



Georgia Innovative Assessment Pilot Program

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ANNUAL REPORT

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GEORGIA INNOVATIVE ASSESSMENT PILOT PROGRAM

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ANNUAL REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Over the past four years, WestEd has provided technical assistance to support the Georgia Innovative Assessment Pilot Program (IAPP). At the end of each program year, WestEd has produced a Technical Assistance Annual Report to describe progress in the implementation of the IAPP and to summarize the technical assistance needs of the two pilot program consortia—the Putnam Consortium (Putnam) and the Georgia MAP Assessment Partnership (GMAP)—and how these needs were addressed during the program year. During the 2022–23 program year, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) withdrew from the federal Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority (IADA) program, which undergirded the state’s IAPP work. This report will therefore be a final report, summarizing the Year 4 work and providing reflections on the overall project.

END OF THE IAPP

Many of the issues raised in prior annual reports remained relevant in Year 4, with the effects of limited testing in early years of the IAPP due to COVID-19 impacting each consortium’s ability to demonstrate comparability to Georgia Milestones. Both pilot program consortia had planned to start submitting comparability evidence in Year 4, but in preparing to submit evidence, they began to realize their limitations in satisfying all IADA regulations within the necessary timeline. In addition, the Georgia State Board of Education (State Board) adopted new mathematics standards in 2021, to be implemented in 2023–24, which would require the newly designed innovative assessments to be revised again prior to full implementation. These issues and others, described in the following sections, forced the consortia and the state to reckon with the viability of the IAPP (see, in particular, Table 1 on page 6 and Table 2 on page 7, which detail changes from originally planned activities for each consortium).

In addition to the challenges of limited data and new standards, GMAP had a further complication when its assessment vendor, NWEA, announced in June 2022 that it could no longer provide its services free of charge without a clear path forward to statewide implementation. This decision left the GMAP districts with nothing to pilot in the 2023–24 school year, which was originally planned to include a full field test of a through-year assessment. Because of this work stoppage, the consortium districts only had limited comparability evidence and decided not to submit any evidence in the October 2022 window.

On September 27, 2022, the State Board invited GaDOE and the superintendents from the lead consortium districts for GMAP and Putnam (Superintendent Rivera from Marietta City Schools and Superintendent Arena from Putnam County Charter School System, respectively) to provide an update on the IAPP. Both consortia cited frustrations with the lack of support from the State Board, as well as a lack of clarity on how to move

from a pilot to a state assessment (e.g., Would there be a competition? Would districts have choices about which assessment to use?). The State Board praised the good work of the consortia and indicated that it would consider providing more support, but no specific decisions were made.

Following that meeting, Superintendent Arena from Putnam County, the lead district in the other consortium in the state, wrote a letter to the State Schools Superintendent and the State Board Chair with questions regarding the pathway to becoming the state assessment, the scope of the work, and the revised content standards, which are addressed in the state's IADA application. Ultimately, the Navy consortium also decided not to submit comparability evidence in the October 2022 window.

Despite its setbacks, GMAP resumed work in November 2022 with plans to conduct a proof-of-concept study with a limited scope. Specifically, it planned to test one grade in English language arts (ELA) and another grade in mathematics, to allow teachers and others to understand what a through-year assessment would require. The end result was to be a report to GaDOE describing implementation features and challenges and providing a recommendation for continuing with end-of-year assessments or moving to a through-year model.

In the meantime, GaDOE received a letter from the U.S. Department of Education (ED) expressing concerns about Georgia's progress under the IADA. The letter prompted discussions at the state level about the feasibility of meeting ED's requirements; these discussions ultimately resulted in the state's decision to withdraw from the IADA. On February 17, 2023, Superintendent Woods withdrew Georgia from the IADA and sent letters to Superintendents Rivera and Arena informing them of the decision. Given the state's withdrawal from the IADA and the resulting lack of a path forward towards expanding the GMAP pilot to the state assessment, GMAP districts decided not to conduct their planned pilot, and work in both consortia ended in March 2023.

