September 12, 2015
New York, NY

In June of this year I was retained by Drake Bennett Summer Schools to administer before and after assessments of their summer school students. I have no other commercial relationship with Drake Bennett. Due to the high number of students in August and the goal of completing all testing in the first and last 2 days of the session, approximately 25% of the testing was done by an additional speech/language pathologist who provides services to Drake Bennett students. She was thoroughly trained in the protocol; she did not test any of the students she works with.

Drake Bennett Summer School is a full-day summer school for elementary grade students. Students are grouped homogeneously for Orton-Gillingham-based reading instruction for 60 minutes, 5 days/week. In addition, students are grouped heterogeneously for an additional period of drama. All students attend classes in math, science, art, and dance.

Each student's reading level is assessed at the beginning and end of the month using two Aimsweb tools: the Test of Early Literacy (TEL) and Reading-Curriculum Based Measurement (R-CBM). Assessment is done through one-minute, timed tasks. The TEL is comprised of four skill-based assessments that measure mastery of early reading measures: Letter Name Fluency; Letter Sound Fluency; Phoneme Segmentation Fluency; and Nonsense Word Fluency. Due to the high number of students at Drake Bennett with dyslexia, all students are administered the TEL even though it is normed only on students in grade K, 1, and 2. Given the short duration of the program, this permits us to see if students make progress in basic reading subskills apart from text reading.

The R-CBM is comprised of brief, grade-level reading passages. R-CBM is a particularly powerful measure that uses oral reading fluency as an indicator of global reading proficiency. Just as a doctor measures your temperature, weight, and blood pressure to monitor your overall health, R-CBM is a proven, accurate measure of reading ability. Aimsweb national norms data comprises the results from over 30,000 students per grade, nationwide. Norms include both ROI (rate of improvement expressed as number of words/week) and percentile ranks. As expected, nationally, children at the lower end have lower ROIs which reflects their slower rates of improvement. As a rule of thumb, children in grade 1 at the 50th and 75th %ile increase their reading rate by 1.5 and 1.8 words/week, respectively. Children in grades 2 through 5, at both the 50th and 75th %ile, increase their reading rate by about 1 word/week.

Two notes before looking at the Drake Bennett data: First, any reference to a child's grade is based on the grade they last completed. This is for two reasons. There is no "summer" aimsweb data. So all Drake Bennett children's scores were compared to scores of children from the spring of the school year just completed. In addition, some of the Drake Bennett students are at risk of being held back in last year's grade, so it is not clear what grade they will be in come fall.

Five kindergarteners attended DrakeBennett in August. Two of them achieved ROIs of more than double their expected rate on the NWF task; one was just slightly ahead of her expected ROI (1 vs. .78) and 2 children did not show growth on this measure. These two children also made very modest gains on the other 3 components of the TEL.

Overall, statistically, the CBM-R is the most accurate measure of reading progress. Of the 11 first-graders who attended in August, one child surpassed the expected ROI for children at his level by a factor of at least 3. This rapid growth moved him from the 47th to the 59th %ile in reading. Two children achieved an ROI of 2x their expected rate. Three children achieved ROIs at the level expected. The remaining five children showed no-minimal improvement in their text reading. Overall, 9 of the 11 children demonstrated improvement in their Nonword Reading Fluency, achieving ROIs of 1.25, 1.5, and 2.25 to 5.25-10, indicating growth in the subskill of segmenting and blending phonemes.

Eight 2nd graders completed the August program. Two children achieved robust ROIs of 4.3 and 6.75, respectively, advancing each of them 10 %ile points (from the 13th to the 26th %ile and from the 22nd to the 35th %ile.) One improved at a faster rate than their national peers by a factor of at least 2. Five children made minimal to no progress in their text reading. Three demonstrated significant improvement in their Nonword Fluency suggesting that these student's foundational skills are developing and need even more intensive work. Two did not demonstrate growth.

Ten 3rd graders completed the August program. Seven demonstrated ROIs on the CBM-R that outpaced their expected rate, five of them by a factor of more than 4, enabling gains of 10+ percentage points in passage reading, i.e., movement from one decile to the next. Three children demonstrated minimal to no change in their CBM-R scores; however their ROIs in NWF were 3.75, 6.5, and 9.25.

The three 4th graders who completed the program in August demonstrated minimal to no growth in their passage reading as measured by the CBM-R; however, each demonstrated significant growth in their NWF, achieving ROIs on that measure of 5.5, 10.74, and 14.25.

The three 5th graders who completed the program all showed strong growth in their text reading, achieving ROIs on the CBM-R of 4.75 (movement from the 17th to 31st %ile,) 4.75 (30th to 45th %ile), and 11.75 (14th to 51st %ile.)

One sixth grader attended in August and achieved an ROI on the CBM-R of 8, moving her from the 12th to the 35th %ile in passage reading for students her grade. Two seventh graders attended in August. One attained an ROI of 8.25, moving him from the 10th to 34th %ile. The other student was tested using 1st grade passages due to her inability to reach critereon on grade-level passages; she did not demonstrate any growth in reading as measured by post-testing with CBM-R first grade passages or by the TEL.

High ROIs are necessary to advance slow readers. According to Aimsweb, performance at the 45th %ile on national norms indicates that the student is 80% likely to meet proficiency standards on a typical state test. Only programs that can demonstrate higher than average rates of improvement have the potential to not just maintain struggling students but to raise their reading levels to the level of their grade-level peers...to move them from one quartile to the next. If students could continue this level of progress throughout the school year, they would have a chance of really catching up.

Andrea Schwartz, M.A., CCC-SLP
Speech/language Therapist