In 2010, President Zuma announced in the State of the Nation address the target that 60% of learners should attain a basically acceptable level of performance in literacy and numeracy by 2014. The address also indicated that Annual National Assessment (ANA) results of individual learners should be shared with parents. As explained in section 5, assessment results that are comparable across schools are an essential basis for ensuring that the right kind of support flows to the right schools and teachers.

Many different interventions and types of support for schools and teachers are explained under Goals 14 to 27, in order to improve the probability that learning outcomes in schools will improve. In the case of the Foundation Phase, many of the interventions described in the Action Plan are refinements to the Foundations for Learning programme, launched in 2008.

This programme represented a major shift towards providing better teaching methodology guidance to teachers and ensuring that learners have the materials they need. One matter that is of particular importance for the Foundation Phase, is the selection of the language used for teaching and learning in the classroom. Extensive evidence points towards the importance of using home language during the first three or so years of a child's schooling, so that a sufficiently solid understanding of key concepts may be established. It is estimated that currently, approximately 80% of learners experience learning and teaching in the classroom in their home language during the Foundation Phase.

This figure has risen by a few percentage points in recent years, partly as a result of a strong emphasis in the curriculum on the use of home language in the Foundation Phase. This emphasis should continue. At the same time it is important to establish that the use of home language is indeed leading to better learning outcomes. Although the 2002 curriculum encourages spending some time on English every week in the case of

learners whose home language is not English, starting from Grade 1, this has not been compulsory and the practice has been scarce. Only approximately 1% of learners who are taught in an African language in Grade 1 also devote some time to English. The low level of attention devoted to English as an additional language in Grades 1, 2 and 3 was identified as a problem by the 2009 curriculum review. More in particular, the current situation makes it more difficult for learners to adjust to English from Grade 4 onwards. Thus, whilst there is a need for more widespread and effective use of African languages in the Foundation Phase, there is, at the same time, a need to strengthen the presence of English as a first additional language.

Practical steps to support the latter were taken in 2010 and will continue during ensuing years. As pointed out in some public comments received during 2010, whilst it is important to focus strongly on improving learning outcomes in the Foundation Phase, delivery targets and pressure to improve should not detract from the fundamental need for learning to be fun, and for the Foundation Phase to be used as a time to instil a love for learning in children. It is a passion for education and not a fear of not meeting targets that must ultimately drive education improvement.

Monitoring of progress

The following two indicators will be important for measuring progress with respect to Goal 1. At the same time, other statistics will also need to be tracked, relating to, for instance, the choice of language in the classroom, the age of learners, teaching methods, the contact time between learners and teachers and access to pre-primary schooling.

Indicators 1.1 and 1.2: Percentage of Grade 3 learners performing at the required literacy/ numeracy level according to the country's Annual National Assessments.

Standardised information on Grade 3 learner performance in literacy and numeracy became available for the first time with the 2001 Systemic Evaluation. The 2007 Systemic Evaluation repeated this Grade 3 assessment. Starting in 2008, standardised tests have been run every year in Grade 3 as part of ANA. However, these ANA tests involved schools-based administration and marking of tests, meaning that the results were not as rigorously standardised as those of the Systemic Evaluation. In 2011, an

ANA verification sample will involve the same standardisation and controls as is found in the Systemic Evaluation and this will result in sufficiently standardised provincial and national values to make comparisons across time possible. The 'required' level of literacy or numeracy will be a level that would reflect a basic compliance with the standards set out in the curriculum. Competency in literacy will be measured in the learner's language of learning and teaching although, adding an assessment in English for those learners who will begin using English as the language of learning and teaching in Grade 4, is under consideration. After 2011, the ANA verification is expected to be repeated every year.

Care will need to be taken when comparing the 2011 ANA verification results to those of the 2007 Systemic Evaluation. If the tests as a whole are not sufficiently comparable, then comparison across similar items would be necessary. These data can, to some extent, be used to track progress in the years when there is no ANA verification sample. However, because the universal ANA results will not be the product of the same levels of quality control as those from verification ANA, they will have to be treated with considerable caution. More details on ANA can be found in section 5.

During this second step of the action research project, my aim was to present the data collected during the semi-structured interviews and the focus group interviews as narratives and to organise the data into three sections, namely the data collected at district level, school level, and classroom level. In addition, the data was presented and organised in question format as they relate to the research questions presented in chapter 1. The data collected in the documents are presented as extracts and organised according to the themes identified in the semi-structured interviews and the focus group interviews. I read through each of the documents four times. I then selected the extracts that specifically addressed assessment and also extracts that could corroborate what stakeholders had mentioned at district, school and classroom level. Although the extracts are lengthy, I wanted to have a comprehensive picture of the problem under investigation, namely progress monitoring assessment.

5.4 Analysis and interpretation of data

Johnson (2008) suggests that “as you collect your data, analyze them by looking for themes, categories, or patterns that emerge” (p. 63). Analyses of the data lead me to the identification of the following patterns or themes:

5.4.1 Challenges

An analysis of the data (cf. sections 5.3.1 through 5.3.4) indicates that **improving learning outcomes** stands out as the greatest challenge currently facing South African education. Output 2 which focuses on **undertaking regular assessments to track progress** is important and is required for the monitoring of several of the output goals and indicators as specified in the *Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025*. Output 2 specifically focuses on the Annual National Assessment programme implemented in 2011. The Department of Basic Education is, therefore, placing a great deal of emphasis on the Annual National Assessment programme. Targets have been set for the country as well as for the provinces. The pressure on provinces, districts, schools and teachers is tremendous. The reason – improved learner performance in language/literacy. Teachers get ANA exemplars, pre-ANA and ANA to administer to the learners.

Despite the enthusiasm for these assessments at the district level and the considerable resources that are being expended on them, the fact remains that they cover too long a period of teaching and provide too little detail for effective use in on-going instructional planning. At best, they function more as snapshots of learner progress. I am of the opinion that they can best be described as **early warning summative tools** rather than as tools that can be formative to teaching and learning.

ANA are formative assessments that should be used to monitor the language/literacy progress of learners at national and provincial level: How are we doing as a nation? How are we doing at provincial level? Have we improved? Are the results plausible? Did we achieve our target?

Although it is explicitly stated that schools should use the ANA in conjunction with the school assessment programme, ANA seems to be dominating the assessment environment at all levels. It does not make sense that teachers should, based on the ANA results, write learner reports in which they identify each learner’s strengths and

needs (cf. Appendix I). In most cases ANA contains one question on, for example, identifying initial sounds (e.g., Grade 1). Does this mean that if the learner did not answer that question correctly that he/she can't identify initial sounds?

There also seems to be very limited instructional decision-making that takes place utilising ANA and school-based assessment results, specifically for the purpose of changing teaching practices and supporting groups of learners as well as individual learners.

Subject advisors state that they need to support schools and teachers with interventions, but they don't know what types of interventions. In their expressed need for interventions the district officials did not seem to make the link between assessment and the types of intervention that would be needed. I also got the impression that a "one size fits all" intervention would suffice for all schools and learners: *"We have to give the schools something."*

My reflection on this theme highlights the fact that I think ANA should be **part of a dynamic, comprehensive assessment and intervention system** which informs instructional decision making and supports differentiated learner support.

5.4.2 Planning assessment

An analysis of the data indicates that the planning of assessment focuses on a number of aspects related to "logistics":

- What is used as planning guide? The CAPS document and the Platinum book are used as primary guiding documents (cf. Appendix K; Appendix N).
- Who administers assessments? The teachers are responsible for conducting formal and informal assessments.
- Where are assessments administered? The assessments are administered in the classrooms.
- What is assessed? The literacy skills as outlined in the CAPS document. For example, **Term 1: Formal Assessment Activity 1 (Phonics)** – identifies letter-sound relationships of some single letters, for example, l, o, h, m, a, b, t, c. There should be 2 vowels and at least 6 consonants.

- When does assessment take place? Assessment is planned on a weekly basis and is usually administered upon completion of a unit or theme of work related to specific skills (cf. Appendix M; Appendix N).

At district level assessment planning revolves around ANA exemplars, pre-ANA, and ANA. The primary purpose of the planning seems to be administrative: who will put exemplar papers on a CD, and distribute it to the schools, photocopying ANA papers, drawing up mark sheets, monitoring at schools, collecting ANA papers, and training teachers on the interpretation of the memorandum.

My reflection on planning assessment can be summarised as follows:

Assessment planning relies exclusively on the CAPS document. Within the CAPS document the teaching content is linked to what is required in the informal and formal assessment activities. However, there is no indication that the assessment planning also incorporates an element of instructional decision making (i.e., instructional change) or possible learner support.

5.4.3 Setting goals, indicators or targets

An analysis of the results indicates that the goal relevant to this study is: **Increase the number of learners in Grade 3 who by the end of the year have mastered the minimum language and numeracy competencies for Grade 3.** The specific indicator is: **Percentage of Grade 3 learners performing at the required literacy level according to the country's Annual National Assessment.** The national target has been set at 60% for 2014 and 75% for 2019. The North West Province provincial target has been set at 56% for 2014.

From the data it is clear that all targets relate to improving overall language/literacy performance. For example, at district level the target is aligned with the provincial target, namely that 56% of the learners in Grade 3 should achieve acceptable levels of competency. At school level the target can be as high as 98% of the learners achieving acceptable levels of competence.

My reflection on the targets is that there is **no** indication that any **individual targets** are set for learners on the core foundational literacy skills. There is no way of determining whether there is **growth** in the learners' core foundational skills. I think benchmark goals (i.e., a research-based target score representing the lowest level of performance

on a measure that predicts reaching the next goal) can be useful as a predictor (Which learners are likely to need more support?), and as a goal (What are meaningful goals for intervention and teaching that will change the future performance for learners?).

5.4.4 Recording and reporting of assessment

The data indicate that assessment results are recorded in various formats, mostly guided by Department of Basic Education documents (cf. Appendices F, G, H, I, J, P, Q). Records should be used to monitor learning and to plan ahead. Recording of learner performance is against the assessment task, and reporting is against the mark obtained in a term, semester or year. In the foundation phase, recording and reporting is done by means of national codes and descriptions.

The main purpose of reporting is to provide learners with regular feedback, inform parents/guardians on the progress of the individual learner, and give information to schools and districts or regional offices on the current level of performance of learners.

Progression (Grades R-8) of learners to the next grade should be based on recorded evidence in formal assessment tasks. Teachers are required to record learner performance in all formal assessment tasks. With regard to school-based assessment, teachers are required to include a mark awarded for each assessment task and a consolidated mark.

My reflection on this theme indicates a concern that the recording and reporting of national codes and their descriptions do not pinpoint or emphasise a learner's strengths or needs in terms of the core foundational literacy skills. A code of 7 indicates that all is well, but this may in fact not be the case. A code gives an overall assessment of language/literacy competence, but does not give an indication of the core skills requiring support and/or differentiated levels of intervention.

This links with a statement made in the *National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12*:

*Promotion from grade to grade through this phase within the appropriate age cohort should be the accepted norm, **unless** the learner displays a lack of competence to cope with the following grade's work. A learner, who is not ready to perform at the next level, should be assessed to determine the level of support required.*

In order to make such a decision it would be helpful if teachers had more accurate, reliable and valid assessment results at their disposal which were focused on core foundational literacy skills that are indicators of later reading achievement.

5.4.5 Interpretation and use of assessment results (i.e., decision making)

From the data it is clear that ANA dominates conversations related to assessment, especially in the foundation phase. This is to be expected as ANA has been identified as an important strategy to improve the quality of learning outcomes in the education system (cf. section 5.3.4.5; Appendix C). The results of ANA should be seen as complimenting and further supporting the assessment programmes used by schools to continuously assess the progress of learners. ANA results are also supposed to play an important part in the school academic improvement plans (APIP). Among other things the results of ANA should:

Assist provincial departments, including district offices, to make informed decisions about which schools require urgent attention in terms of providing necessary resources to improve learner performance in these subjects;

Provide teachers with essential data about the Literacy/Language capabilities of learners in each grade and thereby help them make informed decisions when planning teaching programmes;

Inform individual teachers about how close or far they are to or from realising the target goals they seek to attain through their teaching, and to inspire them to realign their teaching strategies towards accomplishing such goals.

