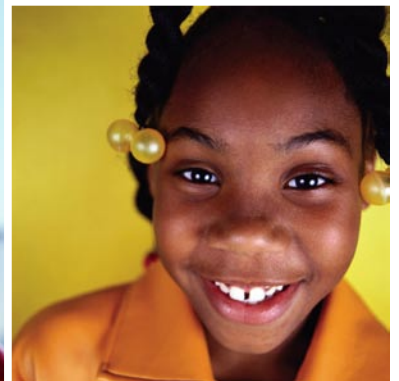


Buffalo Public Schools and the mCLASS®:DIBELS® Software: Expanding from Reading First to a District-Wide Solution



“Here’s my passion: I want to build a model in Buffalo that can be replicated to show this country that inner-city kids can learn if you put the right structures in place. I wanted a strong research component and I like mCLASS®:DIBELS®. I like the results.”

Dr. James A. Williams
Superintendent
Buffalo Public Schools

“A big problem in education is that we don’t monitor and evaluate our work,” says Dr. James A. Williams, the superintendent of Buffalo Public Schools (BPS) in Buffalo, New York. “We adopt a reading series and think it’s going to teach kids how to read. You have to monitor, train, and correct as you go.” Dr. Williams is one of the many public school superintendents who, with their staff, utilize district-wide formative assessment data from the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS®) to make the right decisions about instruction, professional development, and resource allocation to raise student achievement. Buffalo Public Schools has successfully paired measures with Wireless Generation’s mCLASS® handheld-to-Web based system to gain crucial insight from reading data into student learning, and promote educational improvement.

The District

Buffalo Public Schools is a large urban school district located in the greater Buffalo, NY, area. BPS serves over 37,000 students in nearly 70 campuses. Approximately 10,000 Kindergarten to Grade 3 (K-3) students attend 46 elementary schools. The BPS student body meets a high-risk demographic profile with approximately 82% of all students meeting federal poverty standards, 74% classified as minority students, and 18.1% of school-age residents classified as having disabilities.

“During my first 10 days on this job I reviewed student achievement data,” reports Dr. Williams, who started his tenure as BPS superintendent in July of 2005. “We discovered very quickly that we had a literacy problem in the district.” A review of BPS state assessment results in 2003-2004 indicated that 66% of students in the fourth grade and 74% in the eighth grade tested did not meet state academic standards for English Language Arts. The same test administration indicated that 16% of students in the fourth grade and 15% in the eighth grade had serious academic deficiencies in English Language Arts.

The Challenges

Buffalo Public Schools had to overcome several challenges to improve district-wide student achievement. There was the initial question of where and how to focus reform efforts given the sheer size of the district. In addition, BPS had to ensure that the method of assessing and monitoring academic growth had a scientifically research-based foundation. District-wide locally developed assessments were often at odds with state standardized test results. Finally, there was the question of how to ensure that teachers received immediate feedback from the assessment in question. Results from prior test administrations were often received too late to be of much value in informing instruction.

“The results are instant; you can Progress Monitor every day. The mCLASS:DIBELS Web reports give you an overview of whether a child has been Progress Monitored, benchmarked, and a breakdown of their subsequent proficiency levels over time. And because it is so quick and so accurate, the teachers have a 99.9% confidence rate in how they approach student instruction.”

Lawrence Grisanti
Reading First Elementary School Principal
Buffalo Public Schools

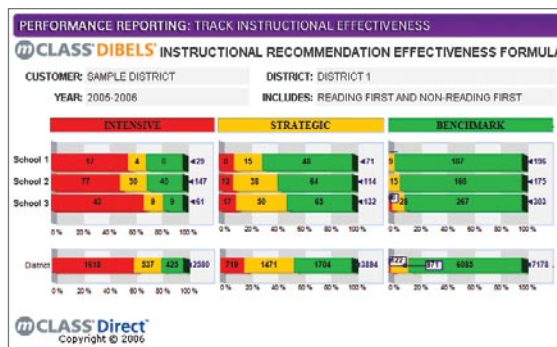
The Solution: DIBELS, Then mCLASS Technology

Buffalo Public Schools, under the guidance of Superintendent Williams, has embarked on a three-year academic strategy for district-wide reform. The strategy places initial emphasis on literacy for students in grades K-3 with a gradual inclusion of additional grade levels over time. In the 2005-2006 school year Dr Williams, along with district stakeholders, made the decision to utilize the paper-based Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) screening and progress monitoring assessment as the district-wide K-3 formative assessment.

“The DIBELS is easily administered and relates well to our focus on the foundational grades (K-3),” reports Dr. Constance Moss, associate superintendent of shared accountability/CIO. “We wanted to put in place a structured approach that would enable us to give our teaching staff the skill set that they need to address the five pillars of reading. It is very much in line with the district in terms of how we are focusing on academic achievement.” The research-based, nationally normed DIBELS effectively replaced and expanded on the previously utilized district-authored assessments.

The decision to use the paper/pencil DIBELS assessment kits on a district-wide basis was largely predicated on the successes of the BPS Reading First program and the mCLASS:DIBELS software. Each of the eight BPS Reading First campuses originally implemented the mCLASS: DIBELS handheld-to-Web assessment and reporting software system in 2004. Dr. Williams, a strong proponent of Reading First, states, “I like Reading First – 90 minute reading blocks, 60 minute math blocks, and progress monitoring with DIBELS using the handheld computers.” After using paper DIBELS during the 2005-2006 school year, BPS decided to implement mCLASS:DIBELS software district-wide in 2006-2007, fully replicating the district’s Reading First model. As Dr. Moss explains, “We didn’t only want the DIBELS by itself; we wanted mCLASS:DIBELS to leverage the technology so that teachers didn’t have to deal with the paperwork.”

