



Common Core State Standards Essential Elements Video Transcript

The Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment System is a new assessment designed to more validly measure what students with significant cognitive disabilities know and can do. This video will provide an introduction to the Common Core State Standards Essential Elements that have been developed in English Language Arts and Mathematics for students with significant cognitive disabilities who will complete the alternate assessment.

This training, *The Common Core State Standards Essential Elements*, is one of a series of training videos that support teachers of students with significant cognitive disabilities in their efforts to teach and assess. Sponsored by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, this training is part of the professional development efforts of the Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment Consortium.

The Common Core Essential Elements are 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. They were developed to address the fact that the authors of the Common Core State Standards did not provide specific guidance regarding the application of the standards to students who perform well below expected levels or have identified disabilities. In this case, the Essential Elements are intended to provide links between the common core standards and grade specific expectations for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

The links between each individual grade level standard and the Essential Elements are important. For example, at the 4th grade level of the English Language Arts Common Core

Standards, the 2nd writing standard reads, *“Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.*

a. Introduce a topic clearly and group related information in paragraphs and sections; include formatting (e.g., headings), illustrations, and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.” The team of educators and content experts working on the Dynamic Learning Maps project identified the Essential Elements of the standard as: *“Write to convey ideas and information clearly. a. Select a topic and related visual/tactual/multimedia information.”*

The link between the Common Core grade level standards and the Essential Element is clear. Both emphasize writing to convey ideas and information. Both address topic. And both include the use of related illustrations and multimedia. The Essential Element is not a downward extension of the grade level standard, instead it is a clarification of the elements that are most essential in achieving the standard.

Hunter provides us with a meaningful example of what it might look like for a student with significant cognitive disabilities to engage successfully in instruction that addresses this grade level standard. In this case, Hunter’s topic for writing is an apple tree project he worked on the previous day. This topic also resulted in a visual/tactual representation to accompany his writing efforts. The way Hunter engages in writing is perhaps the most unique part of this example. Hunter cannot hold a pencil to write and efforts to get him to use standard or alternative keyboards have not been successful. He has only recently developed the ability to use symbols to communicate basic choices and prior to the school year when this video was created, it was unclear whether Hunter knew or could learn letters of the alphabet. His teacher and the entire team made a commitment to developing a system that would allow Hunter to access all of the letters of the alphabet so, like other beginning readers and writers, Hunter could engage regularly in writing as a means of learning about letters, words, and written communication. We often refer to this alternative access to ALL of the letters of the alphabet as an alternate pencil. In this case, it qualifies as a true alternative to

a pencil because it has the capacity to allow Hunter to write anything he wants once he learns more about reading and writing.

Let's watch the video.

<video>

As you could see, Hunter is working on writing to convey his ideas about a topic, the apple tree, and he has related visual and tactual information to support it. Hunter does not yet demonstrate proficiency in using writing to convey his ideas, but he is clearly working toward achieving the standard through this sort of instruction.

Developing the Essential Elements as a means to clarify the grade specific expectations for students with significant cognitive disabilities was an intensive process with multiple stages of development. Over the course of 18 months, a cycle of preparation, development, and review was repeated several times. Led by Dr. Jan Sheinker and Beth Judy of Edvantia, Inc. members of the Dynamic Learning Maps consortium received resource materials, participated in preparatory webinars, engaged in on-site development work, reviewed the resulting product, shared it with other stakeholders, and reviewed it once again.

Preparing to develop the Essential Elements required a great deal of advance work. Consortium members were provided with information regarding the Common Core State Standards including important links to resources, videos, and online trainings. Educators who were gathering to conduct the on-site development of the Essential Elements read and explored these resources independently and then participated in a webinar that provided an overview and summary of the information that related directly to the development of the Essential Elements.

Representatives from thirteen states were convened in English language arts and mathematics. More than seventy educators, content experts, and assessment developers from member states gathered in each of the face-to-face, on-site working meetings. One meeting focused on developing the Essential Elements for English Language Arts and the

other focused on Mathematics. At each meeting, the state representatives began with a careful review of the Common Core State Standards and in-depth discussions regarding their meaning and intent. Those discussions led to draft versions of the Essential Elements for the grade level standards.

The drafts of the Essential Elements that resulted from these on-site meetings were reviewed by content experts, revised, reviewed again by stakeholders and revised, before they were released the Essential Elements provide an important bridge to the grade level standards in the Common Core for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

As in the development of the Common Core State Standards, the process of developing the Essential Elements involved important design decisions. First and foremost, authors of the Essential Elements had to focus on student learning. For more than a decade, we have talked about providing students with significant cognitive disabilities with access to the general curriculum, but in this effort our focus extends beyond mere access to learning. The goal was to ensure that the Essential Elements increased the likelihood that students with significant cognitive disabilities would achieve college and career readiness. Another decision involved making certain that the Essential Elements created comparable expectations for students with significant cognitive disabilities while highlighting the essential learning elements of the grade level standards in the Common Core. Consistent with the Common Core, the decision was made to write the Essential Elements using performance terms that describe what students should know and be able to do in a manner that is measurable and observable.

Other design priorities that drove the development of the Essential Elements included defining differences from grade to grade with respect to cognitive demand, content knowledge, and skills-based expectations. This decision resulted from an understanding that we had to look beyond the verbs that were used when assessing the complexity of a standard or an Essential Element. While the use of verbs like “select” and “identify” provide important information regarding the ways that students will demonstrate a skill or

understanding, they do not, alone, dictate the level of cognitive complexity. The complexity of the content or skills addressed in standards or Essential Elements contributes significantly to the complexity of the expectations. Other design priorities involved considering all of the standards at a given grade level when identifying Essential Elements rather than trying to create a one-on-one correspondence between the standards and the Essential Elements. While most standards have an Essential Element linked directly to them, there is not necessarily a one-to-one relationship between Common Core grade level standards and Essential Elements. That said, every effort was made to align the Essential Elements within and across grade levels.

As you begin to explore the Common Core Essential Elements, it is important to understand what they are not. For example, the Essential Elements are NOT replacements for the Common Core State Standards nor are they downward extensions of the standards. Furthermore, the Essential Elements are statements of academic skills in English Language Arts and Mathematics. They are NOT statements of functional skills. Certainly, students should learn to apply the academic skills they acquire in meaningful, personally relevant, functional ways, but the Essential Elements do not address functional skills directly. The Essential Elements are also not curriculum or learning progressions. The skills and understandings addressed in the Essential Elements appear in the dynamic learning maps that underlie the entire Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment System, but on their own, the Essential Elements do not create a curriculum, learning progression, or learning map. Importantly for those of us who teach students with significant cognitive disabilities, the Essential Elements also are not simply restated as goals or benchmarks on students' individual education plans but can serve as a resource to IEP teams in aligning IEP goals with individual targets for working toward grade level standards.

Finally, like the Common Core State Standards, the Essential Elements do NOT define what is taught or how to teach it. They do, however, help clarify the grade level standards through their clear statement of specific content and skills that are the Essential Elements for all students learning and demonstrating progress in the Common Core State Standards.

In closing, we would like to offer special thanks to Edvantia, Inc, Beth Judy, and Dr. Jan Sheinker of Sheinker Educational Services for their leadership in developing the Common Core State Standards Essential Elements and their support in gathering content for this training.

For more information about the Common Core State Standards Essential Elements and the Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment System, please go to www.dynamiclearningmaps.org. Thank you.