

## **Analyzing and Interpreting Test Results: What's Appropriate, and What's Not Appropriate**

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### **Introduction**

The goal of a standards-based educational system is that the curriculum used, the instruction taught, and the assessment administered to students all align, in order to ensure that students have an opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned in the classroom. The key to aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessment is to use the Curriculum Framework benchmarks to inform all three. For example, the MAPT for Reading and Math are aligned with the benchmarks from the ABE Math Curriculum Framework and the ABE Reading Strand of the ELA Framework. When programs use these benchmarks to plan their instruction and help inform what their curriculum will cover, students have the best opportunity to do well in class and on the MAPT. While the TABE 9/10, the CLAS-E for Reading or Writing, and the BEST Plus were not, like the MAPT, developed from the ground up to align with Massachusetts Curriculum Framework Benchmarks, the same principles apply. These assessments also align to the Framework Benchmarks, though to a lesser extent. Even so, teachers who know the extent of the alignment between the Curriculum Framework Benchmarks and the assessment will be better able to meet students' needs in the classroom.

When assessment results are provided to users in accessible ways and users are prepared to work with the data, much information may be gleaned that will help guide instructional next steps for students. The time needed for such analyses may seem to be taking time away from planning instruction, but the investment of this time can be highly useful in terms of focusing instruction and making the most efficient use of the brief time adult students have in the classroom. Thus, in combination with the alignment information, assessment results will provide useful information to programs on the content and skills covered on the test. The combination will also reveal additional content and skills not covered by the test but which is still very important for learners' academic and career success.

While it is important for programs to align instruction and assessment, there is justifiable confusion around what test information is appropriate to share and discuss with learners, and at what point does any analysis of test scores veer into "teaching to the test" or outright cheating. This document is meant to provide clarification on what is appropriate for programs to do, and what is not appropriate to do when using the MAPT, BEST Plus, TABE 9/10, and CLAS-E Reading or Writing. This document may bring up additional questions that will continue to flesh out the discussion. ACLS welcomes questions and comments; please send them to Jane Schwerdtfeger at [janes@doe.mass.edu](mailto:janes@doe.mass.edu).

### **What is Appropriate? It is Appropriate to:**

Ensure that relevant program staff (e.g., teachers, directors, advisors) know what is on the test, whether or not there is alignment with the program's curriculum and instruction, and how much alignment there is.

1. Staff may study the test materials to determine the content and skills covered. What test materials are appropriate to study, however, varies depending on the test:
  - MAPT: Programs may read the MAPT Test Specifications<sup>1</sup>, the Massachusetts ABE Math Framework Benchmarks and the Reading Strand (2010) of the English Language Arts Framework Benchmarks, and the MAPT Practice Tests and Sample Questions. Programs may not view the actual test items.
  - TABE 9/10: Programs may look at test specifications<sup>2</sup>. They may also look at test items in the Test Booklets in conjunction with the Massachusetts ABE Curriculum Framework Benchmarks for Math, Reading, and Writing to determine which Benchmarks the test items are written to, and the content/skills covered.
  - BEST Plus: Programs may analyze the BEST Plus Test Specifications (e.g., the domains covered in the test and the seven question types), found in the BEST Plus Test Administration Guide. They may compare the ESOL Speaking and Listening Framework Benchmarks for alignment with the domains, questions types, and what is covered in the BEST Plus rubric. Programs may not look at actual test items.
  - CLAS-E Reading or Writing: Programs may study the test specifications<sup>3</sup>. They may also look at test items in the Test Booklets and Expository Writing Folios in conjunction with the Massachusetts ABE Curriculum Framework for ESOL Reading and Writing Benchmarks to determine which benchmarks the test items were written to, and the content/skills covered.
2. Staff may analyze the test materials to determine the content/skills the items are measuring and crosswalk the test materials with the relevant Curriculum Framework Benchmarks to determine the amount of coverage. The test may not cover all benchmarks that teachers consider to be important to teach in class. It is helpful to know at the outset what is covered on the test (and what is not), and to be purposeful about what teachers think is important for students to master as a result of instruction.
3. Teachers may develop or find instructional materials (or identify similar activities) that address skills that are covered in the test and use these materials in instruction. The point is NOT to teach to the test, but to ensure that skills covered in the test are also addressed in instruction.

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<sup>1</sup> The MAPT for Math and MAPT for Reading Test Specifications will be added to the Assessment page of the ACLS website shortly, at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/assessment>

<sup>2</sup> Information about the test objectives, alignment to national standards, and sample test items may be found at <http://www.ctb.com/ctb.com/control/ctbProductViewAction?productId=882&p=products>

<sup>3</sup> Information about the test objectives, alignment to standards, and sample test items for CLAS-E Reading may be found at <http://www.ctb.com/ctb.com/control/ctbProductViewAction?p=products&productId=865>.