My reflection on this theme makes we wonder about the effective interpretation and use of assessment results, not only ANA but also school-based assessment results. I am of the opinion that the ANA results cannot be used to analyse learner performance at an individual level – one question on identifying initial sounds is not a true reflection of what that learner is capable of doing. I don't think that is what the ANA results should be used for. The school-based assessment results (both summative and formative) should fulfil this function. However, in order to ensure that all learners and schools receive targeted intervention it would be extremely valuable if a valid and reliable assessment and intervention system could be put in place. What if we could have all teachers responsible for teaching Grade 1 learners in a specific school administering formative

assessments in a standardised way in order to ensure that learner strengths and needs are identified in exactly the same way, and what if this could be done in exactly the same way in a district? The assessments should fulfil a formative and preventive function, and not be summative and indicate overall language/literacy performance and progress.

Both at district and school level there is no clear indication that the information generated from assessments is key evidence to continuous improvement in teaching and learning. Assessment results should be used to inform all decisions, plans and programmes for improvement. Decisions and plans on what, when and how to teach must be informed by the evidence that comes out of the assessments, both school-based and ANA assessments.

5.4.6 Support to stakeholders

The data indicates that the government documents play a crucial role in guiding the actions of the stakeholders. They very seldom deviate from the guidelines or requirements as stipulated in the documents. For example, at district level circuit managers and subject specialists are required to target underperforming schools (e.g., ANA results) for special support and intervention. Currently, the support is targeted towards helping the schools and teachers identify skill areas needing attention, helping them plan their assessment, helping them develop assessment activities and providing resources, if possible. The focus seems to be on professional development support. The district officials also mainly fulfil a monitoring and guiding role (i.e., are schools improving?).

With regard to learner support, this is limited to what the time allows. Some children will receive individual attention which usually includes additional or different activities or tasks to complete.

My reflection on this theme highlights teachers', and most probably also district officials, lack of training in good quality assessment as well as their inability to use assessment results to make effective instructional decisions, specifically with regard to implementing some sort of intervention or changing teaching when it is not working.

5.4.7 Progress monitoring

The data indicate that Department of Basic Education documentation, departmental officials and teachers tend to equate progress monitoring with improved performance as measured against Goal 1, its indicator, and specific provincial targets:

Goal 1 is formulated as:

Increase the number of learners in Grade 3 who by the end of the year have mastered the minimum language and numeracy competencies for Grade 3.

The indicator linked to this goal is:

Percentage of Grade learners performing at the required literacy level according to the country's Annual National Assessments.

The target for the North West Province is:

56% of the learners should achieve adequate achievement in language in Grade 3.

ANA results are also used as a means to monitor learners, districts and provinces in terms of progress. At classroom level teachers utilise their summative marks, which have been recorded on a self-developed score sheet, to determine when an “intervention” needs to take place and how they will do it.

In my reflection on this theme, I would like to emphasise the fact that the data indicates that progress monitoring relates specifically to “showing” or “proving” improved learning in language/literacy as measured by ANA. In addition to ANA, and at classroom level, teachers monitor progress fairly “randomly”; they can decide what to ‘look’ for, usually by using their summative assessment marks, when deciding whether a learner is making progress or not. It is possible, therefore, that no two teachers will look at the same foundational literacy skill when deciding whether the learner is making progress in a particular skill. There is also no guideline for teachers in terms of what to aim for in order to ensure that learners make progress in core foundational literacy skills that evidence-based research has shown to have a major effect on reading achievement.

Based on an analysis and interpretation of the data as well as my reflections during this step, I would like to emphasise the following aspects that I regard as essential to the **Action** part of the study:

For the District

Develop a data system or adopt an available data system that enables analysis of learner outcomes at multiple levels.

Develop a district-wide plan for collecting, interpreting, and using data. Dedicate time and develop structures for districts, schools and teachers to use data to alter instruction.

Use ANA data as well as formative data to evaluate the overall effectiveness of instructional support services provided by the district.

Conduct “deep analysis” to determine areas (i.e., core foundational literacy skills) in need of improvement.

For the School

Identify which learners are at risk for basic early literacy skill difficulties, and provide more intense instruction to learners identified as at risk.

Train teachers and principals in how to interpret and use data to change instruction.

For the Classroom

Employ efficient, easy-to-use progress monitoring measures to track the progress of learners that did not make benchmark goals or cut points for risk.

Use formative assessments to evaluate learning and determine what minor adjustments can be made to instruction to enhance learner understanding.

5.5 Action based on data

A review of scholarly literature on assessment as well as an analysis of the data collected for this study helped me to formulate **an action plan**. The action plan was to develop a school-wide progress monitoring assessment system for early literacy skills. A review of the international literature made me realise that one of the most respected and technically well-researched assessment systems for progress monitoring that could be used within the foundation phase was the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). A review of the national literature, an analysis of South African government documentation as well as semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews with stakeholders at district, school and classroom levels indicated that no

such system was in use in South Africa, and specifically within the Cloudy District. My first point of action was, however, to address the subject advisors' concern about "another assessment system":

Would you consider implementing a system-wide progress monitoring assessment system which provides accurate and usable assessment results at district, school and classroom level? Motivate your answer.

We'll that's what we use the ANA for. The teachers are already so overloaded that a new or different system will only confuse them. We know what the problems are; the children can't read properly; the problem is with phonics. More assessment won't help, we need to put interventions in place. The teachers don't know what to do if learners have problems. They can just stick to the CAPS. Our results are accurate, we know exactly which schools have problems.

There is no time to do more testing. We must test what the CAPS indicates and also do the ANA's - that's enough.

In order to ensure that the plan was accepted by all stakeholders, and that it had a chance of being implemented successfully, I started by aligning the DIBELS measures with the CAPS document, specifically the formal assessment requirements stipulated in the CAPS document for Grades R to 3 (cf. Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: Alignment of DIBELS Measures, Basic Early Literacy Skills and CAPS

Basic Early Literacy Skills	DIBELS Indicators	CAPS
Phonemic Awareness	First Sound Fluency (FSF) Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF)	Grade R Term 1 - Distinguishes aurally between different letter sounds especially at the beginning of own name - FSF Benchmark 1 - LNF Benchmark 1 Term 2 - Distinguishes aurally between different sounds especially at the beginning of words - FSF Benchmark 2 - LNF Benchmark 2 - PSF Benchmark 2 Term 4

		• Recognises aurally and visually some initial consonants and vowels especially at the beginning of common words • Recognises and names some letters of the alphabet such as letters in own name ○ LNF Benchmark 3 ○ PSF Benchmark 3 Grade 1 Term 1 Formal Assessment Activity 1 Phonics • Identifies letter-sound relationships of some single letters, for example, l, o, h, m, a, b, t, c. There should be 2 vowels and at least 6 consonants ○ LNF Benchmark 1 ○ PSF Benchmark 1
Alphabetic Principle and Basic Phonics	Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF) –Correct Letter Sounds –Whole Words Read	Grade R Term 2 • Distinguishes aurally between different sounds especially at the beginning of words ○ NWF Benchmark 2 Term 4 • Recognises aurally and visually some initial consonants and vowels especially at the beginning of common words • Recognises and names some letters of the alphabet such as letters in own name ▪ NWF Benchmark 3 Grade 1 Term 1 Formal Assessment Activity 1 Phonics • Begins to build up short words using sounds learnt (e.g., c-a-t - cat) ○ NWF Benchmark 1 Term 2 Formal Assessment Activity 1 Phonics • Distinguishes aurally between different beginning and end sounds of words • Identifies letter-sound relationships of most single letters Group Guided Reading • Uses phonics, context clues and sight words when reading ○ NWF Benchmark 2

		Term 4 Formal Assessment Activity 1 Phonics • Builds words using sounds learnt • Groups common words into sound families Group Guided Reading • Using phonics, context clues, structural analyses and sight words when reading ○ NWF Benchmark 3 Grade 2 Term 1 Formal Assessment Activity 1 Phonics • Identifies letter-sound relationships of all single letters • Uses sight words, phonics, contextual and structural analysis decoding skills when reading Group Guided Reading ○ NWF Benchmark 1
Advanced Phonics and Word Attack Skills	<i>DIBELS</i> Oral Reading Fluency (DORF) –Accuracy	Grade 1 Term 2 Formal Assessment Activity 1 Group Guided Reading • Reads aloud from own book in a guided reading group with teacher, that is, the whole group reads the same story Formal Assessment Activity 2 Phonics • Builds words using sounds learnt (e.g., -at, -et, -it, -ot, -ut, -ag, -ig, -og, -ug, -an, -en, -in, -un, -am – at least two word families per week • Groups common words into sound families (e.g., hot, hop, hob) ○ DORF Benchmark 2 Term 4 Formal Assessment Activity 1 Phonics • Recognises common consonant digraphs (sh, ch and th) at the end of a word (fi-sh, mu-ch, wi-th) • Uses consonant blends to build up and break down words (sp-o-t, fr-o-g, dr-i-nk, st-i-ck) Paired/Independent reading • Reads books read in Shared Reading sessions and books from the classroom reading corner Group Guided Reading • Reads with increasing fluency and expression ○ DORF Benchmark 3

		Grade 2 Term 1 Formal Assessment Activity 1 Phonics • Revises common consonant digraphs (sh, ch, th) • Recognises 'wh' at the beginning of a word such as wh-en, wh-y, wh-at etc. • Uses initial and final consonant blends to build up and break down words such as bl-a-ck, bri-ng, sa-ng • Revises common consonant digraphs (sh, ch, th) at the end of words such as fi-sh, ri-ch, clo-th • Recognises vowel digraphs such as 'oo' as in moon and 'ee' as in tree Group Guided Reading • Reads aloud at own level in a Guided Reading group with teacher, that is, the whole group reads same story based on the instructional reading level of the group ○ DORF Benchmark 1 Term 2 Formal Assessment Activity 1 Phonics • Recognises 3-letter consonant blends at the beginning of words. For example str-ip, str-ap) • Recognises 3-letter consonant blends at the end of words. For example, ca-tch, fe-tch, i-tch) • Builds 3, 4 and 5-letter words using the consonant blends, vowel digraphs taught this term ○ DORF Benchmark 2 Term 4 Formal Assessment Activity 1 Phonics • Recognises at least 5 new vowel digraphs. For example, 'ar' as in car, 'er' as in fern, 'ir' as in shirt, 'or' as in short, 'ur' as in church etc. • Recognises vowel digraphs and diphthongs. For example, 'oa', 'oe', 'ow' as in 'cow' and 'ow' as in 'show' • Builds words using the phonics sounds taught during the year ○ DORF Benchmark 3 Grade 3 Term 1 Formal Assessment Activity 1 Phonics
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		- Identifies letter-sound and letter-name relationships of all single letters - Recognises consonant digraphs (sh-, -sh, ch-, -ch, th-, -th and wh-) at the beginning and end of words (sh-irt, ch-irp, th-ink, wh-en, wi-sh, ri-ch, bo-th) - Recognises vowel digraphs taught in Grade 2 such as 'oo', 'ee', 'ea', 'ai', 'oa', 'ay' - Recognises 'silent e' or split digraphs in words such as same, bite, note - DORF Benchmark 1 Term 2 Formal Assessment Activity 1 Phonics - Recognises that some sounds can be represented by a number of different spelling choices - ow (cow) ou (found) - aw (draw), au (autumn) Formal Assessment Activity 2 Phonics - Recognises that some sounds can be represented by a number of different spelling choices - tie, high, sky - few, blue Formal Assessment Activity 3 Phonics - Recognises digraphs making /f/ such as 'ph' as in elephant, 'gh' as in laugh - Recognises that the same spelling can represent different sounds such as 'bread', 'read' - Uses words in written sentences that are pronounced the same way, but have different meanings ('read' and 'reed' - I like to read books. I saw a bird on a reed.) - DORF Benchmark 2 Term 4 Formal Assessment Activity 1 Phonics - Recognises and uses all phonics learnt so far - Recognises and uses spelling patterns such as -igh (high), -ough (tough), -eigh (neigh), -augh (caught) - Recognises and uses synonyms such as happy is the same as glad and antonyms: good is the opposite of bad - Recognises and uses prefixes such as un-, re- and suffixes such as -ful, -ness - DORF Benchmark 3
Accurate and Fluent Reading of Connected Text	DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency (DORF) –Correct Words Per Minute –Accuracy	Grade 2 Term 2 Formal Assessment Activity 1 Group Guided Reading Reads with increasing fluency and