In addition, the Reading First campuses found that mCLASS:DIBELS Web reports addressed prior issues with real-time assessment data access. Lawrence Grisanti, a Reading First elementary school principal at BPS, described his experience with mCLASS solutions and services. “The results are instant; you can Progress Monitor every day. The mCLASS:DIBELS Web reports give you an overview of whether a child has been Progress Monitored, benchmarked, and a breakdown of their subsequent proficiency levels over time,” he says. “And because it is so quick and so accurate, the teachers have a 99.9% confidence rate in how they approach student instruction.”



BPS utilizes mCLASS®:Direct™ reports to access clear, graphical representations of DIBELS data. The mCLASS:Direct reports allow BPS staff to visualize real-time progress for students (including demographic subgroups), teachers, and schools.*

* The mCLASS:DIRECT screen is intended to illustrate report functionality. Buffalo Public School student data is not shown in the sample screen.

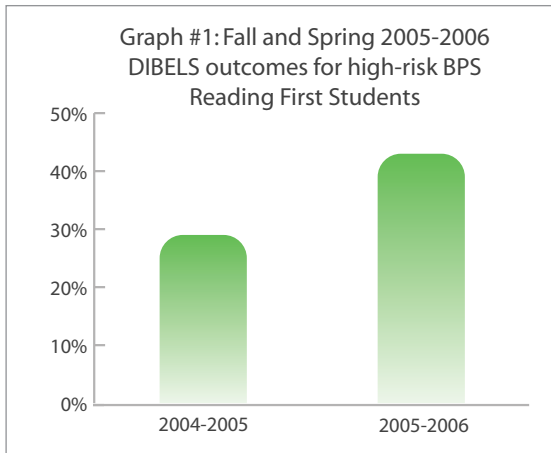
The Results

By Dr. Williams' own estimation, the implementation of mCLASS:DIBELS software in the district's Reading First schools has been highly successful and "the DIBELS data is looking very good right now." Graph #1 shows the consistent academic gains made by at-risk BPS Reading First K-3 students from the 2004-2005 to the 2005-2006 academic year. At the end of the first school year with mCLASS:DIBELS software (2004-2005), 29% of students in BPS' Reading First Schools moved out of the Intensive category, the DIBELS category for students who require the greatest support and intervention. At the end of the 2005-2006 school year, 43% of students moved out of the Intensive category.

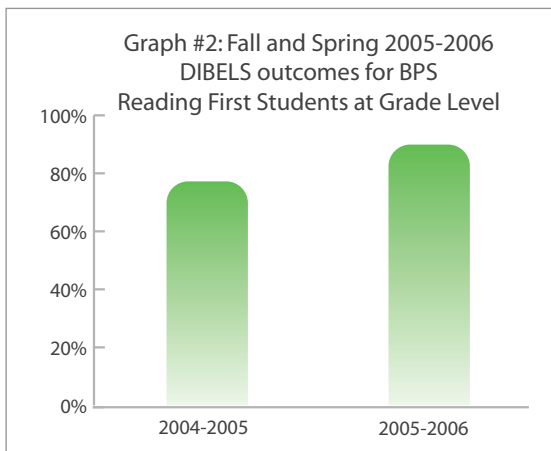
BPS Reading First schools are also doing a better job of keeping students at grade level. At the end of the 2004-2005 school year, 23% of students who were at grade level at the start of the year had slipped below. But at the end of the 2005-2006 school year, that number dropped to just 10%.

Special education referrals and classifications have also decreased at BPS Reading First schools. At the end of the 2004-2005 school year, 143 K-3 students were referred for special education screenings with 106 of these students qualifying for special education services. In 2005-2006, these same categories of K-3 students dropped to 135 and 88, respectively – a 6% reduction in referrals and a 17% reduction in classifications.

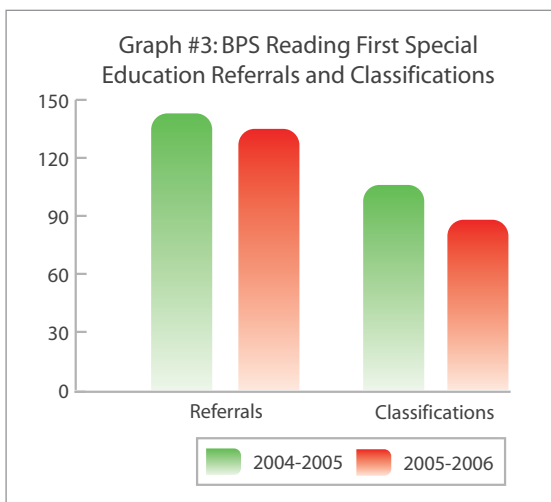
The Reading First academic gains and reduction of special education referrals highlight the BPS commitment to utilizing real-time DIBELS data to identify areas of academic need, inform instruction, and continuously monitor reading improvement. The results were also instrumental in the decision to implement mCLASS:DIBELS software district-wide in all K-6 classrooms (beginning in 2006-2007). "We are taking the Reading First model and expanding it across the district," says Dr. Williams. "Here's my passion: I want to build a model in Buffalo that can be replicated to show this country that inner-city kids can learn if you put the right structures in place", says Dr. Williams. "I wanted a strong research component and I like mCLASS:DIBELS. I like the results."



In the 2005-2006 school year, 43% of BPS Reading First K-3 high risk students moved out of the high-risk category – an increase of 14% from the 2004-2005 school year.



In the 2005-2006 school year, 90% of BPS Reading First K-3 grade-level students remained at grade level – an increase of 13% from the 2004-2005 school year.



In the 2005-2006 school year, 135 K-3 Reading First students were referred for special education services and 88 students qualified to receive special education services – a decrease of 6% and 17%, respectively, from the 2004-2005 school year.