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## INTRODUCTION

One of the main goals of the GirlSMART Literacy Program is to develop strong, smart and bold girls. One of the principal ways to do this is through developing high levels of literacy in GirlSMART girls. Research indicates that low literacy skills are highly correlated with teen pregnancy and high school drop out rates. Fratt (2009) found that there was a high correlation between teen pregnancy and high drop out rates for students who were reading below grade level in second grade. Studies also indicate that students who cannot read at grade level by third grade struggle their entire lives and, “without intervention, 74% never catch up” (Tyndall, 2008).

Literacy matters. Low levels of literacy negatively impact people for their entire lives. This is why it is so important to assess the literacy of GirlSMART girls using multiple measures several times during the year. Without knowing which girl is making significant progress, and which girl is struggling to improve, GirlSMART staff cannot provide the assistance and intervention their struggling readers need. Assessment used at the beginning and mid year are considered formative assessments; they should inform teachers about girls’ strengths and weaknesses. Teachers should use this information to plan activities, choose books, and create questions during reading alouds to improve girls’ literacy levels.

GirlSMART staff also needs to collect data for program evaluation and reporting. The assessments given at the end of the year will enable GirlSMART to measure growth and to have a realistic idea of the literacy levels of GirlSMART girls. If the end of the year assessment indicates that most girls were weak in comprehension, then GirlSMART staff will need to analyze what they are currently doing and determine whether modifications to the program need to be made. GirlSMART receives money from grantors based on a proposal that included measureable objectives. The grantor needs to know that these objectives are being met to ensure that their money is making a difference in the lives of girls they intended on serving.

## GIRLSMART ASSESSMENTS

GirlSMART programs in use *DIBELS 8* (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills). Up until 2015, they also used some assessments CORE’s *Phonological Segmentation Test* and *Phonics Survey*. CORE assessments are used for kindergarten students only. Early on in the program, GirlSMART staff reported that DIBELS was not useful as a diagnostic test because results are very general; they indicate what areas of literacy that girls are weak in (phonemic awareness, phonics, etc.) as opposed to providing detailed information that could help inform instruction. For example, they mentioned that it would helpful to know that a girl knows all the short vowels, but only

the long “a” found in VCe pattern (vowel, consonant plus silent “e”, such as “make”). There has been significant professional development beginning in 2016 to ensure that staff is able to use DIBELS results to inform instruction, because it is possible. DIBELS 8, which is a much improved version of the old DIBELS assessment, will be used for the first time during the 2022-23 school year. DIBELS 8 will give teachers more detailed information about areas girls struggle in, so that teachers can address GirlSMART girl’s literacy needs.

Day to day observations during class are also critical to assess the strengths and weaknesses of GirlSMART girls. this diagnostic purpose. Teachers need to pay special attention to girls as they engage in literacy activities, especially when girls are reading (during Guided Reading, buddy reading, Reader’s Theater, etc.), writing and spelling. It is particularly useful during Guided Reading that teachers pay attention to the cueing systems that girls use while reading.

## THE THREE CUEING SYSTEMS

Teachers should pay special attention to and analyze the miscue difficulties that their struggling readers are experiencing. In order to do this, all teachers should be aware of the three cueing systems (some experts include a fourth cueing system: pragmatic) that readers use to decode a text. Identifying weaknesses in these cueing systems will help teachers give their struggling readers the help they need.

The three cueing system readers use are **graphophonemic**, **semantic**, and **syntactic**. **Graphophonemic** (also referred to as graphophonic) refers to knowledge of letter-sound relationships. Readers who misread words that look alike but have very different meanings are most likely over relying on the **graphophonemic cueing system** and under relying on their **semantic cueing system**.

The **semantic cueing system** is related to making meaning. Readers use their **semantic cueing system** to make sense of what they are reading. Students with larger vocabularies and knowledge of the world should have an easier time using their **semantic cueing system** effectively than readers who have smaller vocabularies and less knowledge of the world. A student who often misreads a word that does not make sense should be asked, “Does this make sense?” Next, the student should be prompted to reread the word from beginning, middle and end. Students who replace the word “mom” with “mother” should be prompted to reread the word from beginning, middle and end. In this case, the girl is over relying on her **semantic cueing system** and needs to pay more attention to the letters on the page (**graphophonemic cueing system**).

The **syntactic cueing system** is usually the least developed in students whose first language is not English. **Syntactic cues** involve identifying the function of a word, that is, its part of speech such as noun, verb, adjective and adverb. Simply put, readers rely

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on their knowledge of grammar to assist them in making meaning. If a student substitutes a similar word for another similar word that is a different part of speech then they are not activating their ***syntactic cueing system***. They need to be asked if what they read makes sense. Additionally, a teacher should make note of such errors and give the student mini lessons in grammar.

## CORE READING ASSESSMENTS

***The CORE Reading Assessments are no longer required.*** The Consortium on Reading Excellence (CORE) has two excellent publications that all GirlSMART programs should have: *CORE Assessing Reading: Multiple Measures* (1999) and *CORE Teaching Reading Sourcebook* (2000). Up until 2016, GirlSMART programs used two assessments from *CORE Assessing Reading: Multiple Measures* (1999) for kindergarteners: *CORE Phonological Segmentation Test* and *CORE Phonics Survey*. These assessments were chosen since research indicates that there is a positive correlation between phonemic awareness and knowledge of sound-letter relationships and success in learning to read (Armbruster et al., 2003). GirlSMART sites that are concerned about their girls' phonemic awareness skills may want to consider using *CORE Phoneme Deletion Test*. Although these assessments are no longer required, staff may want to consider using them to better identify needs or on certain struggling readers who have not made gains.

### CORE PHONOLOGICAL SEGMENTATION TEST

The *CORE Phonological Segmentation Test* has three parts: Part A: Sentences into Words; Part B: Words into Syllables; and Part C: Words into Phonemes. GirlSMART programs administered Part A: Sentences into Words to their kindergarteners at the beginning of the year; administer Part B: Words into Syllables mid year; and administer Part C: Words into Phonemes at the end of the year. Teachers should follow the directions found on pages 47- 50 in *CORE Assessing Reading: Multiple Measures* (1999) and make sure they practice the practice items before administering the test to girls.

### CORE PHONICS SURVEY

GirlSMART programs also used to administer the *CORE Phonics Survey* to kindergarteners at the beginning of the year. This survey is a comprehensive phonic survey which tests phonics and phonics-related skills that have a high rate of application for beginning readers. This survey assesses students' ability to name upper case and

lower-case letters, consonant and vowel sounds, reading and decoding skills and spelling skills. Up until 2016, GirlSMART programs gave the first half of the test to their kindergarteners; they test them through reading short vowels in CVC words which is the first subtest in the section on reading and decoding skills.