

K-5 District Formative Assessments (DFAs) Frequently Asked Questions

What are DFAs?

DFAs are assessments designed to measure students' abilities to read and understand grade level text during a 'cold read'. 'Cold read' is a term used to describe a 'fresh text' - something that hasn't been read before. A cold read assessment measures comprehension as opposed to memorization of previously taught stories / passages.

What is the purpose of DFAs?

Eight years ago, principals requested the district create cold read assessments aligned to Florida's standards to monitor whether students were on track to master grade level standards as well as ensure students would be able to demonstrate proficiency on state assessments. The request stemmed from the historical instructional practice of reading and re-reading, and teaching and re-teaching a story through the basal reader each week then testing the students. This instructional practice assessed the students' memorization skills, but not their ability to think critically through unrehearsed text.

How are DFAs used for grading purposes?

Students should be assessed and graded similarly district-wide. Therefore, the elementary principals unanimously decided upon the following K-5 English Language Arts (ELA) district-wide grading policies:

K-5 ELA Grades:

- ✓ Reading 60% of ELA grade
 - Cold Reads: 20%; ≥ 4 grades per 9 wks
 - Non-cold Reads: 40% ≥4 grades
- ✓ Language Arts 40% of ELA grade
 - Writing: 35%; ≥4 grades
 - Spelling: 5% ; ≤8 grades

What has the process been for creating DFAs?

Eight years ago, the Literacy Coaches used cold read assessments from the basal series to begin this process. These assessments were revised the following year to eliminate questions which weren't aligned to Florida's standards. As the state has transitioned to the new Florida Standards, further revisions were necessary. With this transition, FDOE gave districts access to its Item Bank Test Platform (IBTP). This platform and other sources were utilized to create many of the latest DFAs.

What are the future plans for DFA creation and revision?

The ultimate goal is for grade level teams of teachers from throughout the district to create all DFAs with support from Literacy Coaches. This is where teachers are in the process as of September 2015:

- ✓ Summer 2014: Kindergarten teachers created DFAs for 2014-15
- ✓ Summer 2015: Kindergarten teachers revised DFAs for 2015-16 and beyond; First Grade teachers created DFAs for the first nine weeks of 2015-16
- ✓ Summer 2016: First Grade teachers will revise first nine week DFAs and complete DFAs for second, third and fourth nine weeks for 2016-17; 2nd – 5th grade teachers will create DFAs for 2016-17
- ✓ Fall 2016: All DFAs administered will have been created by grade level teams
- ✓ Summer 2017: K-5 teachers will revisit DFAs and revise accordingly for 2017-18 school year and beyond

How is the DFA grading process similar to other districts?

Districts differ in grading and assessment policies. Some districts grade *only* cold read assessments and use these assessment for student progression purposes. Other districts do not differentiate between cold read and non-cold read assessments. High performing districts typically endorse cold reads as *part* of the grading process to ensure independent student proficiency on grade level standards.

What have the DFA implications been?

DFAs have sparked many quality conversations about reading comprehension, assessments, supports and grading. Teachers are able to use DFA information to create lessons customized to meet students' needs and communicate clearly with parents regarding how their students are performing on grade level standards.