Educator Perspectives on Using Assessment Accessibility Features and Accommodations

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Agenda

• Learn about the new accessibility framework in the U.S.
• Discuss educators’ challenges with the accessibility framework
• Explore possible solutions to those challenges
New Accessibility Framework

• In the past, accommodations were available to students with disabilities and English learners (ELs)
  • American Sign Language, braille, extra time

• Now a wide range of accessibility features are available to all students
  • Some (e.g., text-to-speech) are available if an educator identifies a need for them in advance
  • Some (e.g., glossaries, highlighters) are part of universal design and are available to all students who choose to use them
New Accessibility Framework

**Universal Features**
for all students

**Designated Features**
for students who need them
as identified by an educator in advance

**Accommodations**
for students with disabilities and ELs
Educator Responsibilities

• Educators have to collect data from both assessment and instruction to make accessibility decisions
• Their decisions should account for students’ individual needs and preferences
• Their decisions should be based on current policy
Problem

More accessibility features and accommodations available = More decision making by more educators
DIAMOND Project

• Data Informed Accessibility – Making Optimal Needs-based Decisions

• Collaboration between the National Center on Educational Outcomes and nine state departments of education

- Alabama
- Connecticut
- Maryland
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Ohio
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- U.S. Virgin Islands
DIAMOND Project

• Research activities include a white paper, a survey, focus groups, phone interviews, and in-person interviews

• Goal is to create online professional development modules to help educators make decisions about accessibility features and accommodations
Challenges
Accessibility Framework Is Hard to Understand

• States and tests do not use the same language for the accessibility framework (white paper)

• Teachers sometimes confuse the accessibility framework with other frameworks that are in use in schools (focus groups)

• Teachers are sometimes unclear about where certain accessibility features and accommodations belong in the framework (phone interviews)
Teachers Lack Clear Roles in Decision Making

• General education teachers are the most confused about timelines and criteria for making decisions (focus groups)

• Some teachers implement accessibility features and accommodations without having a role in choosing them (in-person interviews)
Connecting Assessment and Instruction Is Difficult

• Most teachers believe that students receive consistent accessibility features and accommodations across assessment and instruction (survey)

• However, some report that the accessibility features and accommodations used in class are not available on tests (in-person interviews)
Resources Are Scarce

• Making individualized decisions for all students with different needs and preferences is time consuming (phone interviews)
• Access to technology is sometimes limited, so students cannot use certain accessibility features and accommodations (phone interviews)
DIAMOND Professional Development Modules
Purpose & Audience

• Purpose: Improve decision making about accessibility features and accommodations for all students

• Audience:
  • General Education Teachers
  • Special Education Teachers
  • EL Teachers
Module Structure

• Start with a scenario
  • You are starting a new academic year. One of your first goals is to understand how each student learns best to determine their access needs. How can you do that?

• Review student profiles
  • Daisy, student with learning disability
  • Adrián, EL student
  • Gavin, non-EL student with no disabilities

• Go through targeted tutorials as needed
  • What are accessibility features?
  • Who is eligible for them?

• Answer questions to resolve the scenario
Discussion Questions

• In your experience, what are the most pressing needs for educators related to accessibility features and accommodations?