TAO IGNITE
CASE STUDY

The New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) Adds Technology and Multimedia to Language Proficiency Exams

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The NYCDOE takes a technology-based approach, expanding its use of TAO to align the World Language exams to updated state learning standards.

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CASE STUDY

The New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) supports the single largest school system in the United States, serving 1.1 million students in over 1,800 schools located across more than 32 communities. NYC students and their parents communicate in over 180 different languages.

As part of their mission, the NYCDOE offers comprehensive proficiency examinations in world languages to enable their high school students to meet the Advanced Regents diploma requirements with a passing score on one of their World Language exams. These exams are offered in over 20 languages, and contain several core components, including reading, writing, speaking and listening.

The NYCDOE World Language exams are administered in two parts. Students are offered up to three hours for the reading, listening, and writing components of the standardized exams, which are administered concurrently on a specified, city-wide date. Posing a unique challenge for the NYCDOE, the exams are administered across all district schools, in multiple languages, and traditionally rely on live, native speakers, along with the distribution and collection of thousands of paper-pencil-based exam materials.

Wanting to make the process more efficient, the NYCDOE decided to adopt a technology-based

approach, phasing in the use of the TAO assessment platform following a carefully coordinated plan. This began with the digitization of the listening component for the Spanish World Language exam, which was first delivered online to students in grades 9 and 11.

Since first introducing TAO, the NYCDOE has used the platform to conduct several operational exams, as well as other low volume research-based pilots. After utilizing the open source solution TAO Core for several years, the NYCDOE made the move to invest in TAO's subscription model, TAO Ignite, for enhanced support following the adoption of new state standards for World Languages.

THE NYCDOE"S APPROACH TO IMPLEMENTING TAO

New York state education leaders are considering three main strategies as they plan out the roadmap for the continued digitization of World Language exams.

1. **SAMR Model:** A phased approach that considers introducing technology as a simple substitution to paper-based assessment and gradually adding functionality as users gain more experience with the tools.
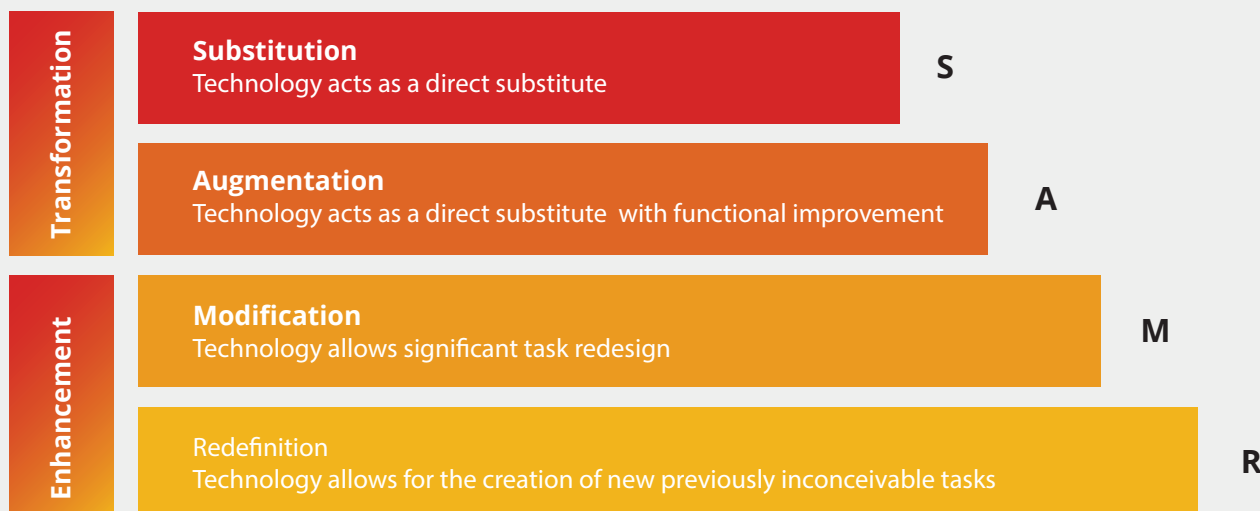
    A. **Substitution:** Technology acts as a direct substitute with no functional change. EG: a student is asked to provide a multiple choice response by selecting a radio button on a screen rather than filling in an answer on paper.

    B. **Augmentation:** Technology provides a functional improvement. EG: a student is asked to type rather than hand write their response.

    C. **Modification:** Assessments and prototypes are redesigned based on user feedback.

    D. **Redefinition:** Technology allows for the creation of new tasks that were previously inconceivable.

2. **Design Thinking Framework:** Involves developing interactive prototypes or pilots that enable educators to explore the technology hands-on in order to provide feedback for an iterative design process

    In 2018, the NYCDOE put the Design Thinking approach into practice when they conducted a digital demonstration project in which Chinese language students were offered the opportunity to explore Chinese Language prototype exams built with TAO.

    In the summer and fall of 2023, the NYCDOE worked with state educators to develop and administer innovative assessment prototypes for the middle school Spanish World Language exams using TAO's range of technology enhanced items

3. **Lead-User Innovation:** Suggests the importance of identifying and working in focus groups with educators who are leading EdTech innovation to help set the direction for technology adoption.

Transformation

Substitution
Technology acts as a direct substitute — **S**

Augmentation
Technology acts as a direct substitute with functional improvement — **A**

Enhancement

Modification
Technology allows significant task redesign — **M**

Redefinition
Technology allows for the creation of new previously inconceivable tasks — **R**

TRY TAO NOW

NYC's ADOPTION OF NEW WORLD LANGUAGE STANDARDS

In 2021, The NYCDOE adopted revised standards for the teaching and learning of World Languages to be implemented for grades 7-12 in schools across the state. These revised standards have necessitated a dynamic approach to education, prompting a shift in 3 key expectations for teaching and assessment:

- Alignment to proficiency frameworks: The new World Language standards are tied to national and international frameworks for language learning and teaching, encompassing 21st-century skills which the NYCDOE World Language exams should measure.

