Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment System: Advancing Alternate Assessment

The Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment System (DLM-AAS) is a comprehensive assessment system designed to more validly measure what students with significant cognitive disabilities know and can do.

Until recently when federal laws mandated that all students be assessed, students with significant cognitive disabilities were not included in large-scale assessment. Furthermore, despite advances in technology, it has not been common practice to assess students within this population using a computer.

DLM-AAS will mark the first time this student population is assessed using online, computer-based, large-scale state assessments.

Based on research into how students learn and utilizing the latest advances in assessment technology, the DLM-AAS will be able to adapt to individual student needs based on the student’s personal profile.

Also, the dynamic assessment technology will adapt to the student’s individual learning pattern during the assessment process and will select assessment tasks based on the student’s previous responses. Therefore, the system can adapt to the student’s skill level.

Additionally, test content is linked to the Common Core State Standards, educational standards adopted by most states, through the Essential Elements that the DLM Consortium created, thereby allowing for comparable expectations and assessment measures.

Future newsletters will provide more details about key features of the DLM-AAS.

Who are Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities?

Students with significant cognitive disabilities make up the 1% of the K-12 public school student population for whom, even with accommodations, general state assessments are not appropriate. Therefore, these students take an alternate assessment. They are a broad range of students with diverse disabilities and communications needs, and make up about 9% of all students with disabilities.
**Person First Language**

Using Person First Language is a respectful way to speak about people with disabilities by emphasizing the person first, rather than the disability. Using Person First Language highlights the person’s value and individuality.

Use terms such as:

- “People with disabilities”
  Instead of: the disabled or the handicapped

- “People with learning disabilities”
  Instead of: learning disabled

- “People with significant cognitive disabilities”
  Instead of: slow, retarded, or mentally retarded

- “People who have (or have been diagnosed with) . . .”
  Instead of: People who suffer from or people who are victims of . . .

**Source:** Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities

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**What is the Dynamic Learning Map?**

The foundation of the DLM-AAS is the Dynamic Learning Map, a massive, computerized information network that resides in a computer software program. Assessment content will be based on the map’s interconnected skills and pathways.

Although the concept of a learning map is not new, the Dynamic Learning Map is one of a kind because it includes development in both English language arts and mathematics. This marks the first time anyone has created a learning map this detailed, broad, and complex.

The learning map currently includes more than 4,000 skills and more than 5,000 connections (pathways) between skills.

“The Dynamic Learning Map is like an educational version of the human genome project,” says Neal Kingston, director of the Center for Educational Testing and Evaluation, which leads the DLM Consortium. “It’s more extensive than other learning maps because it includes critical early development that occurs before school-based skills.”

The project is funded to focus on mathematics and English language arts, the only two subjects addressed in the Common Core State Standards. All Dynamic Learning Map content is linked to skill development in these areas.

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*The present publication was developed under grant 84.373X100001 from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. The views expressed herein are solely those of the author(s), and no official endorsement by the U.S. Department should be inferred.*