Teaching and learning are hard work and the Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment System (DLM-AAS) is being developed as a tool that simultaneously supports teacher instruction and student learning. It will accomplish both by having assessment tasks model good instruction and by being embedded within teachers’ classroom activities throughout the school year.

“We are developing the DLM assessment where supporting instruction is in the very design of the assessment, not an afterthought, so that all children can meet high standards,” said Neal Kingston, DLM project director and co-director of the Center for Educational Testing and Evaluation, which leads the DLM Consortium.

Because the DLM assessments can monitor students’ progress throughout the year during teachers’ classroom activities, assessment becomes embedded and not just solely part of a high-stakes, separate activity at the end of the school year. This gives teachers the chance to continually evaluate their students’ learning and adjust teaching to optimize students’ progress throughout the year.

Computer-delivered testlets are created starting with the Common Core Essential Elements, specific statements of the content and skills that are linked to the Common Core State Standards grade-level specific expectations for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Essential Elements are intended to provide links between Common Core Standards and grade-specific expectations for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

Each testlet, a package of items centered around a learning target, include an engagement activity and between three to five assessment items. Items may include performance-based tasks, technology-enhanced formats that allow students to order, sort, label, and match, or multiple choice scenarios.

The testlets and the DLM computer-based test delivery system are being developed following the principles of Universal Design, which provide access to the system to students with the most diverse learning profiles. For example, the system will be programmed to deliver the test using different response modes, such as a mouse or a one- or two-switch selection system, to accommodate students’ needs.
(A) An instructionally relevant testlet reflects best instructional practice because it reflects the instructional activities teachers use to support student learning. Also, the engagement activities at the beginning of each testlet provide an important instructional context around which the assessment items are centered.

(B) Instructionally relevant testlets provide useful instructional examples that teachers can carry over outside of the assessment environment. For example, teachers might use an engagement activity that begins each testlet as a model for setting the context for other lessons they teach.

(C) The instructionally relevant testlet promotes the content standard being measured because each testlet is based on an Essential Element. These important links to the grade-level Common Core State Standards are intended to reduce complexity of the target and increase access to the general curriculum for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

(D) An instructionally relevant testlet reveals common student misunderstandings about a particular skill or concept. As misunderstandings are revealed, missing precursor skills are identified and students are directed to testlets that provide examples of the instruction they require and assess required precursor skills.

(E) An instructionally relevant testlet informs teacher instruction by providing teachers with continuous results on student performance throughout the year. This provides teachers with valuable student performance information so teachers can adjust their instruction accordingly.

For more information about the Dynamic Learning Maps, visit us online at www.dynamiclearningmaps.org