

TMAS Project

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

What is the TMAS Project?

It is a federally funded research project conducted by the Vermont, Maine, New Hampshire and Rhode Island Departments of Education (CFDA# 84.368). The full name of the project is *Reaching “Kids in the Gap” Through Web-Based Task Module Assessment Systems (TMAS)*.

What are the goals of the project?

The project seeks to increase knowledge and understanding of gaps in State large-scale assessment systems through research studies in four New England states. The project has identified the following goals:

- Define common criteria across the four Compact states for identifying students in the gap.

- Plan, conceptualize, and develop task module assessment strategies, and examine validity and reliability.

- Based on study findings, conceptualize and identify core components of an assessment structure that would lessen the gaps in the assessment system and allow more students to effectively demonstrate what they know and can do.

- Disseminate products to others considering assessments for students in the gap.

Who are the “Kids in the Gap”?

There are several groups of students who take the general assessment, but their performance may not be very meaningful and their results may not provide the information teachers need to increase their achievement. One group is students who may be proficient, but do not show it on the test. Another group is students who may not be eligible for an alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards, but are well below proficiency on the general test.

Who can participate in the study?

The study is being conducted in four states: VT, ME, NH, and RI. We are inviting 8th grade teachers to pilot test a new approach to assessing their students Mathematics skills. Even though this strategy was designed to better assess students in the gap, the pilot study will include both students who are in the gap and students who are not. In this early stage of development, it is important to examine how students at all ability levels perform on this type of assessment. We are inviting 7th and 8th grade Mathematics teachers (in Maine, grade 8 only) to participate in an online survey. 8th grade teachers may participate in either or both parts of the study. Each phase of the study is described below.

Phase 1: Pilot Test

The first phase involves pilot testing a new approach to assessing the multiple skills associated with each Algebra Grade Level Expectation (GLE) and students’ ability to apply a combination of these skills to solve complex problems. During February and March, 8th grade Mathematics teachers will have the opportunity to administer a 40-item computer-based test to their students. The test can be administered at any time during this two-month period. The test is online so immediately after students complete it, teachers can receive feedback on their performance. The total amount of participation time needed from 8th grade Mathematics students is one class period. If you have questions about this phase of the project, please contact Lisa Famularo at lisa.famularo@bc.edu or call (617) 552-6241.

Phase 2: Teacher Surveys

The second phase involves online surveys of all teachers who provided the Mathematics instruction to students taking this year's (2005/2006) 8th grade State assessment in Mathematics. The survey will take approximately 30 minutes and will result in enhanced understanding of the challenges to showing and achieving proficiency in Mathematics. Several schools in the State will later be invited to participate in follow-up interviews to review and reflect on the State assessment results for a small number of students. This phase intends to provide definition and clarification of the assessment "gap" and the students who are in it. The survey will be online during the month of April, and will consist mainly of selected response items. If you have questions about this phase of the project, please contact Sue Bechard at sbechard@measuredprogress.org or call (603) 767-6898.

What is the assessment approach being pilot tested? What types of items are on the test?

The prototype test was designed to measure students' understanding of the skills associated with the Functions and Algebra Grade Level Expectations. The prototype test is based on a set of items from the most recent State assessment. The items were selected because they are complex problems that require students to apply multiple skills and concepts. A series of new items that tap into skills related to the original item and corresponding Grade Level Expectation (GLE) were developed with two purposes in mind. First, items were developed to more deeply probe students' understanding of the component skills both individually and in combination. Second, alternate representations of items were developed to determine if modifications to the original problem would enable students to solve it. For example, in some cases the context of the problem was modified or removed while for others, the presentation of information was changed (i.e., from vertical to horizontal, from a table to a graph) and in some cases, the problem was simplified (i.e., by using whole numbers rather than fractions, reducing the number of variables, or reducing the number of steps required to solve the problem). Even though this strategy was designed to better assess students in the gap, the pilot study will include both students who are in the gap and students who are not. In this early stage of development, it is important to examine how students at all ability levels perform on this type of assessment.

Why should I participate?

You will be helping concerned educators design assessments that are meaningful for all students and providing answers to questions that are being asked across the country. As a participant in the study, you will be provided with the results of this investigation.

Who will see the results?

The responses from all study participants will be combined into statistical summaries. No individual participant will ever be identified. Our project is designed to protect the individual privacy of teachers and students in all published reports or papers resulting from this study.

What if I decide not to participate?

Participation is voluntary but we hope you will consider taking part in this important research project. If you sign up, you have the right to withdraw consent or discontinue participation at any time.

How do I sign up?

Teachers can register online now at <http://www.bc.edu/tmas>. Registration involves answering a few questions and should take only a few minutes. Please contact Lisa Famularo at lisa.famularo@bc.edu or call (617) 552-6241 if you have difficulty with registration.

What organizations are involved in this project?

The project is being led by the New England Compact States (VT, ME, NH, and RI) and conducted in collaboration with four not-for-profit agencies: the Education Development Center (EDC), Technology Assessment Study Collaborative (inTASC), Measured Progress and the Center for Applied Special Technologies (CAST).

New England Compact In 2002, the Commissioners of Education in Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont formed The New England Compact to provide a forum for States to address issues arising from the federal *No Child Left Behind* legislation. The New England Compact focuses on the development and implementation of Grade Level Expectations (GLEs), and State assessments based on those expectations. For more information, visit <http://www.necomact.org/>

Education Development Center (EDC) The Education Development Center is an international, non-profit organization with more than 335 projects dedicated to enhancing learning, promoting health, and fostering a deeper understanding of the world. For more information, visit <http://main.edc.org/about/default.asp>

Technology Assessment Study Collaborative (inTASC) inTASC is a not-for-profit research group housed in the Lynch School of Education at Boston College. inTASC works collaboratively with schools, educational agencies, and businesses to conduct research and development on a variety of issues related to technology and assessment. For more information, visit <http://www.bc.edu/research/intasc/about.shtml>

Measured Progress The mission of Measured Progress is to improve teaching and learning by providing customized assessment products and educational services. For more information, visit <http://www.measuredprogress.org/AboutUs/Overview.html>

Center for Applied Special Technologies (CAST) CAST's Mission is to expand learning opportunities for all individuals, especially those with disabilities, through the research and development of innovative, technology-based educational resources and strategies. For more information, visit <http://www.cast.org/about/index.html>