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BEST PRACTICES
Strategies for Preparing Students for Assessments

Study Island®

Summary

Student assessments provide both formal and informal information about how and what students are learning. Assessments have a greater focus in the classroom than ever before and play a unique role in the learning process.

This paper looks at challenges and strategies when preparing students for assessments and will highlight how one web-based learning tool, Study Island, has been successfully used by teachers for assessment preparation.
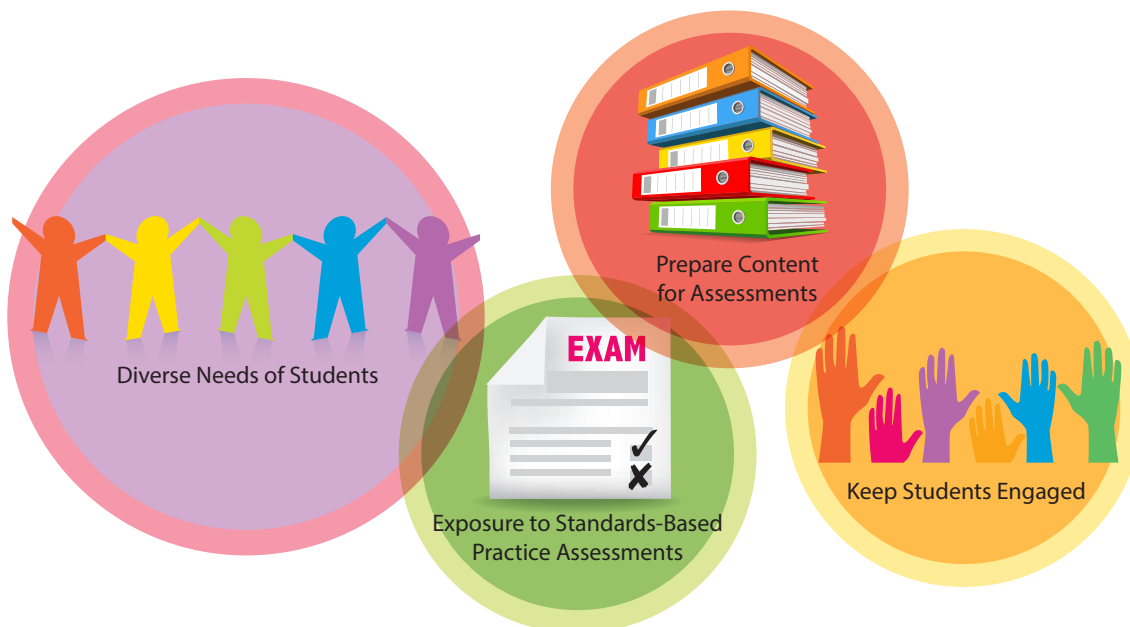
Preparing Students – The Biggest Challenges

In a recent survey* of 42 educators, teachers cited differentiating instruction to meet the diverse needs of students within a classroom as one of the greatest challenges in preparing students for assessments. Other challenges frequently mentioned included the need to expose students to standards-based practice assessments, the amount of content that must be covered to prepare for assessments, and the need to keep students at all levels engaged and motivated.

"I find my biggest challenge to be the fact that so many of my students have different levels of difficulty," said one educator surveyed. "The students that I work with are not always struggling with the same concepts."

Another educator said, "My biggest challenge is exposing students to standards-based test questions. Our students understand the material they have learned in class, but when it's time to take standardized tests they may not be accustomed to the way test questions are asked. They need practice breaking down questions, so that their scores reflect their true abilities."

Challenges in Preparing Students for Assessments

Diverse Needs of Students

Prepare Content for Assessments

Exposure to Standards-Based Practice Assessments

Keep Students Engaged

Preparing Students – Top Strategies and Tools

Many teachers find that review sessions, practice tests, and teaching test-taking skills to be the most effective means of assessment preparation. Practice tests are frequently used since well-designed practice tests support learning, serve as a review, and build students' test taking skills. One strategic tool being used by some educators is Study Island.

"With Study Island I can assign content that aligns with what is being covered in class. It can be used for enrichment, intervention, and more!"

When teachers use Study Island in conjunction with classroom instruction, they can present and assign practice material throughout the year, creating an effective and motivating learning environment aligned to both state and Common Core standards.

Study Island also enables teachers to monitor students' progress toward meeting state-specific objectives. This is accomplished through periodic benchmark assessments that can be a good predictor of student performance on state assessments. Teachers can use the results of the benchmark assessments diagnostically to guide their instruction.