		expression Paired/Independent Reading • Reads independently texts such as comics and simple fiction books ○ DORF Benchmark 2 Term 4 Formal Assessment Activity 1 Group Guided Reading • Uses sight words, phonics, contextual and structural analysis decoding skills and comprehension skills to make meaning • Reads with increasing fluency and speed using correct pronunciation Paired/Independent reading • Reads independently at a more complex level for enjoyment or information from a variety of available texts: comics, simple fiction and non-fiction books ○ DORF Benchmark 3 Grade 3 Term 1 Formal Assessment activity 1 Group Guided Reading • Reads aloud at own level in a Guided Reading group with the teacher, that is, the whole group reads same story based on the instructional reading level of the group • Uses phonics, contextual and structural analysis decoding skills when reading ○ DORF Benchmark 1 Term 2 Formal Assessment activity 1 Group Guided Reading • Reads both silently and out loud from own book in a guided reading group with teacher, that is, whole group reads the same story at the instructional level of the group • Uses phonics, context clues and structural analysis decoding skills when reading unfamiliar words • Reads with increasing fluency and expression ○ DORF Benchmark 2 Term 4 Assessment Activity 1 Group Guided Reading • Reads both silently and out loud from own book in a guided reading group with the teacher, that is, the whole group
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		reads the same story at the instructional level of the group • Reads with increasing fluency, speed and expression Paired/Independent Reading • Reads independently at a more complex level for enjoyment or information from a variety of available texts: magazines and comics, simple fiction and non-fiction books and books from different cultures, books read in Shared Reading sessions ○ DORF Benchmark 3
Reading Comprehension	Daze <i>DIBELS</i> Oral Reading Fluency (DORF) –Correct Words Per Minute –Retell Total/Quality of Response	Grade 1 Term 2 Formal Assessment Activity 1 Shared Reading • Discusses the story, identifying the main idea in the text, the main characters, etc. Formal Assessment Activity 2 Shared Reading • Answers a wide variety of types of questions based on the texts read including higher order type questions ○ DORF Benchmark 2 (Retell) Term 4 Formal Assessment Activity 1 Shared Reading • Recognises cause and effect in a story. The girl got into trouble because she broke a window. • Answers open-ended questions based on the passage read. ○ DORF Benchmark 3 (Retell) Grade 2 Term 1 Formal Assessment Activity 1 Shared Reading • Identifies key details in what was read such as the sequence of events. ○ DORF Benchmark 1 (Retell) Term 2 Shared Reading • Identifies key details in what was read such as main characters and setting. ○ DORF Benchmark 2 (Retell) Term 4 Shared Reading • Answers higher order questions based on the text read, e.g., “In your opinion ...?” ○ DORF Benchmark 3 (Retell) Grade 3 Term 1 Formal Assessment Activity 1 Reading Shared Reading • Uses visual cues to talk about a

		graphical text such as a photograph and discusses what it is about, where it was taken, etc. • Reads book as a whole class with the teacher (shared reading) and describes the main idea and the main characters • Answers higher order questions before, during and after reading a shared text, e.g., “What do you think will happen next? Why do you say this?” ○ DORF Benchmark 1 (Retell) ○ DAZE Benchmark 1 Term 2 Formal Assessment Activity 2 Reading Shared Reading • Reads book as a whole class with teacher (shared reading) and discusses sequence of events, setting and cause effect relations • Answers a range of higher order questions based on the passage read, e.g., “How would you describe the behaviour of the troll?” ○ DORF Benchmark 2 (Retell) ○ DAZE Benchmark 2 Term 4 Formal Assessment Activity 1 Reading Shared Reading • Reads written texts as a whole class with the teacher (shared reading) and discusses characters, the ‘problem’ in the story, the plot and the values in the text ○ DORF Benchmark 3 (Retell) ○ DAZE Benchmark 3
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Another aspect I made a note of was the subject advisors expressed **need for interventions**. After aligning the DIBELS Measures, the Basic Early Literacy Skills and the CAPS document as well as noting the need for interventions, I arranged a meeting with the subject advisors within the Windy City Area Office and Mrs Detail, the Coordinator of the General Education and Training band within the Cloudy District. During this meeting, I presented a powerpoint presentation of the alignment of the above mentioned aspects as well as my proposed action plan (cf. Appendix R). I had to revise the action plan slightly in order to accommodate stakeholder concerns and needs. Originally, the idea was to implement a progress monitoring assessment system, but I decided to add the support¹ aspect because of the expressed need by the

¹ The support aspect was focused on assisting teachers and district officials to use a progress monitoring assessment system such as DIBELS to identify the need for support, etc. Teachers were also assisted in

stakeholders. The outcome of the meeting was that they gave me permission to implement the action plan at Happy Valley School.

I also arranged a meeting with the Head of the Foundation Phase and all the teachers responsible for teaching in the Foundation Phase at Happy Valley School. I presented a powerpoint presentation on the DIBELS measures and we had an informal discussion and planning session on exactly how, and when we would implement the action plan (cf. Appendix S).

One document that played an essential role in the development of the action plan is the *Teaching Reading is Rocket Science* document (cf. Figure 5.1). I realised that teachers and other stakeholders within the national and provincial education departments as well as parents need to know that teaching reading is a complex skill that does not happen naturally.

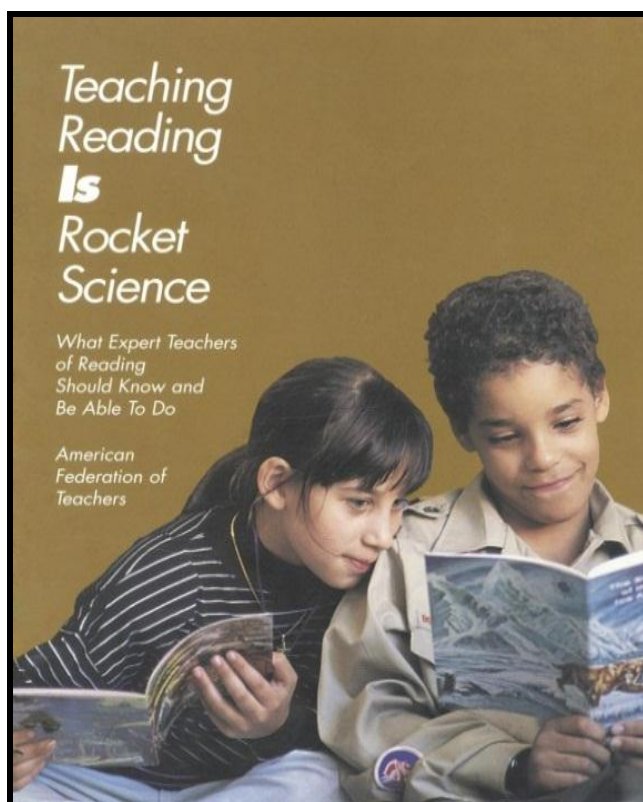


Figure 5.1: Teaching Reading is Rocket Science

A second document was *Linking Assessment to Instruction: Using Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills in an Outcomes-Driven Model*. From this document, I used

terms of how to use data to make instructional decisions, such as grouping learners, implementing different interventions focussed on the individual needs of the individual learners

the concept of the outcomes-driven model (cf. Figure 5.2). Kaminski and Cummings (2008) state that:

The Outcomes-Driven Model was developed to address specific questions within a prevention-oriented framework designed to pre-empt early reading difficulty and ensure step-by-step progress towards outcomes that will result in established, adequate reading achievement (p. 3).

Linking Assessment to Instruction: Using Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills in an Outcomes-Driven Model

Ruth A. Kaminski, Ph.D., Kelli D. Cummings, Ph.D., NCSP, Dynamic Measurement Group

Overview

As educators increasingly are held responsible for student achievement, school personnel struggle to find ways to effectively document student responsiveness to interventions and track progress toward important outcomes. While many educators focus on high-stakes tests as a means of documenting student achievement of important outcomes, other assessment approaches may be better suited to assessing student progress. Assessment that can be used to adapt teaching to meet student needs is called formative assessment. Because the primary purpose of formative assessment is to support student learning, it may arguably be considered the most important assessment practice in which educators engage. This paper will focus on linking assessment

to instruction to improve student outcomes through the use of Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) within an Outcomes-Driven Model.

What are DIBELS?

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) comprise a set of procedures and measures for assessing the acquisition of early literacy and reading skills from kindergarten through sixth grade. DIBELS were designed for use in identifying children experiencing difficulty in the acquisition of basic early literacy skills in order to provide support early and prevent the occurrence of later reading difficulties. As part of the formative assessment process, DIBELS were designed to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions for those

children receiving support in order to make changes when indicated to maximize student learning and growth.

DIBELS measures, by design, are indicators of each of the basic early literacy skills. For example, DIBELS do not measure all possible phonemic awareness skills such as rhyming, alliteration, blending, and segmenting. Instead, the DIBELS measure of phonemic awareness, Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF), is designed to be an indicator of a student's progress toward the long-term phonemic awareness outcome of segmenting words.

Overview of DIBELS Measures

Core Components of Reading		DIBELS Indicator
1	Phonemic Awareness	Initial Sound Fluency Phoneme Segmentation Fluency
2	Alphabetic Principle and Phonics	Nonsense Word Fluency ¹ Oral Reading Fluency ²
3	Accuracy and Fluency with Connected Text	Oral Reading Fluency
4	Comprehension	At least through grade 3: A combination of Oral Reading Fluency and Retell Fluency
5	Vocabulary and Oral Language	Word Use Fluency

Figure 1

Notes: ¹Nonsense Word Fluency is an indicator of early phonics skills or the alphabetic principle, specifically, does the student know the most common sound for each letter and can he/she correctly blend the sound with the sounds before and after to read an unknown word. ²Oral Reading Fluency accuracy is an indicator of a child's advanced phonics skills. If accuracy is less than 95% on ORF, it is likely that a student may need support in the area of decoding not reading fluency. Reading fluency is an appropriate instructional goal when accuracy is at least 95%, i.e., the student is reading accurately but slowly.

Figure 5.2: Linking Assessment to Instruction: Using Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills in an Outcomes-Driven Model

I used these two documents to develop a metaphor for the implementation of the action plan – a progress monitoring assessment and support rocket system! (cf. Figure 5.3).

The aim of the rocket is to ensure that **all** learners achieve “lift off” and hit the identified targets, at all grade levels, on the way to reading success. In order to ensure that the rocket is launched effectively, all stakeholders would have to be dedicated and committed to the project:

The flame is provided by national policy documents such as the *National Assessment Protocol*, the *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement. Foundation Phase Grades R to 3*, *Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025*, and the *National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12*. At provincial level, visionary and creative leadership is required to ensure that policy is implemented so that goals and targets are achieved in ways that take cognisance of diverse learners’ strengths and needs within a particular province. To ensure that the rocket is stable before lift-off, three stakeholders play a crucial **scaffolding** role; the district, the school, and the teachers in the classroom. Data-based evidence should be the driving force for instructional decision making and support intervention by these stakeholders. The reading assessment and support rocket system is based on the initial application of the problem-solving model to early literacy skills (Kaminski & Good, 1998). The general questions addressed by a problem-solving model include:

- What is the problem?
- Why is it happening?
- What should be done about it?
- Did it work? (Tilly, 2008, p. 24).

In order to ensure that the rocket remains functional, the **compartments** are checked each term as a learner progresses through the grades. At the beginning of the term, the first step is to identify learners who may need additional support. At the end of the term, the final step is to review outcomes, which also facilitates identifying learners who need additional support for the next term. In this manner, teachers can ensure that learners who are on track to become proficient readers continue to make adequate progress, and that those learners who are not on track receive the support they need to become proficient readers. The compartments of the progress monitoring assessment and intervention rocket as they were implemented at Happy Valley School are discussed below. In each of the compartments a number of questions guided the teachers in the

process of collecting evidence and providing support. Grade 1 is used as an example to illustrate the focus in each compartment of the rocket.

