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Teachers' Perception and Utilization of the Dominie Literacy Assessment In Grades K-3

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Dominie Literacy Assessment - Teacher Use and Perceptions

Background

In 2003, South Carolina received a federal Reading First grant to help schools and districts improve reading achievement for students in grades K-3 through scientifically proven methods of instruction. Six CCSD elementary schools are participating in South Carolina's Reading First grant: Chicora, Dunston, Fraser, Goodwin, Mitchell, and St. James-Santee. The grant provides professional development, supplies, and coaching on literacy instruction for all K-3 classrooms in the six schools. In 2005-06, CCSD schools completed the second full year of the grant.

Dominie was selected by the South Carolina Reading First program as the literacy assessment to be used by all Reading First grantees for assessing students in grades K-3. Dominie is used for screening, diagnosis, and progress monitoring. The Dominie assessment portfolio measures key skill areas in reading, writing, spelling, phonological awareness and phonics. It was developed by Dr. Diane DeFord at the University of South Carolina and was first published in 2001.

Reading First schools are required to use selected assessment tools within the Dominie portfolio. A Reading First third-grade class, for example, is assessed on "Sentence Writing and Spelling" at the beginning, middle and end of the school year; "Text Reading" in the beginning and end of the year; and "Core Reading Words" in the beginning and end of the year. (See appendix for a complete list of Dominie assessment tools used by Reading First schools.)

The statewide Reading First grant is being evaluated by a research team based at University of South Carolina. As part of CCSD's internal evaluation, district researchers conducted a survey with all K-3 teachers in the six schools regarding their experiences with and perceptions of Dominie. This report summarizes key findings from the survey.

Methodology

All seventy-four K-3 teachers in the six Reading First schools were e-mailed the Dominie Teacher Survey in mid-May 2006. A total of twenty-nine teachers completed the survey for a response rate of 39%. Given the low response rate, characteristics of survey respondents were compared with characteristics of all K-3 teachers in the six schools to ensure that the teachers who completed the survey were similar to all K-3 teachers in these schools. Based on this comparison, it appears that the survey respondents were a fairly representative sample.¹

Findings

Seventeen percent of teachers responding to the survey are in their first year of teaching and 45% have been teaching 10 or more years. Twenty-eight percent of surveyed teachers used Dominie for the first time during the 2005-06 school year. The remaining teachers have been using Dominie for two years. Two-thirds of respondents (66%) had used a formal reading assessment before Dominie, most often the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA).

¹ The breakdown of survey response across all six school was: three of thirteen teachers at Chicora; four of ten teachers at Dunston; three of ten teachers at Fraser; eight of twenty-three teachers at Goodwin; five of nine teachers at Mitchell; six of nine teachers at St. James-Santee. The breakdown by grade level was: five of fifteen Kindergarten teachers; twelve of twenty-five 1st grade teachers; three of sixteen 2nd grade teachers; nine of eighteen 3rd grade teachers. On the whole, teachers at St. James-Santee were slightly overrepresented in the survey sample while teachers at Chicora were slightly underrepresented. First- and third-grade teachers were slightly overrepresented, and second-grade teachers were slightly underrepresented.

**Survey of CCSD Teachers' Use and Perceptions of DOMINIE (Literacy Assessment)
Spring 2006**

Summary of Key Findings

Percentage of teachers who report. . .

TRAINING & SUPPORT	
I am thoroughly trained on <i>administering</i> Dominie	79%
I am thoroughly trained on <i>using data</i> from Dominie	69%
Our literacy coach is the building "expert" on Dominie	81%
ADMINISTERING DOMINIE	
It is very easy to administer Dominie	28%
I administer Dominie to my students	100%
It takes 20 minutes or more to administer Dominie to each of my students	96%
ANALYZING DOMINIE DATA	
It is very easy to understand Dominie data	48%
Someone else in my building tracks and reviews my students' Dominie data	35%
USING DOMINIE DATA	
It is very easy to use Dominie data	48%
Dominie data are extremely/somewhat useful in my instructional planning	93%
I use Dominie data extensively for grouping students	55%
I use Dominie data extensively to refer students for interventions and/or special education services	45%

Dominie Training & Ongoing Support

- The vast majority of teachers (79%) thought that they had received thorough training on how to administer Dominie. A slightly lower percentage of teachers felt thoroughly trained on how to interpret and use Dominie results (69%).
- Nearly all respondents (28 of 29 teachers) indicated that there was someone in their building who was viewed as an “expert” on Dominie. Eighty-one percent of teachers identified the school’s Reading First literacy coach as the Dominie “expert”. A few teachers (12%) identified both the Reading First literacy coach and the Reading First reading interventionist as “co-experts”.
- Most of the surveyed teachers (69%) were able to correctly identify at least three literacy skills that Dominie measures. A small percentage of teachers (14%) could not identify any literacy skills measured by Dominie.