PROGRAM BACKGROUND AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Georgia's IAPP was authorized under Georgia Senate Bill 362 and ED's IADA. Two groups of school districts—Putnam and GMAP—were granted the authority to develop new accountability assessments through the IADA. Districts participating in the two consortia, along with their assessment partners, were working toward administering a new assessment program (either the Navy system of assessments in Putnam or the Georgia MAP assessment in GMAP) in place of the state's summative Georgia Milestones, once the new assessments demonstrated comparability to Georgia Milestones and received approval from the state. The original timeline for the two consortia to demonstrate comparability to the Georgia Milestones was a five-year period, beginning in fall 2019 and ending in summer 2024.

To support the consortia, GaDOE contracted with WestEd to provide technical assistance to both consortia. Technical assistance was provided through two primary mechanisms: (1) technical assistance hours allocated for WestEd to meet with the consortia to discuss the IAPP goals, project roadblocks, and psychometric considerations, and (2) technical advisory committee (TAC) meetings facilitated by WestEd, in which the consortia received assessment advice from industry experts. Given specific issues with both consortia, the technical assistance that WestEd provided was limited in Year 4, and the TAC did not meet in that year, as described in the following sections.

WESTED–CONSORTIA TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE MEETINGS

During Years 2, 3, and 4, 12 hours of WestEd staff time were available to Putnam and GMAP annually, compared to 114 hours in Year 1. Even with this reduction in available hours, the consortia did not use all of the allocated hours in Years 2, 3, or 4. In Year 4, GMAP used five hours, and Putnam used zero hours.

In Year 4, GMAP did not use technical assistance hours until after a plan to conduct a proof-of-concept study was formulated in July 2022. Rather than developing an entirely new assessment system at once, the goal of the proof-of-concept study was to provide information about a potential through-year design, using a smaller number of grade levels and subjects than in the original GMAP plan. The smaller scope of the study also brought NWEA back on board after it had stopped work in June 2022. Although the proof-of-concept plan was formulated in July and agreed to in September 2022, the GMAP consortium did not resume work with NWEA involvement until November 2022. GMAP used its technical assistance hours to discuss implementation of the study, including the required sample need to provide valid information, participating districts' desires for reporting and growth data, and the pros and cons of working under IADA regulations versus continuing the study after withdrawing from the IADA.

After the June 2022 TAC meeting, two meetings between Putnam and WestEd were held, at which the following topics were discussed: grade levels and subjects for comparability evidence submissions; external evaluation requirements; the IADA timeline; and shifting WestEd and TAC involvement with the consortia from a technical assistance role to an evaluative one. Following Putnam's pause in October 2022, no hours were used, and its involvement in the IAPP ceased because of the aforementioned issues.

During Year 4, WestEd also supported conversations between the consortia and GaDOE when questions about the IADA contract timeline, GMAP's proof-of-concept plan, and the State Board's support arose.

TAC MEETINGS

In Years 1 and 2, WestEd planned and facilitated two TAC meetings for the Georgia IAPP, in which each consortium met with the TAC for one full day at each meeting. In Year 3, an initial daylong TAC meeting was held, followed by two half-day TAC meetings with each consortium. In Year 4, TAC meetings were planned to be divided into two sessions: one for the TAC, GaDOE, and WestEd to discuss feedback on the consortia's comparability evidence submissions, and one to provide this feedback from the TAC to each consortium. However, after both consortia declined to submit comparability evidence, neither of these meetings took place.

OTHER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE: STATE-REQUIRED INDEPENDENT TECHNICAL EVALUATION

In Year 4, in addition to providing direct support to consortia as part of its technical assistance, WestEd also provided feedback on draft evaluation requirements that the state intended to use to seek an independent evaluator for the IAPP. Georgia state law required the State Board and GaDOE to contract with an independent organization to "evaluate comparability between the innovative assessments, including norm-referenced assessments, and the state-wide assessments, including for subgroups of students," and to "identify strategies that may be used to scale the innovative assessment to all local school systems state-wide." WestEd reviewed

GaDOE's draft requirements, provided written feedback, and assisted GaDOE in developing a budget estimate. Final comments and estimated costs were sent to GaDOE on January 11, 2023.