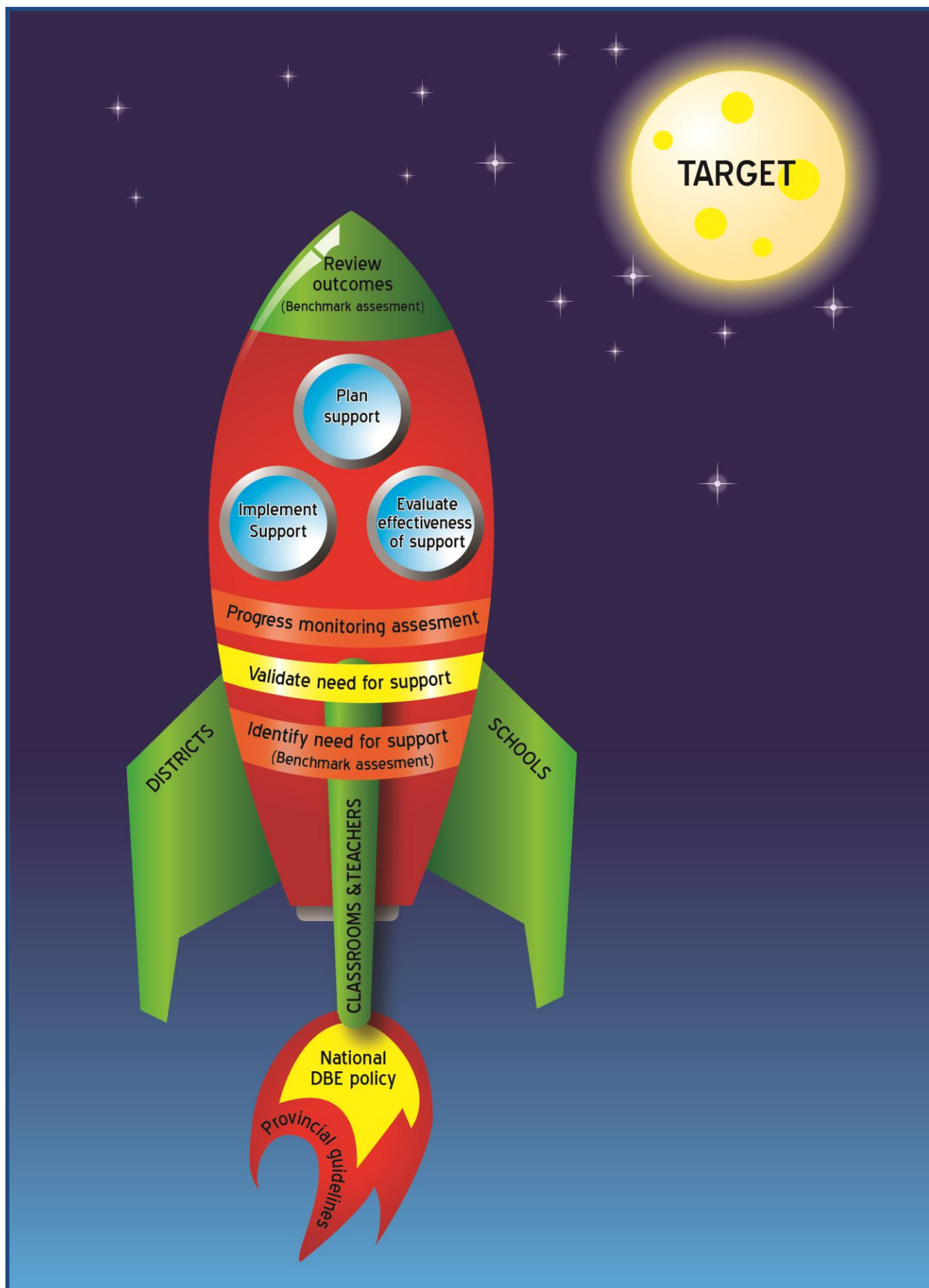


Figure 5.3: The Progress Monitoring Assessment and Support Rocket System

5.5.1 Identify the need for support

The first step is to identify those learners who may need additional instructional support to achieve **benchmark goals** (cf. Chapter 3). To identify the need for support, DIBELS benchmark assessment is administered to all learners in the school three times per year -- at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year (cf. Figure 5.4). Periodic screening of all children helps to ensure that all children are making progress and to allow time to make changes in instruction for those learners who, in the middle of the year, are not on track to meet end of the year goals. In this way, benchmark assessment represents a prevention-oriented strategy that identifies learners before a substantial, pervasive problem is evidenced. The benchmark assessment provides data that are used to identify individual learners who may need additional instructional support to achieve the next benchmark goal. The benchmark assessment also provides information regarding the performance of all children in the school with respect to benchmark goals.

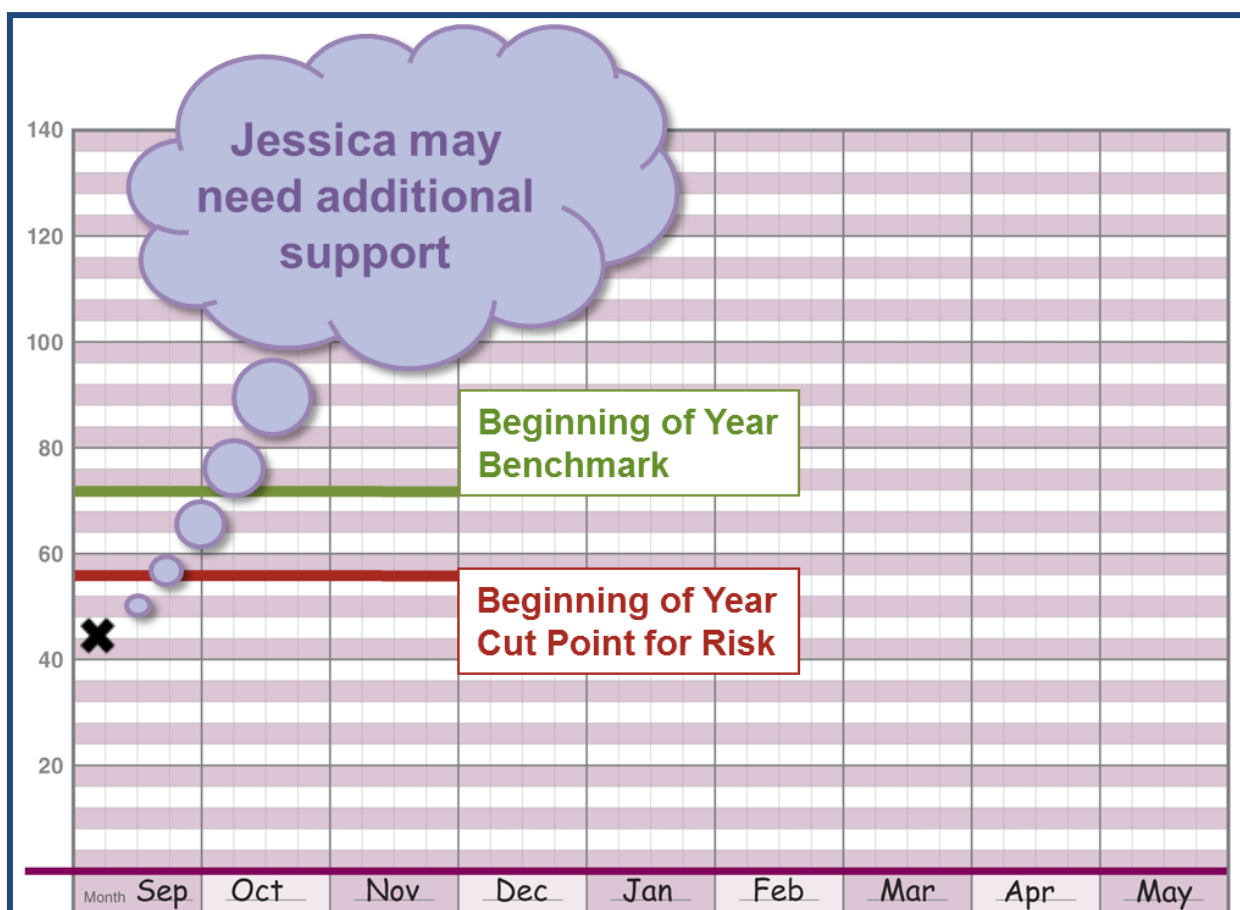


Figure 5.4: Identify Need for Support

At the systems level the following question can be asked:

Is the system of support generally effective to support most learners to reach reading outcomes?

This is determined by the percentage of learners who reach benchmark goals. If a large proportion of learners score below the benchmark, system-level support may be necessary (cf. Figure 5.5).

At the learner level the following question can be asked:

Is the learner likely to need more or different instruction to reach reading outcomes?

This is determined by each learner's score relative to benchmark goals (cf. Figure 5.5).

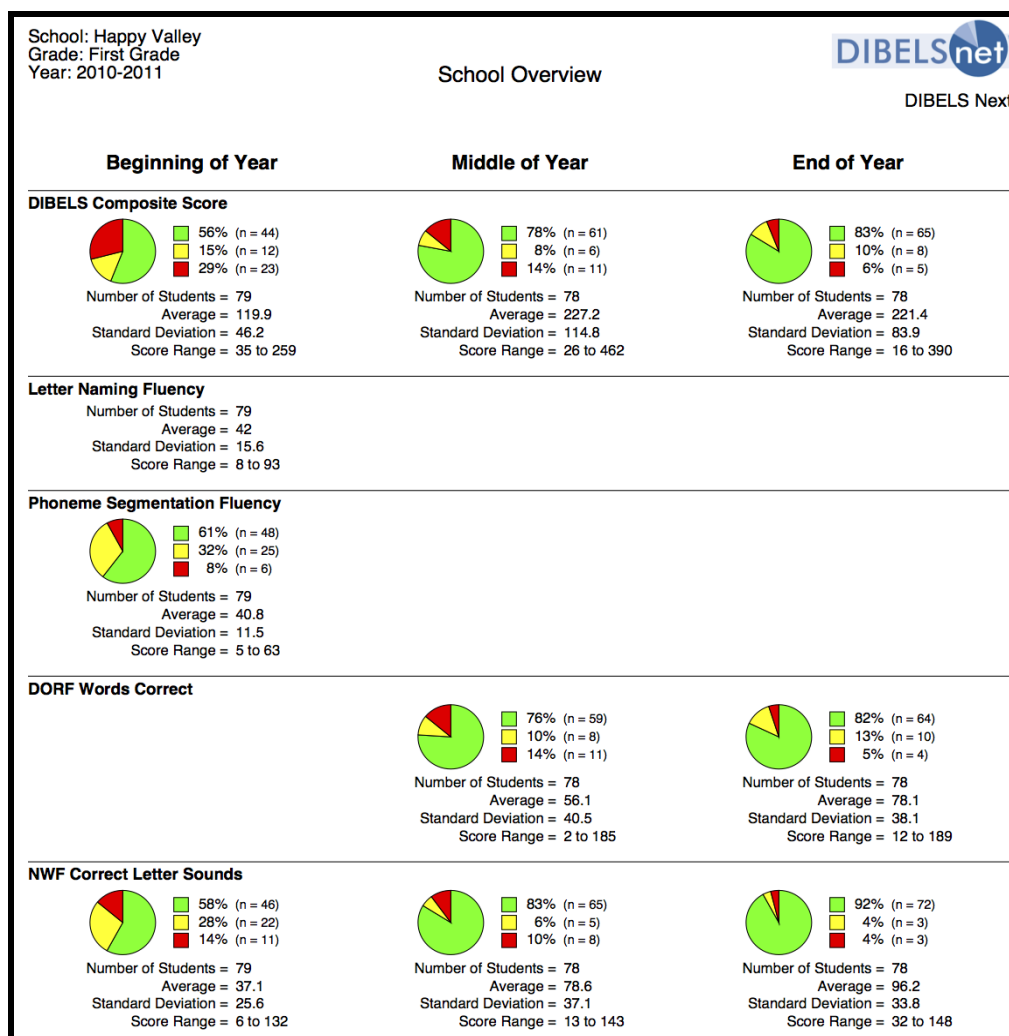


Figure 5.5: Happy Valley School Overview Report

It is important to start with the composite score; it is the best overall predictor of outcomes. In terms of overall early literacy skills, are most learners on track to achieve literacy outcomes? Approximately how many learners may need additional instructional support? In terms of overall literacy skills, 56% of learners have scores at/above the benchmark on the composite score at the beginning of first grade. Approximately 44% of learners may need additional instructional support. Of these, 15% may need strategic support (e.g., an additional 30 minutes of targeted intervention) and 28% may need intensive support (e.g., an additional 60 minutes of intensive support).

On which basic early literacy skill(s) might learners need support? 40% of students may need support in acquiring phonemic awareness skills (% below and well below benchmark on PSF). Of these, 8% of students have scores below the cut point and may need intensive support. 42% of students may need support in learning/becoming fluent in applying knowledge of letter sounds (% below and well below benchmark on NWF-CLS). Of these, 14% of students have scores below the cut point and may need intensive support. 35% of students may need support in applying knowledge of letter sounds in fluently blending/decoding unknown words (% below and well below benchmark on NWF-WWR). There is no cut point for risk at this benchmark period.

Are there learners who need instructional support? Teachers have to determine whether the next step is to analyse and improve their core reading instruction or to plan additional interventions. Overall, too many first graders are not on track. 35-42% of learners are not on track, which is not a reasonable percent for which to plan additional instructional intervention. It is possible that the teachers may have to make adjustments to the core programme.