Administering Dominie

- Teachers indicated that they are the key person responsible for administering Dominie to their students. Teachers reported that they administer Dominie one-on-one with each student in their class at least three times a year. For struggling students, teachers reported that Dominie was administered an average of four times per year. Teachers reported an average of 36 minutes per child to administer the assessment. With a class of fifteen students, that would be an average of 9 hours for the whole class per administration. Multiplying 9 hours by three times per year equals approximately 27 hours of Dominie testing per year.

“It takes up too much time. Gives us little time to teach all our standards.”

- About two-thirds of teachers (68%) indicated that the most common criticism of Dominie in their school is the amount of time it takes to administer the assessment. An equal percentage of teachers (69%), however, think that the data that Dominie yields is worth the time it takes to administer it.

“It provides one on one time. The running records clue us in to what strategies our students are using. The sentence writing and spelling shows us how our students are internalizing the letter sound relationships.”

- A few teachers indicated that it is difficult to administer the assessment while trying to manage their class. Overall, however, teachers did not express many challenges administering Dominie besides the time commitment.

Interpreting & Using Dominie Results

- Nearly one-half of teachers (48%) found it very easy to understand Dominie results.
- Over three-quarters of teachers (79%) thought that the literacy skills measured by Dominie related directly to their classroom instruction. Less than one-third (31%) of teachers, however, found Dominie results useful in their own instructional planning.
- Classroom teachers appear to have a moderate amount of support with tracking Dominie data and interpreting the results. One-third of teachers (35%) reported that the Reading First literacy coach and/or reading interventionist were key individuals in assisting the teachers in tracking and interpreting Dominie data.
- Teachers identified many individuals who reviewed Dominie results in their school including their principal, literacy coach, reading interventionist, and teacher teams. Only about one-quarter of survey respondents, however, included their school psychologist in the list of individuals who reviewed Dominie data.
- Nearly all teachers (90%) were aware that Dominie data can be used for grouping students. About one-half of teachers (55%) were using Dominie data extensively for instructional grouping. Less than one-half of teachers (45%) extensively used Dominie data to refer students for interventions.

Overall Impressions of Dominie

- Nearly all surveyed teachers (93%) would recommend Dominie to other teachers.

“It gives a lot of information about an individual student's strategies, strengths and weaknesses.”

- Among teachers who have used other reading assessments, two-thirds (68%) think that the information from Dominie is more useful than the information from other reading assessments. One-half of the second- and third-grade teachers indicated that if Dominie was not required under the Reading First grant, they would still support using it in addition to the district's MAP testing.
- When asked, “At your school, would you say that support for Dominie is increasing or decreasing?”, teacher responses varied greatly from school to school. None of the respondents at St. James-Santee thought teachers at their school had become more supportive of Dominie. In contrast, 60% of surveyed teachers from Dunston believed that support for Dominie was increasing at their school. About one-half of respondents from Mitchell and Fraser felt there was increasing support for Dominie. Forty-four percent of respondents from Goodwin perceived a positive change in perception of Dominie and one-third of teachers at Chicora perceived an increase in teacher support.

Conclusion

Teachers appear confident in administering Dominie but less confident in how to interpret and use results. Nearly all surveyed teachers commented about the enormous time it takes to administer Dominie. Many teachers also praised the wealth of information they obtain both during the process of administering Dominie and from the assessment results.

While teachers seem to be tracking individual student progress, they do not appear to be extensively using Dominie results to group students or to develop intervention plans for struggling students.

Teachers at the Reading First schools have “experts” in-house, the Reading First literacy coach and reading interventionist, who can assist them with administration, data compilation, and interpretation.

Some schools appear to have greater staff buy-in regarding Dominie. Given that all six schools are receiving the same opportunities through the Reading First grant, it would be useful for schools to explore the within-school factors that contribute to this variation in support of Dominie.

APPENDIX

Dominie Assessment Schedule for South Carolina Reading First Schools

Kindergarten	Beginning of the Year	Middle of the Year	End of the Year
Phoneme Segmentation	X		X
Sentence Writing and Spelling		X	X
Core Reading Words	X		X

First Grade	Beginning of the Year	Middle of the Year	End of the Year
Text Reading	X		X
Phoneme Segmentation	X		X
Sentence Writing and Spelling	X	X	X
Core Reading Words	X		X

Second Grade	Beginning of the Year	Middle of the Year	End of the Year
Text Reading	X		X
Sentence Writing and Spelling	X	X	X
Core Reading Words	X		X

Third Grade	Beginning of the Year	Middle of the Year	End of the Year
Text Reading	X		X
Sentence Writing and Spelling	X	X	X
Core Reading Words	X		X