The Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment System is a new system designed to more validly measure what students with significant cognitive disabilities know and can do.
This video provides a brief overview of the DLM system, which is being developed by a consortium of states through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education programs.
The Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment System is designed to map a student’s learning throughout the year.
The items in the DLM Assessment are designed to be instructionally relevant, and when the system is fully operational, the DLM assessment system will support teachers in embedding these instructionally relevant items and tasks in day-to-day instruction. In this way, testing will happen as part of instruction.
In addition to the instructionally embedded version of the assessment, the DLM system will include an end of the year, summative assessment. In both the instructionally embedded and end of year formats, the new DLM Alternate Assessment System will allow students with significant cognitive disabilities to show what they know and can do.
As defined by the U.S. Department of Education, students with the most significant cognitive disabilities have a disability or multiple disabilities that significantly impact intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior.
Students with significant cognitive disabilities differ markedly from one another.
Many are able to read independently with fluency and comprehension, and write for a variety of purposes.
Others struggle to learn basic academic concepts or process the world around them.
Still others have not developed intentional communication and depend completely on others to meet all of their needs.
Individual states set eligibility criteria that helps establish which students are eligible to take the alternate assessment; however, most states include descriptions that clearly indicate that students who take the alternate assessment require extensive, repeated, individualized instruction and support; and they use substantially adapted and modified materials and individualized methods of accessing information in alternate ways to acquire, maintain, generalize, demonstrate and transfer skills across settings. These are the students we intend to participate in the DLM Alternate Assessment.
At the core of the DLM Alternate Assessment System is a learning map. The learning map is a massive network of nodes that reflect knowledge and skill development that were drawn from the research in Mathematics and English Language Arts, as well as the researcher pertaining to foundational skills that contribute to later domain-specific development.
The Dynamic Learning Maps Essential Elements are specific statements of knowledge and skills that are linked to the grade-level expectations and stand on their own as important learning targets for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The DLM Essential Elements were developed to align with College and Career Readiness standards at each grade level in general education.
Within the thousands of nodes that comprise the DLM Learning Maps, there are nodes that have been tagged as target nodes for each of the DLM Essential Elements. This tagging highlights the progression of the Essential Elements within the learning map and the tagging ensures that each Essential Element links directly to the research.
The DLM Learning Map and Essential Elements are organized into a set of Claims and Conceptual Areas. The DLM claims are overt statements about what we intend for students to learn and what the DLM assessment will measure. Conceptual Areas connect the learning map to the overall Claims and identify large areas of conceptually related skills in the maps.
Within Conceptual Areas, nodes in the map that most closely link with the DLM Essential Element targets are specified. These nodes are the focus of the items in the DLM assessment.
The nodes are assessed through a set of 3-5 items that are grouped together into a Testlet. Each testlet links to a specific DLM Essential Element. Target testlets assess nodes that are most closely linked with an individual Essential Element.
Four other levels of testlets have been created for each target testlet. The four other testlets assess nodes that precede and build up to the target nodes and the skills that extend beyond the target.
Eventually, the DLM Alternate Assessment System will have features that will not be operational for the Field Tests in the first half of 2014.
For example, both the instructionally embedded and summative versions of the DLM Alternate Assessment will feature dynamic routing. This means that the system will use data entered by the teacher initially and data generated based upon the student’s performance over time to determine appropriate next steps in the assessment. In the field test events, we are testing out the reliability of our process to start students at an appropriate place in the map; however, the dynamic routing will not be operational.
Reporting is another feature that will not be operational during the Field Test Events in the first half of 2014. In fact, no scores or accountability data will be reported during the Field Test Events. This means that administrators will not be able to monitor the progress of individual teachers or students. Reporting will, however, be an integral part of the fully operational system when it’s complete.
Teachers will enter the DLM Alternate Assessment System through the Educator Portal. This portal will eventually allow teachers to do things like override testlets selected by the system, preview materials required for a testlet, and access professional development and instructional supports. These features will not be available during the field test, but they will be available in the fully operational system.
The DLM software is designed to allow most students with significant cognitive disabilities to interact directly with the computer using a keyboard, a touch screen, and a range of assistive technology input devices. Throughout 2014, these accessibility features will be tested and enhanced with new features available during each of the field test events.
Even with these accessibility features, however, there will be some students with the most complex multiple disabilities who cannot interact directly with the computer. We expect that these students will be assessed using the DLM system; however, their teachers will enter responses that students provide off the computer or the teacher will record observations of student behaviors using item-specific observation checklists. The Field Test Events will help us refine the system for these students, but the system is designed to include them now.
The DLM System is an integrated system involving learning maps, claims, conceptual areas, essential elements, testlets, instructionally relevant items, and both instructionally embedded and year-end summative versions of the final assessment. The system is still being developed and refined. The fieldtest events in the first half of 2014 will provide important data that will support this continued work and lead to the completion of a fully-operational system.
For more information about the entire Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment System, visit our web site at www.dynamiclearningmaps.org. Thank you.