Whenever assessment data are collected at one point in time under one set of conditions, alternative reasons for low performance must be considered. For example, learners may have a bad day, be ill, be confused by the directions, or be uncomfortable with an unfamiliar examiner or teacher rather than have an actual skill deficit. For learners whose skills may be a concern as indicated by performance on the benchmark assessment, validation of need for instructional support is the next step.

5.5.2 Validate the need for support

Within this compartment the aim is to rule out alternative reasons for a child's poor performance, and be reasonably confident that the learner needs additional instructional support. It is important to examine a *pattern of performance* rather than a single score before making important, individual decisions about instructional support (cf. Figure 5.6). DIBELS are only one piece of information that teachers have access to when making educational decisions. Teachers may always use additional assessment information and knowledge about a learner to validate a score and the decision as to whether or not to provide additional support. By retesting learners whose skills are of concern, confidence is increased that a low score is indicative of low skills rather than a bad day, illness, shyness, etc. Each retest examines a hypothesis about poor performance. If the child had a bad day or was sick, he or she can be retested another day.

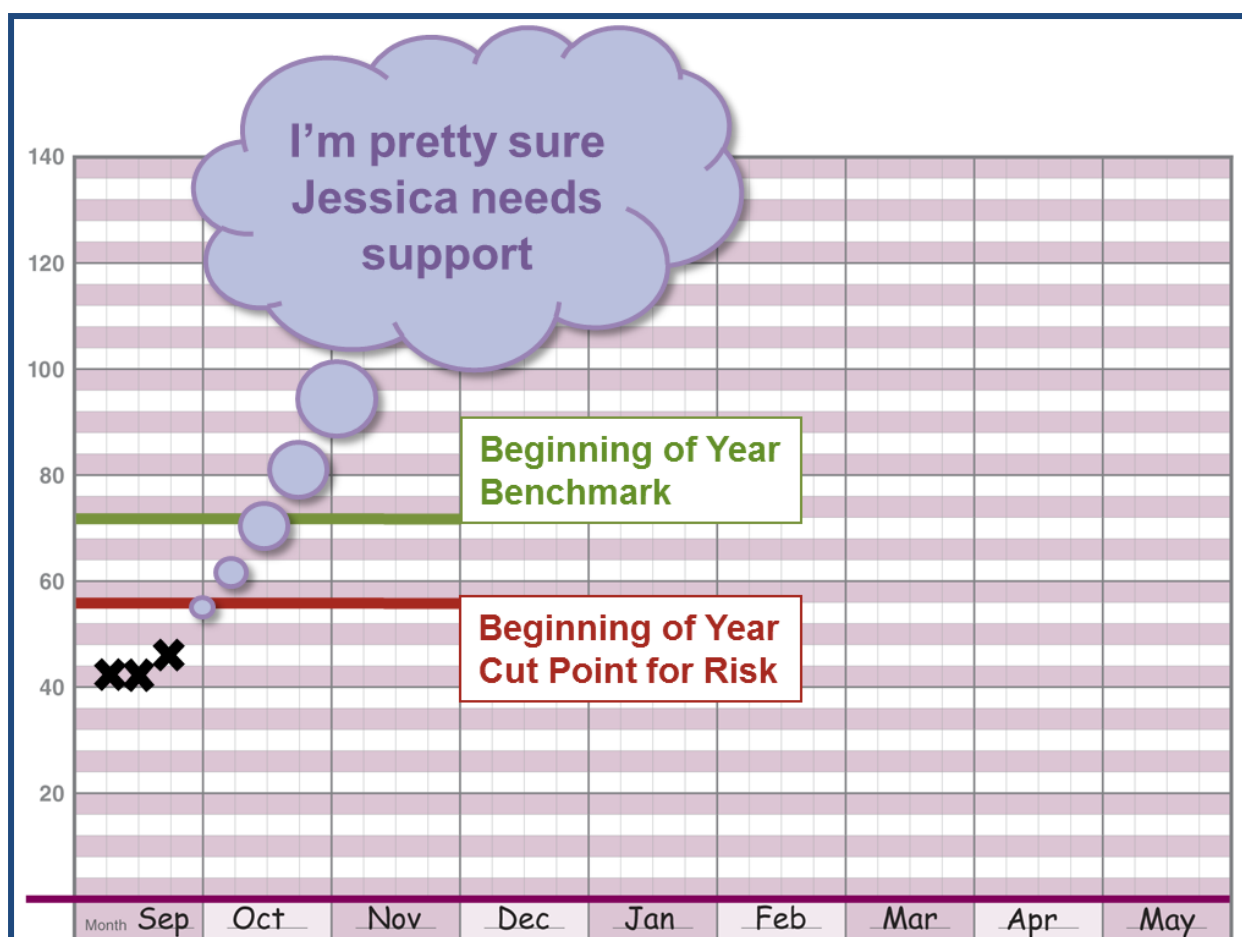


Figure 5.6: Validate Need for Support

5.5.3 Plan and implement support

The main compartment of the rocket is focussed on planning instructional support. For each DIBELS measure that is related to a Basic Early Literacy Skill, a benchmark goal has been established and validated² (cf. Chapter 3). Achievement of the goal means that the odds are in the learner's favour of achieving the next goal, thus achievement of each benchmark goal is a step toward reading outcomes. The aim line is the line connecting the child's current performance to the end-of-year goal. The aim line represents the expected rate of progress and can be used to monitor growth and evaluate the effectiveness of teaching from week to week (cf. Figure 5.7).

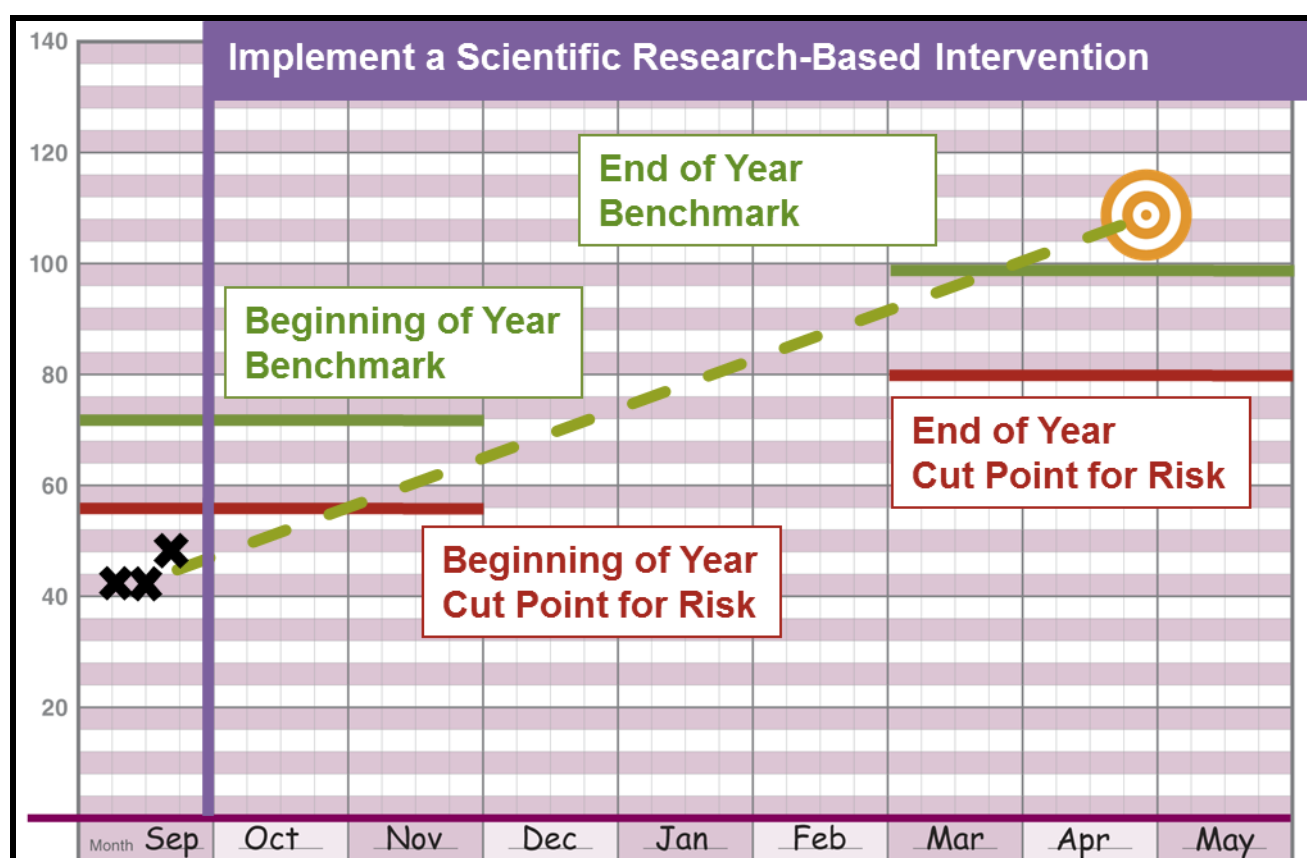


Figure 5.7: Plan and Implement Support

In order to plan support at the system level it is necessary to set system-wide goals. What proportion of learners are at/above the benchmark on the composite score? What is the goal for the end of the year? When a system-wide modification in support is made (e.g., a new programme, different types of interventions, targeted support) gains in proportion of learners at/above benchmark can range substantially within a single year. In general, gains are greater when larger numbers of learners are below the benchmark

² Benchmark goals have not been validated within the South African context as yet. A large quantitative study is needed for this purpose.

(e.g., >40%) and in earlier grades. At Happy Valley school, 56% of learners score at/above the Composite Score benchmark at the beginning of first grade. 61% of learners score at/above the benchmark on phonemic awareness. 58% score at/above the benchmark on NWF correct letter sounds, and 65% read at least one word as a whole word on NWF (cf. Figure 5.5). Our goal, set by the teachers at Happy Valley School, is that at the middle of the year (MOY), 75% of first grade learners will have phonemic awareness and basic phonics skills at a level at which they score at/above the benchmark goal on the Composite Score and on all of the component skills.

What is the plan for achieving system goals?

We identified a need for strong core teaching in foundational early literacy skills (i.e., phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle and basic phonics) in Grade R, a need for differentiated instruction for all learners in first grade, and a need for targeted support in foundational early literacy skills in first semester of first grade.

What is our plan?

We thought we would consider the following variables when analysing and improving our core reading instruction:

- protected block of time for instruction;
- research-based scope and sequence and instructional strategies are well trained and implemented with fidelity;
- majority of time spent in small, flexible, skill-based groups;
- all learners receive core teaching (i.e., guided by CAPS);
- interventions are in addition to core classroom instruction;
- screening data are used to inform instruction and groups; progress monitoring data informs changing groups; and
- sufficient common planning time is available weekly.

Now we needed to focus on the individual learners. How will learners be grouped for support? Learners should be grouped according to specific needs for support (cf. Figure 5.8, Figure 5.9). They may also receive whole group instruction and be grouped

heterogeneously for most of the school day. Instructional groupings should be dynamic and flexible. Instruction that groups learners according to skills allows learners to receive instruction focused on their needs and they can progress at their own pace.

What skills should we teach? Our focus was on the Basic Early Literacy Skills. If learners were low on First Sound Fluency and Phoneme Segmentation Fluency we taught phonemic awareness. If they were low on Nonsense Word Fluency we taught the alphabetic principle and basic phonics, and if learners were low on DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency or Daze we taught Advanced phonics and/or accuracy and fluency with connected text and/or Vocabulary/language skills/comprehension.

Instruction for children who have difficulties learning to read must be more *focused, explicit and comprehensive, more intensive, and more supportive* (Foorman & Torgesen, 2001). In addition, Connor et al. (2009) state that: “Our results indicate that ... providing recommended amounts of instruction, which change systematically over the course of the school year, as well as in response to students’ changing skills, is associated with stronger student reading outcomes” (p. 241).

Finally, we focused on the instructional strategies that we were going to consider:

Grouping

- Small group instruction
- Homogeneous groups
- Differentiated instruction
- Flexible and dynamic

Time

- How much?
- How frequently?
- When?

Teacher-student interactions

- Explicit instruction (Direct explanation, modeling)

School: Happy Valley
 Grade: First Grade, Beginning of Year
 Class: Wimmer, K.

