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Lessons Learned About Instruction from Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in College and Career Ready Assessments

The new large-scale assessments rolled out by consortia and states are designed to measure student achievement of rigorous college- and career-ready (CCR) standards. Recent surveys of teachers in several states indicate that students with disabilities like many features of the new assessments, but that there also are challenges. Many of these challenges are related to instructional issues that need to be addressed to improve student outcomes.

This Brief was prepared to provide information and suggestions for state education agencies (SEAs) and other technical assistance (TA) providers who work with local education agencies (LEAs).

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It highlights four main challenges **identified by the teachers**, and then addresses the implications for instruction, the relationship to CCR standards, and the implications for TA providers. A companion Brief on lessons learned about the implications for assessment from the inclusion of students with disabilities in CCR assessments is forthcoming.

Resource suggestions are provided, although these are not exhaustive. Undoubtedly, TA providers will have access to other useful and relevant resources.

Though this Brief is focused on the immediate needs of students with disabilities, many of the identified issues apply to all learners. Teacher buy-in of the need to address instructional issues is essential for immediate action and sustainable change. It is also essential that teachers not only have high expectations for all learners, but that they actually know how to provide instruction that aligns with high expectations and that actualizes high expectations.

This Brief is organized to allow the implications to be easily shared with teachers in a way that can support their development of new knowledge, skills, and practices.

The four challenges pertain to:

1. **Reading:** students struggled to read extended passages of text in the time available; they had difficulty understanding the assessment questions; they had difficulty extracting supporting evidence from text and video; they were not familiar with "authentic" texts.

2. **Writing:** students were not used to writing extended responses to assessment questions; they were not used to composing online responses, and lacked keyboarding and scrolling skills.

3. **Justification of answers:** students had difficulty using evidence to justify answers, and were not used to providing written justification for math responses.

4. **Getting the research and essay done in one day:** students did not have basic research skills; they were not able to complete research and write about it in a timely way.

Challenges, Implications for Instruction, Relationship to College- and Career-Ready (CCR) Standards, and Implications for TA Providers

Challenge #1: Reading Challenges

The Challenge

- Students struggled to read extended passages of text in the time available.
- Students were not familiar with the kind of texts they had to read.
- Students were not familiar with vocabulary used in the text.
- Students had difficulty understanding the assessment questions.
- Students had difficulty extracting supporting evidence from text and video.

Implications for Instruction	Relationship to CCR Standards	Implications for TA Providers
Students need to read and understand multi-paragraph authentic texts (e.g., narrative and expository texts written in the original, natural language of the authors). These texts are not written with a controlled vocabulary or rewritten to achieve a particular score according to a readability formula. Students need to increase stamina in reading extended text in a short amount of time and increase the amount of their reading. Students need practice in identifying and using supporting evidence related to ideas in the text. Students need to practice reading text online.	Read and comprehend both literary and informational text of increasing complexity; elementary level—50% informational complex text. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.	Provide examples of how teachers can: • select multi-paragraph, authentic text; • select text to read online; • directly teach students' close reading of text and of sample test questions; • incorporate Universal Design for Learning (UDL) considerations (e.g., chunking text); • integrate vocabulary building in meaningful activities with text; • teach students to extract and organize information from more than one source (e.g., use of graphic organizers); • teach students to extract supporting evidence from text and video; • help students understand the verbs used in assessment questions and the kind of responses required; provide sample responses.

Challenge # 2: Writing Challenges

The Challenge

- Students were not used to writing extended responses to assessment questions.
- Students were not used to composing online responses and lacked skills in keyboarding and scrolling.

Implications for Instruction	Relationship to CCR Standards	Implications for TA Providers
Students need to increase fluency, stamina and quality in writing through frequent opportunities to write and use feedback. Students need practice writing online, and support in developing keyboarding skills and using other functionalities (e.g., scrolling).	Write informative/explanatory texts. Write opinion pieces. Write arguments to support claims. Write for authentic purposes. Demonstrate increasing sophistication in vocabulary, syntax development and organization of ideas.	Provide examples of how teachers can: • help students understand that they are writing for "remote readers"; • help students write complete and coherent responses of appropriate length; • use sample responses as exemplars (provide samples for teacher use); • give students opportunities to practice with keyboards, screens, external mouse, and touchpads.

Challenge # 3: Justifying Answers Challenges

The Challenge

- Students were not used to justifying answers (extracting supporting evidence from video, text).
- Students were not used to providing written justifications for math responses.

Implications for Instruction	Relationship to CCR Standards	Implications for TA Providers
Students need to practice identifying relevant evidence in text to support conclusions. Students need practice in drawing inferences from textual evidence. Students need to understand the difference between justification and explanation in mathematics. Students need to engage in math talk to justify conclusions, and learn how to craft justifications in writing for mathematical conclusions.	*ELA—* Use evidence to inform, argue and analyze. Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. *Math—* Justify conclusions, communicate them to others.	Provide examples of how teachers can: • teach students to identify relevant evidence in text and from video (e.g., graphic organizers of different levels of complexity, close reading with text dependent questions) ; • teach students to draw inferences from textual evidence; • teach students to annotate text while they are reading (e.g., annotate text identifying supporting evidence); • use think-alouds to model how skilled readers cite evidence, and how mathematicians justify conclusions; • teach students how to include textual evidence in written responses and provide examples; • teach students to make a clear connection between their conclusion and the evidence; • teach students the difference between explanation and justification; • provide opportunities for students to engage in math talk and math writing to practice justifying conclusions.