- Purpose & context: Educators are asked to incorporate authentic resources and multimedia elements into assessments and classroom instruction to provide more contextual and immersive language learning experiences for students.

- Digital literacy: Alignment with these new standards places a focus on developing students' digital literacy, where students not only master the intricacies of language acquisition but also gain essential digital skills by learning to effectively utilize digital tools within the context of the language they are studying.

"We're excited to have this opportunity to redefine our assessments and further leverage TAO's robust technology, " says Dr. Anthony Benners, Innovation Advisor and Sr. Psychometrician with the NYCDOE.

"Given these shifts, we're looking at the digital World Language exams to be the future for our students."

Following the timeline for implementation set by the state, the 2023 seventh grade student cohort is scheduled to be tested against the revised World Language Standards starting in June of 2024.

NYCDOE timeline for the implementation of new World Language State Learning Standards

September 1, 2023	**Grade 7**
September 1, 2024	**Grade 8**
September 1, 2025	**Grade 9**
September 1, 2026	**Grade 10**
September 1, 2027	**Grade 11**
September 1, 2028	**Grade 12**

ALIGNING THE ASSESSMENTS

As of early 2024, the NYCDOE is continuing the redesign of the World Language exams.

"We're inspired by the technology enhanced items and graphical interactions that TAO offers," Dr. Benners notes, "as well as the capabilities for scenario-based performance simulations to provide real purpose and context to our World Language assessments. With TAO, we can use technology to truly put the student in that mindset where they are immersed in a real-world situation."

While the core skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening will continue to be assessed, the Department is investigating several enhancements to the test format:

1. **Speaking:** The NYCDOE is exploring the integration of TAO's audio recording feature to enable students to practice their speaking skills through recorded responses to prompts.
2. **Listening:** For the redesign of the listening component, the NYCDOE is using TAO to incorporate authentic media sources, such as video clips, alongside test questions to provide longer and more immersive exposure to the target language.
3. **Reading:** The redesign pilot aims to move beyond traditional multiple-choice formats, enabling students to showcase their comprehension of texts in the target language through more diverse and interactive means.
4. **Writing:** Students are required to compose two essays in the target language. The redesign aims to better foster digital literacy by encouraging students to type rather than handwrite their responses.

"We expect this shift will empower students to search for personally relevant content in the target language online, thereby boosting motivation and fostering a genuine desire to enhance their language skills," concludes Dr. Benners.

The first redesign pilot for the World Language exams was delivered via TAO Ignite in the fall of 2023. During this phase, administrators observed initial hesitancy among students when speaking into the microphone, particularly when recording their spoken responses in a shared space with other students. Nonetheless, the team anticipates that familiarity with this format will enhance learners' comfort level and ultimately elevate their speaking proficiency.

An additional pilot test is scheduled for March 2024, and the first redesigned operational exams via TAO Enterprise will reach eighth-grade students in June 2025.

In June 2024, while 8th-grade students won't be facing a redesigned exam. Rather, a subset will be taking digital operational exams under the current blueprints delivered via the new and improved TAO Advanced test runner, offering a more enhanced look and feel. What's more, educators will be breaking new ground by using TAO Grader for the first time to assess students' typed responses to the writing section.

PREPARING FOR SCALE

As the district gears up for a significant expansion and aligns with the timeline for implementing the World Language standards, they also envisage a substantial increase in scale. Anticipating this growth, the NYCDOE plans to accommodate up to 60,000 students participating in digital World Language exams.

Turning to the TAO team to support their hosting needs, the NYCDOE began the migration to the cloud-based TAO subscription model, TAO Ignite, in 2023.

TAO Ignite relies on the world's leading cloud providers to provide a secure and robust experience, giving the NYCDOE the freedom and peace of mind to reliably scale their program as they continue to digitize the World Language assessments.

"Over the next several years we look forward to seamlessly transitioning into the next phase of our relationship with TAO. Our goal is to ultimately take full advantage of OAT's Enterprise services, including TAO Advance, TAO Grader, and TAO Insights. This strategic alignment ensures that as we continue to digitize World Language assessments, we can leverage the comprehensive capabilities offered by TAO to enhance the efficiency, insights, and overall success of our program. We are confident that TAO's robust solutions will play a pivotal role in the continued growth and excellence of our digital assessment initiatives."

Dr. Anthony Benners, Innovation Advisor & Sr. Psychometrician New York City Department of Education

Accelerating digital transformation in education through online assessment

TAO, from Open Assessment Technologies S.A., is the leading open source digital assessment solution for education and career advancement. Modular, customizable and interoperable by design, TAO empowers you to break free from the confines of proprietary data silos, take control of your technology roadmap and deploy 21st Century assessment solutions.

For over 15 years we've built strategic partnerships with the world's leading ministries of education, helping them find the most effective paths to large-scale digital assessment. We offer solutions for every stage of the assessment cycle, and partner with renowned content providers and psychometricians to offer turnkey assessment solutions for the 21st Century.

Get in touch with a TAO Solutions Specialist! Email us at contact@taotesting.com

100 Million+
Tests Delivered

30+
Languages Supported

160+
Countries Served Worldwide

TAO is a cornerstone technology of the FLIP+ eAssessment community. See https://flip-plus.org

Awarded "Best Assessment App," "Best Global Assessment Startup" and "Best Global Assessment Leader" by the Edvocate Awards.