Classroom Report

Name	Student ID	LNF		PSF		NWF				DIBELS Composite Score	
		Score	%ile	Score	%ile	CLS	%ile	WWR	%ile	Score	Score Level
N, Bernadette	21417	14	2	10	2	11	3	0	14	35	Well Below Benchmark
M, Evan	21409	30	15	5	1	14	5	0	14	49	Well Below Benchmark
G, Shawn	21402	22	6	18	4	12	3	0	14	52	Well Below Benchmark
A, Paulina	21419	21	5	37	28	23	18	2	39	81	Well Below Benchmark
T, Mariana	21416	39	30	29	11	22	15	5	52	90	Well Below Benchmark
O, Tessa	21414	39	30	35	21	25	22	0	14	99	Below Benchmark
P, Theo	21412	41	36	19	4	41	58	9	67	101	Below Benchmark
A, Sage	21411	40	33	40	36	24	20	2	39	104	Below Benchmark
D, William	21413	34	21	43	46	29	32	2	39	106	Below Benchmark
K, Alyssa	21404	57	76	36	24	23	18	0	14	116	At or Above Benchmark
S, Michael	21401	44	45	36	24	46	66	0	14	126	At or Above Benchmark
A, Tori	21415	45	47	41	39	40	55	8	64	126	At or Above Benchmark
E, Frederick	21418	53	67	40	36	36	47	8	64	129	At or Above Benchmark
L, Tyra	21408	53	67	33	17	46	66	2	39	132	At or Above Benchmark
S, Estrella	21405	47	54	51	74	39	53	11	72	137	At or Above Benchmark
A, Jilian	21406	43	41	52	77	42	60	11	72	137	At or Above Benchmark
J, Paul	21403	53	67	40	36	46	66	7	60	139	At or Above Benchmark
M, Emilio	21410	48	57	53	80	39	53	3	44	140	At or Above Benchmark
A, Nicholas	21407	43	41	46	56	58	79	15	80	147	At or Above Benchmark

Status	Score Level	Likely Need For Support
	At or Above Benchmark	Likely to Need Core Support
	Below Benchmark	Likely to Need Strategic Support
	Well Below Benchmark	Likely to Need Intensive Support

Figure 5.8: Forming Instructional Groups at the Beginning of the Year

1 Grade 1 Beginning of Year Initial Instructional Grouping Suggestions

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Group 1: Likely to Need Core Support

Phonemic Awareness	At or Above Benchmark (PSF is 40 or higher)	
Alphabetic Principle and Basic Phonics	At or Above Benchmark (NWF–CLS is 27 or higher)	
Name	PSF 40+	NWF–CLS 27+
William	43	29
Tori	41	40
Frederick	40	36
Estrella	51	39
Jilian	52	42
Paul	40	46
Emilio	53	39
Nicholas	46	58

Group 3: Additional support on phonemic awareness skills

Phonemic Awareness	Below or Well Below Benchmark (PSF is below 40)	
Alphabetic Principle and Basic Phonics	At or Above Benchmark (NWF–CLS is 27 or higher)	
Name	PSF 0–39	NWF–CLS 27+
Theo	19	41
Michael	36	46
Tyra	33	46

Group 2: Additional support on the alphabetic principle and basic phonics skills

Phonemic Awareness	At or Above Benchmark (PSF is 40 or higher)	
Alphabetic Principle and Basic Phonics	Below or Well Below Benchmark (NWF–CLS is below 27)	
Name	PSF 40+	NWF–CLS 0–26
Sage	40	24

Group 4: Additional support on phonemic awareness skills as well as the alphabetic principle and basic phonics skills

Phonemic Awareness	Below or Well Below Benchmark (PSF is below 40)	
Alphabetic Principle and Basic Phonics	Below or Well Below Benchmark (NWF–CLS is below 27)	
Name	PSF 0–39	NWF–CLS 0–26
Bernadette	10	11
Evan	5	14
Shawn	18	12
Paulina	37	23
Mariana	29	22
Tessa	35	25
Alyssa	36	23

Note. If a large number of students fall in any of the instructional grouping recommendations other than Group 1, consider supplementing core instruction addressing the corresponding skill areas.

Figure 5.9: Preliminary Instructional Groups

5.5.4 Evaluate and modify support

In this part, the **effectiveness of instructional support** is evaluated and modified as needed for individual learners. The goal is to find a match between the support provided and the child's needs. Modifications in support are provided until the learner's progress is sufficient to achieve the benchmark goal. A key premise at this stage is that a good plan is a powerful starting place for teaching, but an individual child's response to a particular curriculum or strategy, even a research-based curriculum or strategy, is unpredictable. No matter how good the plan, programme, or strategy, if it is not supporting the learner's progress toward the goal, it needs to be modified.

The first step in evaluating support is to establish a data collection plan for progress monitoring. In general, for learners who are receiving substantial, intensive instructional support, weekly monitoring of progress is recommended (cf. Hall, 2012). For learners who need less support, less frequent monitoring may be sufficient – every other week or once a month (cf. Hall, 2012). Of course, data collection plans need to be considered within the context of the school and the resources available. In a school in which a large number of learners require intensive support, it may not be feasible to monitor progress on a weekly basis for all learners in need of intensive support. In such a case, resources may be focused on enhancing the core teaching programme for all learners to decrease the number of learners who need intensive support.

The next step is to establish decision rules to use to evaluate the data. Using a goal-oriented rule is recommended for evaluating a learner's response to intervention that is straightforward for teachers to understand and use. Decisions about a learner's progress are based on comparisons of DIBELS scores that are plotted on a graph and the aim line, or expected rates of progress. It is suggested that teachers consider instructional modifications when learner performance falls below the aim line for *three consecutive points* (Kaminski & Good, 2013) (cf. Figure 5.10). This recommended decision rule is based on early work with curriculum based measurement (Fuchs, 1989) and precision teaching (White & Haring, 1980) and allows for a minimum of three data points to be gathered before any decision is

made. As when validating a learner's need for support, a pattern of performance is considered before making individual learner decisions.

In addition to being a more reliable indicator of learner skill level, ongoing progress monitoring data places an upper limit on the amount of time an ineffective intervention is allowed to continue. For example, if data are gathered weekly, and a learner is flat lining, teachers will have information useful for deciding how to modify instructional support within three weeks, a relatively short period of time. It is important to note, however, that modifying support does not necessarily mean discontinuing an intervention. Especially if a school is implementing an evidenced-based programme, important alterable instructional variables ought to be considered before adopting an entirely different approach. These modifications may include, but are not limited to, assessing fidelity of implementation, decreasing group size, spending more time on the content, or providing additional, explicit instructions and opportunities to practice. In general, it is recommended that support be continued until a learner achieves at least three data points at or above the goal. If a decision is made to discontinue support, it is recommended that progress monitoring be continued weekly for at least one month to ensure that the child is able to maintain growth without the supplemental support. The frequency of progress monitoring will be faded gradually as the child's progress continues to be sufficient (Kaminski & Good, 2013).

An example of a modification made in our instructional approach is given below:

Most reading programmes teach segmenting and blending by having learners pause between each of the segmented sounds. Bursuck and colleagues (2004) found that teaching learners to pause between each of the sounds – a common instructional approach in most core programmes – works well for the majority of learners. However, Weisberg and Savard (1993) found that some learners at risk find blending the distinct sounds after a pause to be very difficult. This is what we encountered in one of our Grade 1 classes. Chard and Osborn (1999) recommend modifying instruction to a stretching and connecting approach to blending. For example, if one or more learners omit the initial consonant when blending together the sounds of a word (e.g., saying “ad” instead of “sad”), they will benefit from an alternative

instructional approach. This is variously called *continuous*, *blending*, *stretching and connecting*, or *telescoping*. They are the same in that learners do not pause between the sounds as they say them but stretch and connect the sounds (e.g., stretching the word sad out as /sssaaddd/ just before saying the word fast).

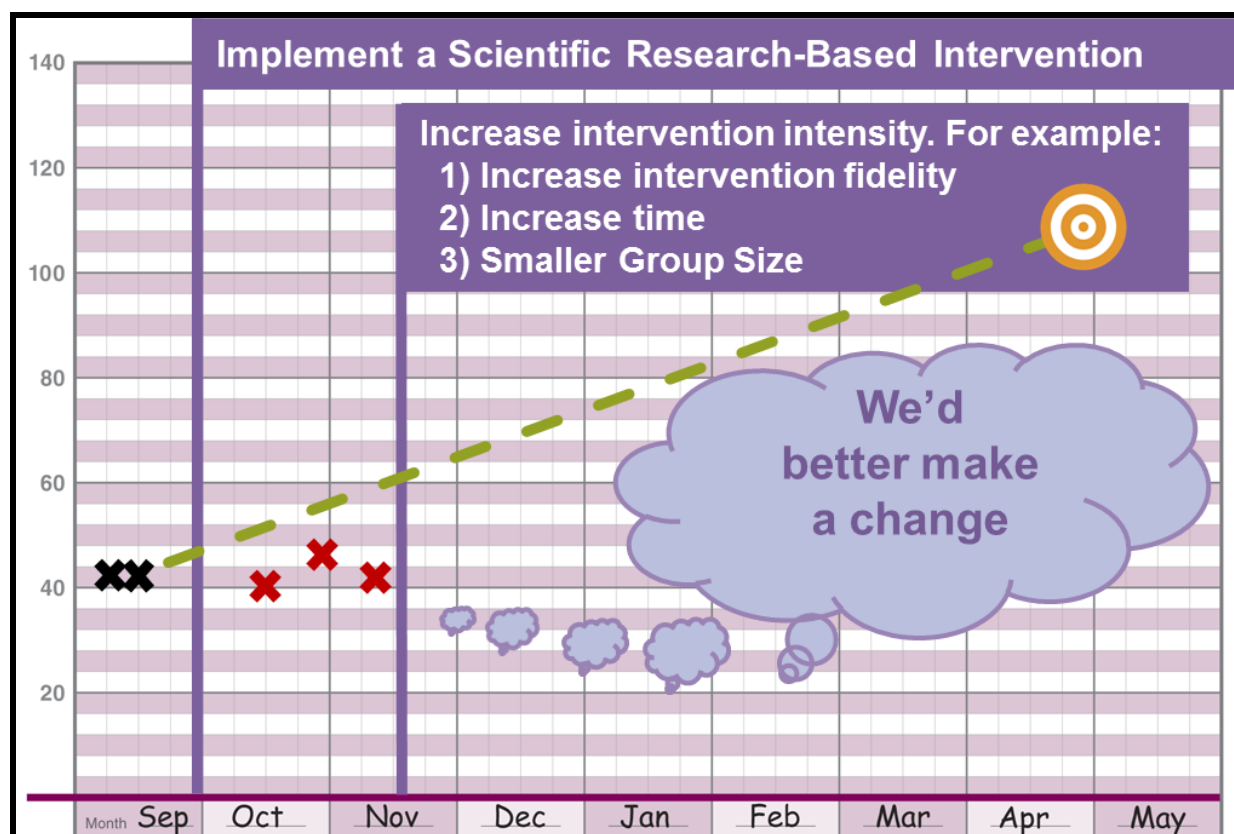


Figure 5.10: Evaluate and Modify Support

5.5.5 Review outcomes

In the last compartment the aim is to review the structure of supports the school has in place to achieve outcomes at both an individual-learner level and at a systems level. For individual learners, the teacher must decide if the learner has achieved the benchmark and no longer requires additional instructional support (cf. Figure 5.11). At this stage, teachers will again review benchmark assessment data for each goal period using the same procedures as when identifying need for instructional support.