4. Teachers may teach the content, concepts, or skills covered on a test, but not in exactly the same way as on the test (e.g., to avoid teaching to specifically give the correct answers to test items). Teachers should use crosswalk documents and the ABE Curriculum Frameworks to identify benchmarks that correspond to areas of students' relative strengths and weaknesses. Teachers should focus on teaching the underlying skills as defined by the frameworks rather than item-specific details that may not translate across test forms or testing occasions.
5. With the CLAS-E Reading and/or Writing and the TABE 9/10 only, staff may identify which items students answered correctly and incorrectly, examining item by item, to determine the number of students missing a particular benchmark and whether any trends warrant additional instruction.
6. Staff may look at previous test results and do an analysis of student performance and compare the information to current tests. This process can take a great deal of work since students change classes or exit, but the information can be rich. Staff may not look at actual MAPT or BEST Plus test items.
7. Directors may wish to analyze test results as a whole across the program, to note any trends or use as discussion topics in staff meetings or curriculum planning/revising meetings. The point is to explore the possible reasons for trends in test results, and what factors may be influencing any trends. The purpose is not to evaluate teachers using student test scores.
8. Staff may use the MAPT for Reading and MAPT for Math Score Reports, available for individual students, classes of students, and for customized lists of students in order to inform curriculum, instruction, and program planning.

**It is Not Appropriate to:**

- Share actual test questions with students at any time, including prior to a testing session or following a testing session.
- Use actual test questions in instruction or when working on areas for improvement with students.
- Create instructional materials that are too close to the original text questions (e.g., simply changing a pronoun in a test item to use for instructional purposes).
- Provide inadvertent access to any testing materials or student score sheets where students or anyone else may see or find them (e.g., if teachers are working on analyzing how students performed on a test and the score sheets are in an area where students might view them). Test materials need to remain secure.
- Focus on the text of specific questions with students rather than content/skills/concepts behind the test item. Focusing on the Framework benchmarks associated with the test items is the most appropriate method for analyzing test results.

### **Strategies to Consider When Analyzing Test Results, and questions to consider:**

- Each test level of the MAPT for Reading and MAPT for Math aligns to a corresponding level of benchmarks in the ABE Curriculum Framework for Math and the benchmarks from the Reading Strand of the English Language Arts Framework. This direct alignment enables teachers and students to know the types of content/skills which were used to develop the MAPT's test items for a particular level of the test. For example, a student taking the MAPT for Math Level 2 test may see test items written to measure any of the benchmarks at the Beginning ABE Level of the Math Curriculum Framework. Do teachers know and cover the reading and math benchmarks for the levels of the test their students will likely be taking on pre- and post-tests?
- Do instructional books and materials align with Framework benchmarks to which test items are written? If so, how much do they align? Do the books and materials align with the program's curriculum as well? If so, by how much?
- Do teachers teach students about the importance of listening to or reading directions carefully? For all the tests, it is critical for students to understand test directions to make sure they are following what is being asked of them and to do well on the test. Attending to directions is a transferrable skill that is even more important in all aspects of students' lives (e.g., reading prescriptions for medications, following requests from a supervisor, following directions in a voting booth).
- *Examples from ABE colleagues:* At the end of the year, one program produces a report for ESOL students that outlines what their scores were on tests and where that placed them in terms of levels, so students can see the changes they made. The report also shows if students go down, and staff explain that the test is one measure of their progress, not the only way progress is measured, and that progress is also informed by their attendance. The Cape Cod Community College also provides a report card to students at the end of the year that describes their attendance, their scale score test results, their curriculum level, and their goals met, which students are positive about receiving.

### **Additional questions for program directors to consider relative to each standardized assessment:**

#### BEST Plus:

- Does the program's curriculum cover the three general domains of the BEST Plus? *Personal* (Personal identification, Health, Family/Parenting, Consumerism, Housing, Recreation/Entertainment); *Occupational* (Getting a job, On the job), and *Public* (Civics; Community Services; Transportation/Directions; Weather/Seasons; Education).
- Does the program's curriculum address skills associated with listening and responding to different types of questions? There are seven types of questions with an explanation of each

that is covered in the BEST Plus Test Administration Guide: Photo description; Entry item; Yes/No question; Choice question; Personal expansion; general expansion; Elaboration.

- Does the program's curriculum consider the aspects of the BEST Plus rubric and what is evaluated by the rubric in Listening Comprehension, Language Complexity, and Communication? Are students aware of the importance of Listening Comprehension, Language Complexity, and Communication and what specifically is evaluated in the rubric?

#### CLAS-E Writing:

- Do teachers analyze the test results from both CLAS-E multiple choice and folio scores, and not just students' scale scores? The analysis is time consuming, but gives useful info for instructional next steps.
- Are teachers aware of the content and skills that are covered by the writing prompts?
- Do students practice timed writing activities? The ability to be able to write a note to one's boss quickly and efficiently is a good skill to practice and is transferrable to other areas of one's life.

#### CLAS-E Reading and Writing:

- Use the Testing Guidelines to ensure the pre-test is at the appropriate level. Don't wait until the 2<sup>nd</sup> test to adjust the level if the Guidelines indicate a retest.

#### MAPT:

- Do all ABE teachers know and teach the Framework benchmarks?
- How does your program use the MAPT for Reading and Math Score Reports to inform instruction? The score reports can help staff understand which test questions individual students and classes would be expected to answer correctly, and where to target additional instruction.
- Does your program use the MAPT for Reading and Math Score Reports to consider adjustments to the curriculum? If so, how?
- Does your program use the MAPT for Reading and Math Score Reports to help discuss test results with students? How?
- Do advisors use the Score Reports as one of the pieces of information they use to inform their conversation with student advisees?