OTHER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE: THE COMPARABILITY PROCESS

During Year 2, WestEd worked with GaDOE and the TAC to develop a comparability guidelines document, which was intended to serve as a checklist for the consortia to use in gathering and submitting the evidence needed to establish that their assessments met federal IADA guidelines and could potentially be used as an alternative system to the Georgia Milestones assessments under the IAPP. The comparability guidelines were organized around the original IAPP application to the State Board, as well as IADA requirements and peer review guidelines. They provided descriptions and examples of the types of evidence that would address each of the requirements. During Year 3, WestEd refined the details on the process to be used to provide comparability evidence and the consortia established plans to start submitting evidence during an initial submission window in Year 4 (see the Appendix for the comparability guidelines and process). Ultimately, as previously described, neither consortium submitted any evidence, since both had paused work prior to the initial October 2022 deadline.

PROGRESS TOWARD FULL IMPLEMENTATION

Ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as other issues specific to each consortium, led to changes in the originally projected timelines, which the consortia was not able to overcome. Tables 1 and 2 show the original Putnam and GMAP timelines, respectively, along with changes and revisions to those original timelines. These two tables illustrate that, prior to the work stoppages in Year 4, the consortia continuously experienced challenges associated with the effects of the pandemic, the volume of work, and adhering to all aspects of IADA regulations. It is important to note that the original IAPP timeline was a five-year timeline plus a two-year scale-up timeframe, although the consortia would lead the first five years and GaDOE the last two. When Putnam paused work, it had not indicated what activities would be needed beyond the initial 5 years; GMAP had already noted that an extension would be needed to obtain initial approval for use of its assessment in lieu of Georgia Milestones for participating districts.

Table 1. Original and Revised Putnam Timeline and Activities

Putnam	Original	Changes/Revised Plans
Year 1: 2019–20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ready for comparability: ELA & Math, 3–8 & High School Field test: Grades 1–2 ELA & Math and Writing, 5, 8, 11 Develop: Science, 4 & 7 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No Georgia Milestones or Navy spring administrations No field test
Year 2: 2020–21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operational: ELA & Math, 1–8 & High School Ready for comparability: Writing, 5, 8, 11 Field test: Science, 4 & 7; Writing, 3, 4, 6, 9 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Georgia Milestones and Navy administrations with incomplete participation Grades 3–8 Navy ELA & Math only
Year 3: 2021–22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operational: ELA & Math, 1–8 & High School; Writing, 5, 8, 11 Ready for comparability: Science, 4 & 7; Writing, 3, 4, 6, 9 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Georgia Milestones and Navy administrations Grades 3–8 Navy ELA & Math only

Putnam	Original	Changes/Revised Plans
Year 4: 2022–23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final adjustments & comparability analyses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comparability analysis and approval process for grades 3–8 ELA & Math
Year 5: 2023–24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing comparability analyses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Navy operational assessments in lieu of Georgia Milestones (ELA & Math only) with ongoing annual comparability analyses (as required by IADA)

As shown in Table 1, Putnam’s original plan was to quickly establish comparability and obtain approval to use the Navy assessments in lieu of Georgia Milestones, so that consortium members would not need to continue using both assessments (as was required during the development period). However, even with this plan, Putnam would still have been required to double-test at least a sample of students in order to complete IADA-required annual comparability analyses. Because initial plans were interrupted due to the pandemic, Putnam had hoped to use data from the 2021–22 school year as a primary source of comparability evidence, given the limitations of the 2020–21 data.

Table 2 shows the original GMAP timeline, along with changes and revisions from those original plans.