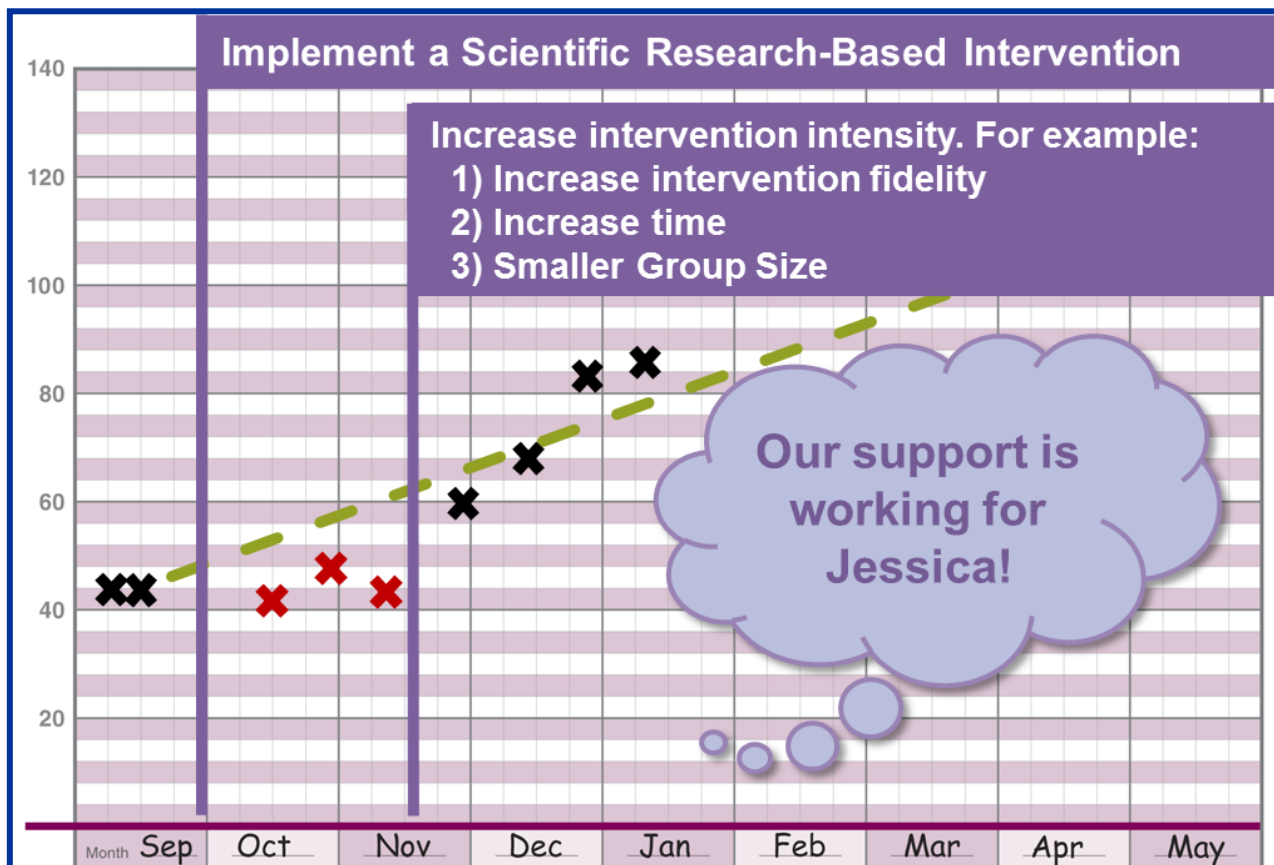


Figure 5.11: Review Outcome

As with decision making for individual learners, when used at the systems level DIBELS data should be used *formatively* to *identify needs for support* at a school level. By using the progress monitoring assessment and support rocket to analyze school/district-based data on Basic Early Literacy Skills, a school team can evaluate the various components of their system of support in beginning reading including core and supplemental curricula and programmes, instructional strategies and materials, and professional development. Similar to formative assessment of individual learners, systems-level DIBELS data is designed to be used by teachers responsible for teaching programmes with the intent to improve the programmes. In this way, systems-level DIBELS data are helpful in evaluating overall effectiveness of support across a school year and mobilizing resources to improve programmes at the systems level (cf. Figures 5.12 through 5.17).

The following organizing questions were used for reviewing outcomes at the systems level:

1. What proportion of learners are meeting benchmark goals?
 2. How effective is our core curriculum and teaching (CAPS) in supporting learners who are on track to achieve benchmark goals?
 3. How effective is our system of supplemental programmes and teaching in supporting learners who need strategic support to achieve benchmark goals?
 4. How effective is our system of intensive intervention in supporting learners who need intensive support to make adequate progress toward benchmark goals?
 5. How do the early literacy skills displayed by learners at each grade and point in the year compare to literacy skills displayed by learners the previous year?
- (Kaminski & Good, 2013).

Overall Goal: 80% on composite			
NWF	CLS	Basic Phonics: letter sounds	80%
	WWR	Basic Phonics: blending/decoding	80%
DORF	WC	Accuracy and Fluency	80%
	Accuracy		

Figure 5.12: System Level Goals

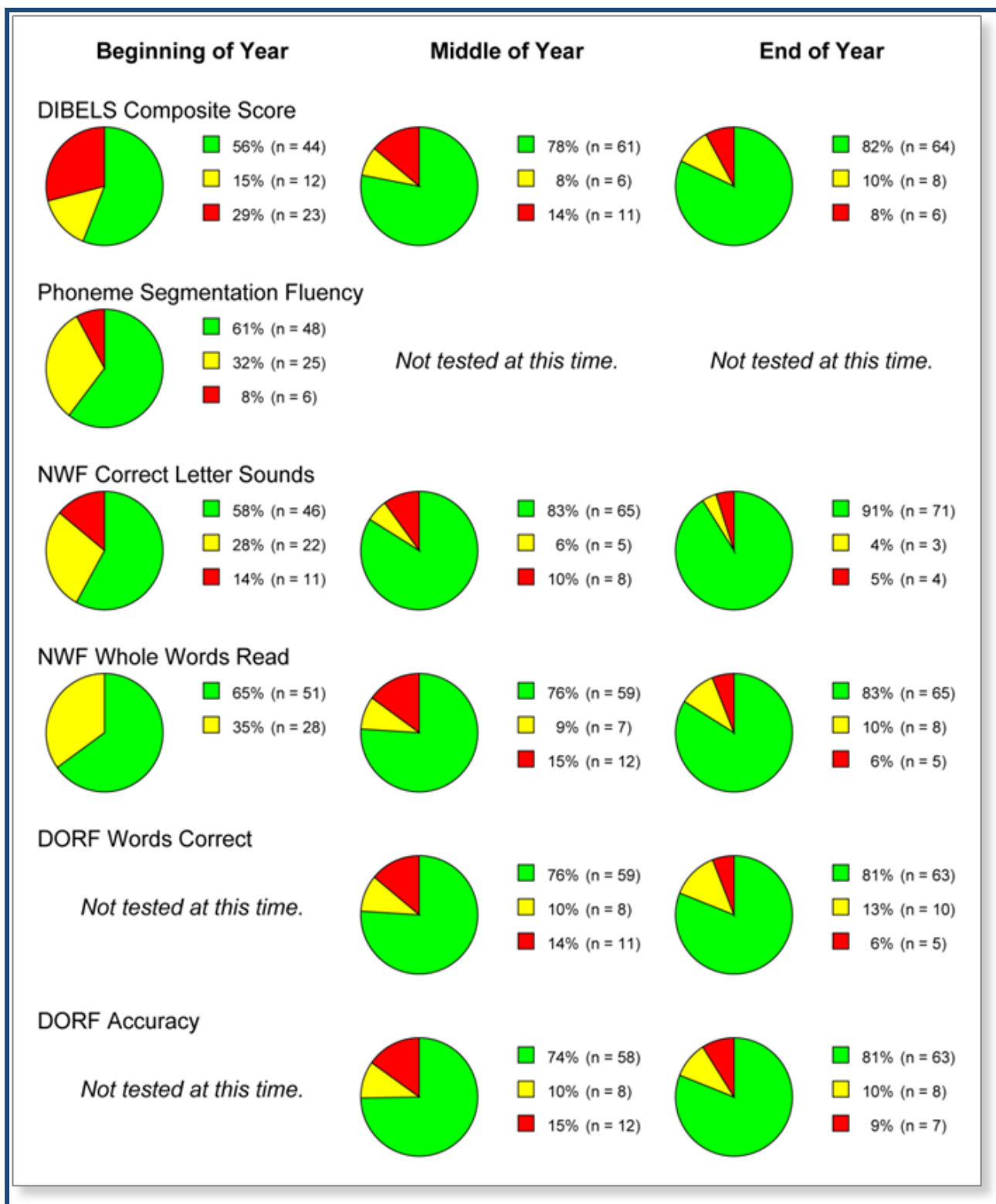


Figure 5.13: District Status Report

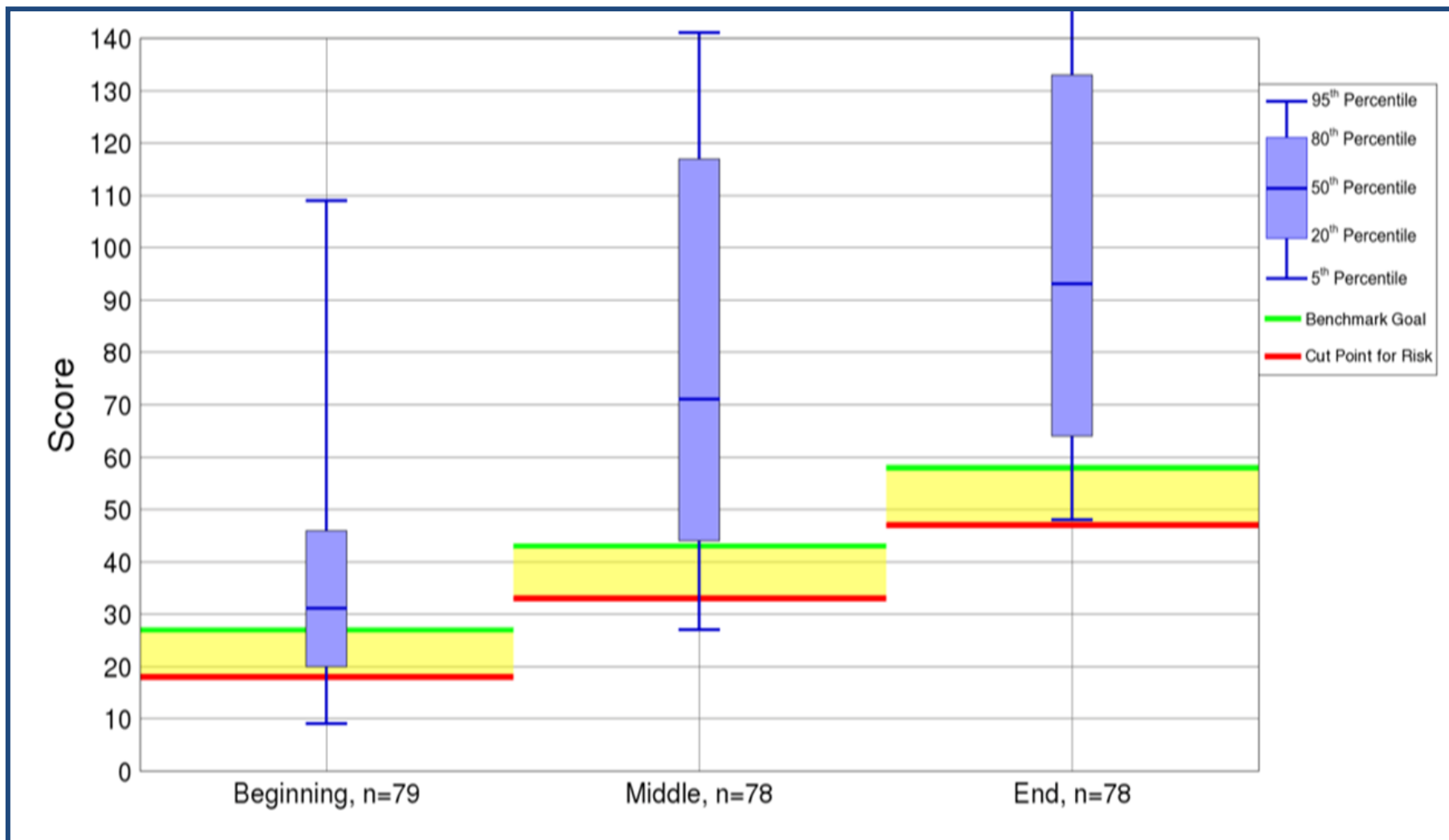
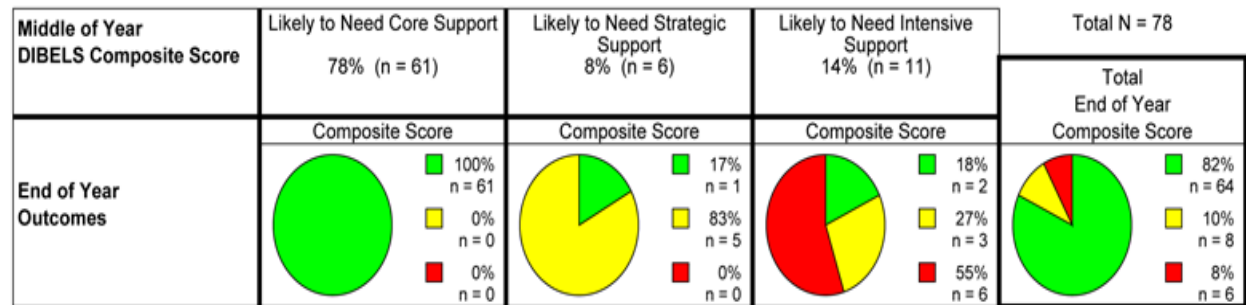
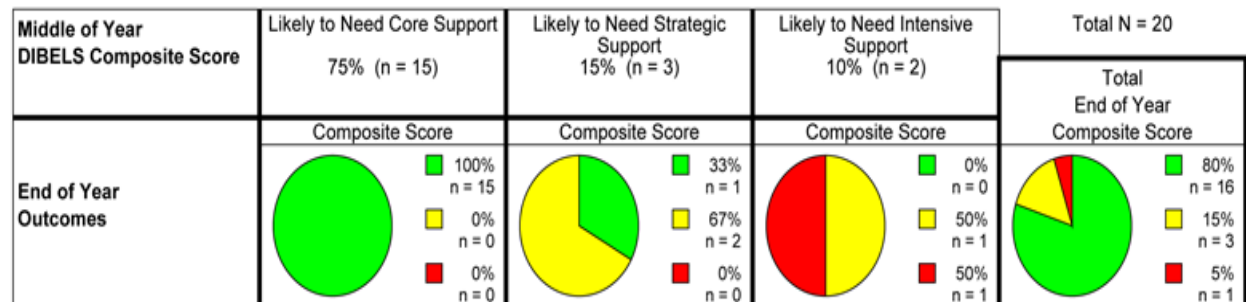