Preparing Students – Strategies that Meet Diverse Learning Needs

Small group instruction, peer tutoring, and web-based learning programs are some of the most popular strategies teachers use to prepare students with diverse learning needs for testing. Small group instruction enables teachers to focus on the particular needs of the group. Peer tutoring benefits both students since one student gets extra help while the tutor gets to develop skills that reinforce learning. Web-based programs like Study Island allow teachers to focus on specific content for a group or individuals to help prepare them for assessments.

"Study Island allows me to completely individualize instruction. With the Response to Intervention reporting I have all the progress monitoring results I need."

Study Island employs real-time reporting to provide teachers with instant feedback regarding student progress and to drive differentiated instruction based on demonstrated student need. Additionally, it gives educators the flexibility to assign content to individual students at their prescribed instructional level, to small groups of students as supplemental practice, or to a whole class.

With Study Island, students answer a customizable set of questions that are built from state or Common Core standards and learning objectives. If students answer a question incorrectly, the program provides immediate feedback and opportunities for remediation and further learning. Study Island also uses adaptive testing technology to create individualized learning paths for each student on individual topics, cycling students down, as needed, so they can practice and master skills that are building blocks for more difficult topics. This allows students to continually practice, build their skills until they master each standard, and demonstrate proficiency at state required levels.

Preparing Students – Interactive Learning Activities

Teachers increasingly report that interactive online education helps engage and motivate students. With interactive online learning, students have multiple opportunities to practice, review content, and earn rewards.

"The best review my students received this year in science was with Study Island. They had two weeks to achieve a Blue Ribbon in every skill offered. The students were very well prepared and confident on the state test."

Study Island enables students to monitor their progress as they complete lessons and feel successful by watching their individual results improve. When students reach the specified mastery level of an objective they earn a personalized reward in the form of a Blue Ribbon icon. This serves as a concrete symbol of recognition for their academic achievements and further motivates them to succeed. Study Island provides students access to a wide variety of simple and short games they can play when they have answered a question correctly. Students compete with other Study Island users in their school to try to achieve the highest score on the games.

Preparing Students - Partnering with Parents

Communicating with parents on a regular basis is an integral part of engaging them in their child's success in testing. Teachers reported that sending home notes with practice materials for parents to work through with their child helps keep parents involved. Teachers also use other tools such as email and websites to communicate with parents. These tools give parents visibility into their student's progress and convey ways in which they can help their child at home.

"We try to ensure that parents know the importance of the testing and that we want their students to be successful without being stressed. I use Study Island and let my parents know that this is something that students can work on at home with their parents to ensure their student's success."

Study Island's integrated notification system simplifies parent-teacher communication. It achieves this with a message box feature that allows teachers to quickly and easily e-mail parents about student performance, assignments, suggested topics to study, and school events.

Study Island allows parents access to student achievement reports from any computer with an Internet connection. This makes it easier for parents to monitor a student's progress on an ongoing basis. Parents can view the expectations and standards for tested content areas and quickly determine if their child is meeting those standards. If a student needs extra practice on specific standards, parents can use the instructional lessons and problem explanations within the program to help them improve their performance. Study Island helps foster higher expectations as well as increased interest and involvement in students' academic progress by providing parents ongoing access to student achievement reports.

Preparing Students with Study Island

Assessment preparation is most effective when it is an integrated component of the learning process and not a separate task. As educators seek more innovative assessment preparation systems, the shift from print to web-based instructional tools will continue. One of the critical elements of effective assessment preparation is programs that provide differentiated instruction to support a variety of learning styles.

Study Island's standards mastery program prepares students for assessment and supports learning. Teachers can assign content that aligns with classroom instruction. Assessments and real-time reports give teachers feedback on specific areas in which students require additional help and provide information on student progress and mastery of content. The program provides students with continuous feedback on their performance to support learning. After each question, students receive feedback on whether or not their answer choice was correct, and an explanation of the correct answer. All feedback is specific to the task and provides immediate remediation to students if needed.

Study Island helps teachers manage increasing demands by providing differentiated instruction and addressing varied learning needs. Students build confidence as they learn and complete assignments with content specifically designed to keep them engaged. With content built from state and Common Core standards, teachers can be assured that they have a program to help them cover all the content required for state assessments.

*Edmentum, Assessment Preparation Survey May 2012

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