Challenge #4: Getting the Research and Essay Done in One Day Challenges

The Challenge

- Students did not have basic research skills.
- Students were not able to complete research and write about it in a timely way.

Note: the implications for reading and writing above are also relevant for this challenge.

Implications for Instruction	Relationship to CCR Standards	Implications for TA Providers
Students need to learn and practice basic research skills. They need practice in developing basic focused research questions (what do I want to know about this subject/topic?). Students need practice in organizing information on a topic. Students need to learn how to integrate information from more than one source (including text and video). Students need practice in writing information in a coherent way on a topic in a short period of time.	Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. Write in short time frames.	Provide examples of how teachers can: • teach students to select what is important to answer the question; • teach students to identify key-words/phrases related to the question; • teach summarization skills; • teach students how to organize information (e.g., graphic organizers); • conduct think-alouds to illustrate extracting information from text and video; • teach note-taking skills; • teach students how to cite sources; • provide examples of short written responses to research questions; • provide examples of several sources on a topic for students to practice research skills.

Conclusion

The suggestions included in this Brief can be used as a catalyst to improve student learning and performance. The perspectives of teachers regarding the difficulties that students with disabilities had with the new assessments provide valuable information about several instructional challenges that have implications for instruction and for TA providers. The identified strategies and practices have the potential to improve outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities.

Suggested Resources

Challenge #1: Reading Challenges

7 Actions that Teachers Can Take Right Now. Hiebert, E. (2012). Santa Cruz CA: TextProject. http://textproject.org/library/text-matters/new-library-publications-section-page/7-actions-that-teachers-can-take-right-now-text-complexity

CAST Free Learning Tools. (2015). Wakefield MA: CAST. http://www.cast.org/our-work/learning-tools.html#.VnQn2MrvaLg

Generative Vocabulary Instruction. Hiebert, E.H. & Pearson, P.D.(2014). Santa Cruz CA: TextProject. http://textproject.org/assets/library/resources/Hiebert-Pearson-Generative-vocabulary-instruction.pdf

Supporting Students in Close Reading. Jones, B., Chang, S. Heritage, M.H., Tobiason, G., & Herman, J. (2015). Los Angeles CA: Center on Standards and Assessment Implementation (CSAI). http://www.csai-online.org/resource/335

Read, Write, Think Classroom Resources (2015). Newark DE: readwritethink. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/used-words-paraphrasing-informational-1177.html]

UDL Examples and Resources. (2012). Wakefield MA: National Center on Universal Design for Learning. http://www.udlcenter.org/implementation/examples

Challenge # 2: Writing Challenges

Preparing Students in Writing Responses to Open-Ended Questions. Kapinus, B. (2014). Santa Cruz CA: TextProject. http://textproject.org/library/text-matters/common-core-state-standards-and-assessment/preparing-students-in-writing-responses-to-open-ended-questions/

Challenge # 3: Justifying Answers Challenges

Creating Math Talk Communities. Wagganer, E.L. (2015). Reston VA: National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM). http://www.nctm.org/Publications/Teaching-Children-Mathematics/2015/Vol22/Issue4/Creating-Math-Talk-Communities/

It Says – I Say – And So . . . (n.d.) Arlington, VA: Reading Rockets. http://www.readingrockets.org/pdfs/inference-graphic-organizer.pdf

Text-dependent Question Resources. (2013). New York NY. Achieve the Core, Student Achievement Partners, Inc. http://achievethecore.org/page/710/text-dependent-question-resources

The Art and Science of Teaching: Teaching Inference. Marzano, R. (2010). Educational Leadership, 67(7), 80-01. http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/apr10/vol67/num07/Teaching-Inference.aspx

The Power of Incorrect Answers. Hoffman, B.L., Breyfogle, M.L., & Dressler, J.A. (2009). Reston VA: National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM). http://www.nctm.org/uploadedFiles/Professional_Development/FHSM_Video_Library_Task_Force/Power%20of%20Incorrect%20Answers.pdf

Think-aloud: Modeling the Cognitive Processes of Reading Comprehension. Davey, B. (1983). Journal of Reading, 27(1), 44-47.

When Kids Can't Read—What Teachers Can Do. Beers, K. (2003). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Challenge #4: Getting the Research and Essay Done in One Day Challenges

A Suggested Scaffolding of Research Skills. (2006). Austin TX: Texas Education Agency. http://www.txla.org/sites/tla/files/conference/handouts/521TipsforTeaching.pdf

Helping Students Become Better Online Researchers. Muthler, S. (2015). Seattle WA: Edudemic. http://www.edudemic.com/students-better-online-researchers

Improving Research Skills with Effective Key Words. (2013). Oakland CA: Teaching Channel (Tch). https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/teaching-strategies-internet-research

Research Project Guide: A Handbook for Teachers and Students. Lankau, L. Parrish, R., Quillin, L., & Schilling, S. (n.d.) Humble TX: Humble Independent School District. http://www.humbleisd.net/cms/lib2/tx01001414/centricity/domain/29/researchguideelem.pdf

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