

RESEARCH SYNOPSIS

Educator Perspectives on Instructionally Embedded Assessments

AUTHORS: Amy K. Clark, Jennifer Kobrin, Ashley Hirt

KEY POINTS

- Overall, educators preferred instructionally embedded assessments over assessments administered only in the spring.
- Educators valued administration flexibility, including the ability to choose Essential Elements, linkage levels, and when to assess students.
- Educators typically used the system-recommended linkage level to assess students; educators indicated that when they did adjust a linkage level it was to provide their student with a greater opportunity for success, or to align more cohesively with instruction.
- When utilizing the Instruction and Assessment Planner that is used for test assignment and accessing results, most educators found it informative and easy to use, but several educators did not know they could access assessment results in the interface.

IMPLICATIONS

- Findings will be used to evaluate current implementation practices and inform future Instruction and Assessment Planner enhancements.
- Results provide support for instructionally embedded assessments as a flexible assessment approach that provides educators with instructionally useful information.

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Clark, A. K., Kobrin, J., & Hirt, A. (2022). *Educator perspectives on instructionally embedded assessments*. (Research Synopsis 22-01). University of Kansas, Accessible Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Systems.

The authors would like to acknowledge the contributions of Hamadi Henderson and Megan Mulvihill to work that informed this brief.

BACKGROUND

Instructionally embedded Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessments are administered throughout the year to determine student mastery of knowledge, skills, and understandings. Assessment content measures **Essential Elements**, which are learning targets aligned to grade-level academic content standards at reduced complexity. Assessment content is available for each Essential Element at five levels, called **linkage levels**. During instructionally embedded assessment administration, educators have flexibility within constraints for which Essential Elements are administered, at what linkage level(s), and at what time interval in the administration window. There are two assessment administration windows during the school year: fall (September-December) and spring (February-June).

In November 2021, DLM staff conducted a series of focus groups with educators to collect feedback on their administration and use of instructionally embedded assessments. A total of 30 educators from six states participated in 11 focus group sessions. Educators taught a range of subjects spanning grades three through eight and high school.

FINDINGS

Educators shared a strong preference for instructionally embedded assessments over previous portfolio-based alternate assessments, indicating that instructionally embedded assessments were a better fit for students and required less educator time to prepare and administer. However, some educators shared that it may be challenging to implement instructionally embedded assessments if they were required to administer to their entire caseload. Educators valued the flexibility of instructionally embedded assessments, indicating that they appreciated being able to choose Essential Elements and levels and determine the most appropriate time to assess students within their state's assessment windows.

Educators tended to use system-recommended linkage levels for each Essential Element, particularly during the fall window. When educators reported adjusting a linkage level, they did so to align more effectively with their instruction or to provide students with a greater opportunity for success. Educators identified several factors that influenced timing of assessment administration, including student demeanor and attendance, local guidance, and proximity to instruction. Some educators indicated that they were not aware that Essential Elements could be reassessed, and others shared that they were unable to reassess due to time constraints.

Educators reported that they generally liked the Instruction and Assessment Planner tool used to assign the instructionally embedded assessments and view results. Most educators indicated that the Planner was easy to use and supported them in knowing if blueprint requirements were met. Several educators reported not knowing how to access assessment results in the Instruction and Assessment Planner, while others indicated that they found results useful and informative to their instruction.

In addition to giving feedback on instructionally embedded assessment, educators shared varied perspectives on the appropriateness of DLM content and expectations for students with significant cognitive disabilities. They also described variability in their training on using assessment results to inform their instruction.