



## **BENCHMARK ASSESSMENT SYSTEM (BAS) FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **WHAT IS A BENCHMARK ASSESSMENT (BAS)?**

A benchmark assessment system is a series of texts that can be used to identify a student's current reading level and progress along a gradient of text levels over time. The word "benchmark" means a standard against which to measure something.

### **WHY IS BENCHMARK ASSESSMENT (BAS) A VALUABLE USE OF TIME?**

You can:

- Determine your students' independent and instructional reading levels.
- Assess the outcomes of teaching.
- Assess a new student's reading level for independent reading and instruction.
- Identify students who need intervention.
- Document student progress across a school year and across grade levels.
- Inform parent conferences

### **HOW OFTEN SHOULD YOU ADMINISTER THE BENCHMARK ASSESSMENT?**

The BAS needs to be completed before the end of each trimester. Teachers need not wait until the end of the trimester. Students may be tested anytime during the trimester. Assessing “3-5 students a day” is one strategy to meet with all students before the end of the trimester.

It is also beneficial to use BAS at the beginning of the year to know where to start the teaching with each student. The assessment in the middle of the year measures student progress, and at the end of the year you want to make a final record of the students’ growth across the year.

### **HOW IS THIS DATA USEFUL?**

As teachers, we need to seek information about our students and also to seek information that informs us about how our teaching is impacting their learning. At the beginning of the year, the assessment gives information about the starting points of the learners. As the school year progresses, the assessment becomes a tool for measuring the growth of the students and the effectiveness of your teaching. The series of assessments conducted over several years will reflect the success of the entire school in bringing each child forward in literacy outcomes. BAS is our tool to build a learning profile for each student.

## **HOW DO YOU KNOW AT WHICH LEVEL TO START BENCHMARK ASSESSMENT SO AS TO MAKE THE ADMINISTRATION AS TIME EFFICIENT AS POSSIBLE?**

BAS provides several time-saving options. If you have no information on the student's previous reading, the Where-to-Start Word Test provides a rough starting level for assessment and will cut down the number of books a student needs to read before you can identify an independent and an instructional level. If you do have information about a student's previous reading performance, BAS provides several charts in the Assessment Guide that help determine the starting point by looking at the texts students are reading.

## **WHAT IS THE BEST RATE FOR READING?**

Educators should be cautious in assessing a student's rate of reading. Words-per-minute is only one factor in fluency, and we believe that it is not even the most important factor. Proficient readers vary greatly in the speed of their reading. Rate depends on purpose for reading, content, literary quality, and genre. Excellent readers may have good reason to slow down and reflect on what they are reading. It is a natural part of reading to search back in the text to confirm memory or look for information. They pause to examine illustrations or graphics that provide more information. And, remember that it is also possible for students to read too fast. In other words, faster is not necessarily better.

We do not want readers to read in a slow, halting way; but teachers who are concerned about students' fluency should attend to four other key factors in addition to rate.

**Pausing**—Readers reflect the meaning of the text by pausing appropriately. They are guided by the punctuation.

**Phrasing**—Readers read in meaningful phrase units to show the meaning of the text.

**Stress**—Readers emphasize some words more than others in a sentence to reflect the meaning.

**Intonation**—Readers' voices rise and fall to reflect punctuation and the meaning of the text.

To support fluency, teachers can place students in texts that they are capable of reading and then work consistently to support pausing, phrasing, stress, and intonation. Rate will ultimately be affected so that students read at a good pace—not too slow and not too fast.

## **WHAT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WILL BE PROVIDED TO SUPPORT TEACHERS?**

There will be a series of modules provided over the course of the year. The modules will address analyzing reading records to inform your instruction. The Continuum of Literacy Learning will guide our professional development.

## **WHAT SHOULD TEACHERS DO WITH THESE DATA?**

The primary purpose for using an assessment system is to inform your teaching and measure student learning. An important point to remember is the assessment time is not instructional. However, target teaching and specific instruction to address concerns should happen in a timely fashion shortly after assessing the students.

## **WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF SHARING RESULTS DURING MEETINGS?**

PLCs, articulation meetings, professional development trainings, etc. are perfect opportunities to share results and discuss strategies. Collaboration increases our capacity to share and learn ways to meet the diverse needs of our students. TOSAs are a great resource.

## **SHOULD I SHARE RESULTS WITH STUDENTS?**

Within the classroom, each student's progress is a confidential matter between the teacher and the student. However, sharing data with students is a powerful part of the feedback loop and they will want to know their results. When students monitor their own learning it has an impact on their progress (Hattie, 2012).

## **WHAT COPIES OF ASSESSMENTS WILL BE PROVIDED BY THE DISTRICT?**

The print shop will provide each site a set of required assessments. The number of sets will vary by the size of the school.

## **WHY IS THE ORDER OF THE WORDS IS LISTED ON THE *HIGH FREQUENCY WORDS* ASSESSMENTS NOT THE SAME AS THE ORDER TAUGHT IN *TREASURES*?**

The high frequency words are words from the Benchmark Assessment Kit and are listed in Fry's Frequency order. We are using the Benchmark Assessment Kit words list because these are the words that the students will encounter when reading the gradient level texts (A-Z) for their reading record. They are in the order of Fry's frequency so that teachers will be able to find text that contains these words.

The order does not match Treasures phonics lessons and decodables; however, we need to introduce students to more than just the words in Treasures. This means that teachers should be encouraged to use other forms of print to access the high frequency words and teach students mastery. Other forms of print could be: big books, Science text, Social Studies text, read aloud

text, shared reading text, guided reading text, books from the library, poetry, morning messages, songs, etc.

The order of the words taught is not as important as the fact that students are learning new words. There are word lists for K-2 and cut-points for each trimester for word totals in the CAG and on the district website. The focus should be on the amount of words that the students are learning with less emphasis on the order. Teachers should be looking for growth from trimester to trimester. High frequency word knowledge and automaticity with these words increases reading ability for students. Our ultimate goal is to get all students reading by third grade.