Mode Adjustments on the ACCESS for ELLs Tests

Since 2016, the percentage of Massachusetts English learners (ELs) in grades 1-12 and who take the **online** ACCESS for ELLs test has increased annually, compared with paper test-takers, since the online ACCESS test was introduced in 2016. Fewer than half the test-takers in 2016 took the online test; by 2019, almost all (98%) students had taken the online test (see Table 1). In 2017, WIDA offered states the option of applying *mode adjustments* to the scores of students taking the paper version of the ACCESS for ELLs tests. Since a sizeable portion of Massachusetts students took the paper test versions in 2017 and 2018, the state applied mode-adjusted scores for paper test-takers in those years. Scores for paper-based test-takers were lowered as a result of the mode adjustment process.

The rationale for using mode-adjusted scores became evident when examining average student growth percentiles (SGPs) each year. ACCESS scores that were **not** adjusted would have resulted in larger mean differences advantaging paper testers across almost all grades (excepting grades 1 and 4, as shown in the left-hand side of Graph 1). Student Growth Percentile (SGP) differences were greatly ameliorated when mode-adjusted scores were applied, as shown in the right-hand side of Graph 1, in which SGP averages for both groups averaged close to 50. Because SGPs are conditioned on students’ prior ACCESS scores, disparities in SGPs by mode provided strong evidence of mode effects in test results, since we would have expected SGPs for any substantially-sized group to average about 50.

**Table 1: Test Counts and Percentages for Online Test Takers, 2016 to 2019**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Online Test Takers from 2016 to 2019 | | | |
|  | Total | Online | % Online |
| 2016 | 72076 | 33238 | 46% |
| 2017 | 75033 | 46255 | 62% |
| 2018 | 81888 | 71157 | 87% |
| 2019 | 82715 | 81879 | 99% |

**Graph 1: Average SGPs by Mode, Using Adjusted and Unadjusted Scores**

