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## Preparing ALL students for the DC-CAS Guidance from the DC Special Education Co-operative

This guidance document was developed by the DC Special Education Co-operative and three of its member schools. Special thanks to those who shared their expertise in an effort to help all children be successful.

### **Key points**

There is no single tool, strategy, person, or resource that is going to prepare students for the DC-CAS. Schools can improve student success on the DC-CAS by doing careful data analysis that breaks down standards and identifies which skills are missing for each student; teaching the missing skills and targeted test-taking strategies; using a thoughtful process to determine test accommodations; and teaching students how to use their accommodations.

### **DC-CAS prep plan**

Develop a school-wide DC-CAS prep plan that aligns with the general education curriculum and DC standards. Built-in test prep is most effective. If your school has a general education test prep plan, make sure that special education teachers and students are a part of the plan and participate in trainings and discussions about data and test strategies. If you don't know how to analyze data, find someone who does and schedule training for staff. The plan should include a practice test to 1) work out and practice the logistics of administering the test with accommodations and 2) to gather diagnostic data on the students' current skills.

### ***Be creative with time and resources:***

- Build designated test prep time into school day
- Put classroom tests into DC-CAS format
- Incorporate a problem of the day that focus on tested skills
- Focus on test vocabulary
- Build in extra time these next few weeks for all test prep. Students stay later for extra support or come in on Saturdays or over spring break.
- Identify non-teaching staff who can work with kids who need that extra help. For example, the school librarian or office staff can run book clubs during lunch to work on comprehension. Be sure to train these staff members first.
- Don't rush to squeeze in new skills. Build in 2-3 weeks of review.

### ***Empower students:***

- Ask students to make a list of everything they have learned this year. This activates prior knowledge and prepares students to classify questions.
- Teach students to classify questions: expose students to the types of comprehension questions that will be asked and how to answer them (for example, even if a student can't read every word, they can tell how a passage is organized)
- Focus on how to deal with low reading levels (read first sentence of each paragraph before trying to tackle whole article, read questions then go back and circle key words and phrases in the passages).
- Train students to classify math problems – is it percentage, perimeter, etc.? This also helps to activate prior knowledge.
- For students who are significantly below level, teach them to go through and circle all the problems they *can* do even if they don't have grade-level math skills. This allows them to feel successful and eases the stress.
- Train students on how to show their work so that they do not just fill in bubbles.
- Don't forget about the emotional stress these tests can cause some students with disabilities. Make sure they know this test is not going to determine if they pass or fail, nor does it measure all the great progress they have made toward their goals. The more empowered your students feel, the more likely they are to stay calm and do their best.

### ***Use Accommodations Wisely:***

- Train students on how to use their accommodations. Students need to know what questions are okay to ask and how to take breaks or ask to have math/science questions read aloud. They should be using their accommodations long before the DC-CAS during regular classroom testing and also during mock testing so all the kinks are worked out.
- Be sure to read the new DC-CAS accommodations manual to make sure your staff is clear on the limits of each accommodation.
- Breaks can be incredibly useful: Take a short walk, Breathing exercises, drink water, stretches/movement
- Read aloud for Math and Science: whole group read-aloud can frustrate students who can read faster and raising hands can miss kids. Solution: work with one group reading aloud and monitor the other students.
- Small groups and Individualized testing when necessary can have a huge impact:
  - Have kids testing in the afternoon
  - Be creative with space - send non-tested grades on field trips to use their classrooms
  - Proctors should be a person that the student is comfortable with
  - Be thoughtful about grouping, don't put two students who distract each other in the same group.

## **Resources**

There are many types of resources to help students prepare for the DC-CAS. Students need multiple opportunities to practice their test taking strategies and skills. Don't waste time making up math problems or writing passages. Use these resources:

- Released DC-CAS tests ([www.nclb.osse.dc.gov](http://www.nclb.osse.dc.gov))
- Ohio State released/sample tests (<http://www.ode.state.oh.us>)
- Massachusetts - MCAS released/sample tests (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/>)
- Scantron
- Achievement Net
- BBC kids articles
- DC-BAS/Thinklink
- Cliff Notes
- Wilson Reading System differentiated articles (you need to have a login for the WRS website)

## **Reflect After the Test is over**

Immediately after testing have teachers write up what went well and what didn't, questions they have, etc., to refer back to next year. Make sure to incorporate student feedback as well. This way you begin implementing your plan right away next year.