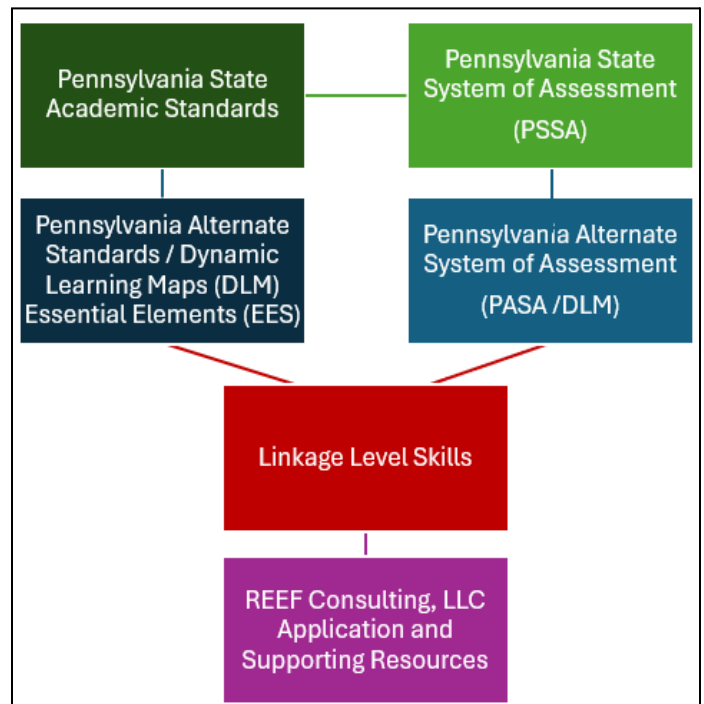


REEF Teaches Overview: An Application to Support Teachers of Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities

Background

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 mandates that States and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) provide all children with disabilities, including those with the most significant cognitive impairments, access to and participation in all state and district-wide assessment programs. This requirement is central to ensuring that every student receives a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and aligns with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) mandates. When necessary, states may develop alternate assessments for students who cannot participate in the general assessments, even with accommodations.

In Pennsylvania, eligibility for participation in the Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA) is determined by an Individualized Education Program (IEP) team based on six specified criteria. Approximately 18,000 students in the state qualify for this alternate assessment. The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) and 22 other state education departments have partnered with Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) to support these students. The DLM initiative aligns with Pennsylvania's academic content standards and the national Common Core State Standards, offering a streamlined pathway to these standards with reduced depth, breadth, and complexity. This approach measures the attainment of essential knowledge and skills for students with significant cognitive disabilities, much like the statewide general assessments in PA (PSSA and Keystone Exams) inform school districts and other educational service providers for instructional improvement and accountability reporting. DLM organizes its content into detailed “maps” by subject area, grade level, and academic standard. Each standard, an Essential Element, is further segmented into Linkage Levels that approximate skill proficiency, specifically designed for students with significant disabilities.



Purpose and Goals of the Application

Teaching students with complex needs is both deeply rewarding and exceptionally challenging. While the Essential Elements and Linkage Level Skills provided by DLM offer valuable instructional guidance, the complexity of these resources often results in a time-consuming and guesswork-laden process for educators. Teachers must navigate a labyrinth of standards and skill levels to design individualized curricula for each student, diverting precious time from teaching.

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A system that streamlines the identification of the most appropriate skills, resources, and tools would enable educators across Pennsylvania—and potentially nationwide—to dedicate less time sorting through standards and skill areas and more time to teaching. This approach enhances students' educational pathways and ensures that all students receive exposure to the critical content they deserve.

An application that could allow teachers to more easily identify the most appropriate skills, resources, and tools for teaching their students, would offer teachers across PA, and potentially the US, the opportunity to spend Further, it would allow them to spend more time teaching appropriate and critical content ALL students have the right to be exposed to and opportunity to learn. In collaboration with a local Approved Private School (APS) and with feedback from teachers, [REEF Consulting LLC](#) has developed one such application. This innovative tool is built upon a robust dataset manually curated from publicly available DLM resources.

The REEF Teaches application allows teachers to filter and sort through relevant variables efficiently, thereby reducing the guesswork and streamlining the process of identifying appropriate skills and standards for their students. REEF Consulting LLC has also developed a customized set of Activity Resources Documents to provide further instructional support and guidance. These resources are designed to evolve to meet educators' growing and changing needs.

Conclusion

This tool represents a significant advancement in supporting educators who serve students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. By simplifying the process of aligning instruction with DLM standards, the application enables teachers to focus on what matters most—delivering high-quality, individualized instruction to students who need and deserve that type of education.

Sample Resources/Outputs for Teachers

[Example English Language Arts Activity Resource Document](#)

[Example Mathematics Activity Resource Document](#)