Figure 5.14: School Level Box Plot Report

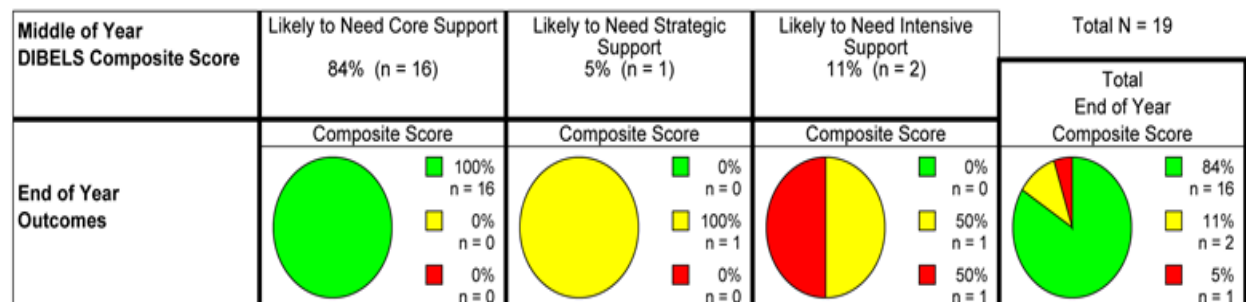
► School-wide: Happy Valley



↳ Class: Carlson, C.



↳ Class: Roth, M.



↳ Class: Smith, A.

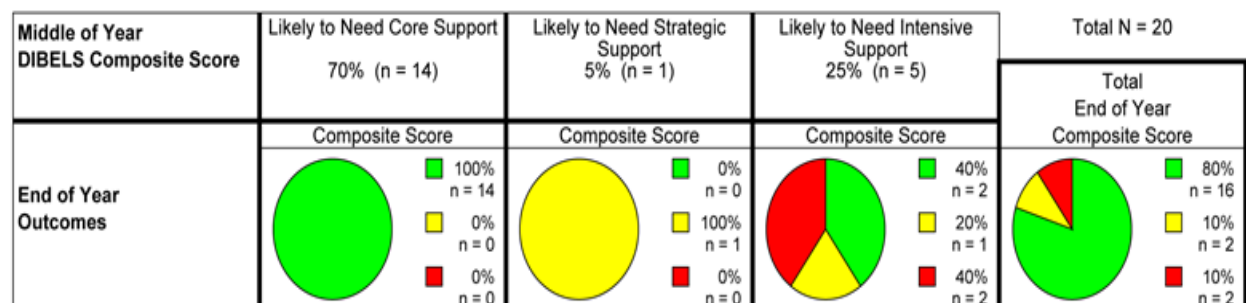


Figure 5.15: Effectiveness of Instructional Levels

School: Happy Valley
 Grade: First Grade, Beginning of Year
 Class: Roth, M.

Class Report

Name	Student ID	LNF		PSF		NWF				DIBELS Composite Score	
		Score	%ile	Score	%ile	CLS	%ile	WWR	%ile	Score	Score Level
H, Bradley	21202	8	< 1	27 	9	6 	1	0 	14	41 	Well Below Benchmark
A, Jaylen	21211	29	13	26 	8	12 	3	1 	32	67 	Well Below Benchmark
J, Geraldine	21215	21	5	39 	33	20 	12	0 	14	80 	Well Below Benchmark
D, Shannon	21213	33	19	33 	17	21 	14	0 	14	87 	Well Below Benchmark
S, Yasmin	21201	38	28	37 	28	35 	45	10 	69	110 	Below Benchmark
B, Maya	21212	43	41	42 	42	28 	30	3 	44	113 	At or Above Benchmark
E, Barkely	21218	42	38	48 	64	25 	22	0 	14	115 	At or Above Benchmark
K, Shayla	21214	42	38	46 	56	27 	27	0 	14	115 	At or Above Benchmark
C, Jenner	21205	40	33	40 	36	36 	47	2 	39	116 	At or Above Benchmark
G, Zachary	21216	42	38	54 	83	29 	32	2 	39	125 	At or Above Benchmark
G, Chad	21207	45	47	47 	60	33 	40	6 	56	125 	At or Above Benchmark
J, Brent	21203	49	59	43 	46	36 	47	2 	39	128 	At or Above Benchmark
A, Lyle	21206	40	33	52 	77	43 	62	9 	67	135 	At or Above Benchmark
A, Gwyneth	21219	41	36	59 	92	39 	53	3 	44	139 	At or Above Benchmark
G, Christian	21204	51	64	48 	64	46 	66	13 	76	145 	At or Above Benchmark
S, Corinne	21217	55	72	56 	87	41 	58	11 	72	152 	At or Above Benchmark
B, Chelsea	21208	59	79	55 	85	45 	65	7 	60	159 	At or Above Benchmark
L, Daphne	21209	59	79	50 	71	69 	85	16 	82	178 	At or Above Benchmark
Z, Dominique	21210	75	96	48 	64	132 	99	36 	98	255 	At or Above Benchmark

Status	Score Level	Likely Need For Support
	At or Above Benchmark	Likely to Need Core Support
	Below Benchmark	Likely to Need Strategic Support
	Well Below Benchmark	Likely to Need Intensive Support

Figure 5.16: Classroom Level Report: Beginning of the Year

School: Happy Valley
Grade: First Grade, End of Year
Class: Roth, M.

Classroom Report

Name	Student ID	NWF				DORF					Retell Quality	DIBELS Composite Score	
		CLS	%ile	WWR	%ile	Words Correct	%ile	Accuracy	Retell	%ile		Score	Score Level
E, Barkely	21218	54	16	15	31	39	15	85%				132	Below Benchmark
J, Geraldine	21215	75	40	22	44	38	13	86%				145	Below Benchmark
H, Bradley	21202	61	27	14	29	50	33	91%				159	At or Above Benchmark
G, Zachary	21216	65	31	22	44	48	27	87%	15	20	1	161	At or Above Benchmark
D, Shannon	21213	72	37	16	33	52	36	91%	18	32	1	165	At or Above Benchmark
A, Jaylen	21211	58	23	15	31	51	35	94%	25	51	2	168	At or Above Benchmark
A, Gwyneth	21219	65	31	20	40	72	60	96%	49	91	3	205	At or Above Benchmark
J, Brent	21203	99	62	35	68	61	51	94%	25	51	3	218	At or Above Benchmark
C, Jenner	21205	128	82	42	82	94	74	94%	22	44	2	265	At or Above Benchmark
B, Maya	21212	126	81	42	82	87	69	98%	20	38	2	270	At or Above Benchmark
S, Yasmin	21201	128	82	41	80	102	80	96%	40	80	3	277	At or Above Benchmark
B, Chelsea	21208	136	86	44	85	103	80	97%	28	56	2	290	At or Above Benchmark
G, Christian	21204	133	84	45	86	104	81	98%	29	60	3	293	At or Above Benchmark
L, Daphne	21209	142	89	48	92	106	82	96%	54	95	4	295	At or Above Benchmark
K, Shayla	21214	124	79	42	82	114	85	98%	42	83	3	297	At or Above Benchmark
S, Corinne	21217	139	87	48	92	112	84	96%	28	56	2	301	At or Above Benchmark
G, Chad	21207	143	90	46	88	127	92	98%	39	79	3	318	At or Above Benchmark
A, Lyle	21206	148	98	50	97	146	96	99%	37	76	3	351	At or Above Benchmark
Z, Dominique	21210	147	97	48	92	189	> 99	100%	32	68	2	390	At or Above Benchmark

Status	Score Level	Likely Need For Support
	At or Above Benchmark	Likely to Need Core Support
	Below Benchmark	Likely to Need Strategic Support
	Well Below Benchmark	Likely to Need Intensive Support

Figure 5.17 Classroom Level Report: End of Year

Based on the current research literature regarding system sustainability (McIntosh et al., 2006) and effective core reading programmes, a rough guideline for interpreting system-level data is that approximately 95% of the children who enter a grade at benchmark should stay at benchmark. Of the children who are identified as in need of strategic support, 80% should achieve the benchmark goal. Of the children who are identified as in need of intensive support, 80% should make *adequate progress*. Adequate progress for learners receiving instruction on grade level is defined as moving from an intensive recommendation to either strategic or benchmark.

Ultimately, schools and districts may use the DIBELS data to establish school- or district-wide goals for literacy growth. The first year of DIBELS data for Happy Valley School provides a baseline from which subsequent growth can be measured and ambitious and realistic goals set. Although their ultimate goal is to have all children achieving literacy goals, it is unrealistic for a school to progress from a baseline of 40% of learners at benchmark to 95% of learners at benchmark in one year. Data on a large number of schools and districts indicate that it is not uncommon to experience a 10% to 20% growth in the number of learners achieving benchmark goals in Grade R and first grade over the first two years of collecting DIBELS data.

5.6 Evaluate results

The final step in the action research cycle is to assess the effects of the action steps that were implemented to determine if improvement has occurred and to verify and validate if the data clearly provide the supporting evidence for the improvement in the classroom, school and district with regard to the progress monitoring of the learners.

The data presented in section 5.5 (cf. Figures 5.4 through 5.17) indicate that the implementation of the action plan (i.e., the progress monitoring assessment and support rocket system) made a significant difference in learner achievement on the basic early literacy skills needed for reading success. All stakeholders were of the opinion that the use of the rocket system enabled them to make far more dynamic, effective, comprehensive, and timely decisions related to core foundational skills for all grades, classes and individual learners (e.g., Jessica).

5.7 Summary

My action research study took a team of sceptical and then cautiously optimistic “astronauts” (i.e., district officials, school management members, a head of department of the foundation phase, foundation phase teachers and myself) on a voyage of discovery. For almost all participants it meant moving out of their comfort zones to explore the unknown and untrained for.

All teachers assess learners, but the use of the data may be less consistent. Success is more than simply having the tool or even administering it. Too often the scores are sitting on the shelf. Merely assessing and not using the data to inform teaching is a waste of time. Teachers need to know how to use the data, including making decisions about how to diagnose deficit skills once they have been flagged by an early literacy screener and determining that teaching is appropriate to address the learners’ deficits.

The progress monitoring assessment and support rocket system is intended to be “serviced” regularly and launched recursively. At an individual level, the data are used formatively to monitor each learner’s progress toward an important goal, make modifications to the intervention when indicated, and evaluate the effectiveness of the support being provided. At the systems level, the outcomes of the instructional support for all children are reviewed at the end of each benchmark period. The system-wide data informs needed modifications to the system of support, including the core and supplemental programmes being implemented.

When launching the rocket, the bottom line is the achievement of crucial literacy outcomes for both individual learners and systems at the classroom, school, and school district levels. The outcomes drive the decisions. If outcomes for individual children and/or groups of children are adequate, the instruction and curricula are deemed to be adequate. However, if outcomes are not adequate, a change is warranted. Changes that increase outcomes are maintained; changes that decrease outcomes are abandoned. Because data are collected on an ongoing basis documenting growth toward important benchmark skills, instructional and/or curricular modifications can be made in a timely fashion to ensure all children achieve the goal of becoming established readers.