Table 2. Original and Revised GMAP Timeline and Activities

GMAP	Original	Changes/Revised Plans
Year 1: 2019–20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect data through MAP Growth & Georgia Milestones Develop new GMAP-specific items 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No Georgia Milestones or MAP Growth spring administrations No field test
Year 2: 2020–21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect data through MAP Growth & Georgia Milestones Develop new GMAP-specific items 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Georgia Milestones and MAP Growth administrations with incomplete participation
Year 3: 2021–22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administer GMAP as a through-year assessment Establish comparability with Georgia Milestones for ELA & Math 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Georgia Milestones and MAP Growth administrations GMAP field test (spring 2022): ELA & Math
Year 4: 2022–23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ELA & Math operational GMAP Science administered as through-year assessment Establish comparability with Georgia Milestones for science 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NWEA stopped work in June 2022 Consortium continued to administer MAP Growth while seeking funding for GMAP development exploring a smaller proof-of-concept study.
Year 5: 2023–24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ELA, Math, & Science operational 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hoping to field test GMAP through-year assessments in one grade for ELA & Math.

In contrast with Putnam’s original timeline, GMAP planned to focus on item development and field testing of new items in early years, while districts continued to administer existing MAP Growth assessments. However, pandemic-related delays meant that GMAP items were first field-tested in spring 2022, and the first time that the GMAP assessments could have been administered as through-year assessments was delayed from Year 3 of the project (2021–22) to Year 4 (2022–23). With NWEA stopping work on the project in late June 2022,

districts were not able to administer the GMAP as a through-year assessment in 2022–23, and no other progress was made toward the revised Year 4 timeline.

CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES OF PILOT PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

As the IAPP concludes, looking back on what went well and what challenges ultimately contributed to the project’s termination is important both for the state of Georgia and for Federal policymakers examining the efficacy of the IADA. Previous annual reports described several themes related to implementation, including delays due to the pandemic and the resulting effects on timelines; challenges of comparability requirements; resource challenges associated with building and scaling new assessments; and benefits and limitations of an assessment competition such as the IAPP. Many of these themes are reflected in this final discussion of the program’s challenges and successes.

CHALLENGES

District-led pilot, but state-level responsibility. Georgia’s IAPP was a vehicle for different consortia of districts to pilot different approaches to through-year assessment. Thus, leadership came from the district level, and the associated vendors reported to the districts; during the initial development, the state department of education served as little more than an observer and occasional advisor. With no direct authority over the process, GaDOE generally only met with the consortia twice a year, during the technical advisory meetings facilitated by WestEd. This disconnect between GaDOE, which is responsible for implementing state assessments, and the district consortia, which were developing assessments that would need to be comparable to the current state summative assessment, resulted in a lack of clarity among the parties at several points in the project. For example, district consortia sometimes did not fully understand the scope of the state assessment uses or procedures that their new assessments would need to match, such as federal accountability requirements and test security procedures.

Resource constraints. In Year 1, the consortia were not provided with funds to build and scale their assessment systems, nor was GaDOE provided with funding to oversee the project and review comparability documentation. In Year 2, the Georgia General Assembly allocated \$250,000 to each consortium. However, half a million dollars is nowhere near the amount of money spent on state summative assessment programs, so the consortia had to rely on funds from districts, philanthropies, and internal vendor resources. Because of the district-led nature of the pilot, the state was ineligible to receive federal funds through the Federal Competitive Grants for State Assessment (CGSA) program, to pass through to the districts.

Meeting comparability requirements. Although a high-level pathway to obtaining state approval to use innovative assessments for summative purposes was laid out in the IADA application, the details of the process were complex, and were perhaps more demanding than the district consortia originally understood. For example, participating districts initially believed that merely participating in the project allowed them to forgo state testing. However, in fact, students in the pilot districts were required to take both the pilot assessment and Georgia Milestones assessments until the districts could show that the innovative assessments produced comparable results to Georgia Milestones assessments.

IADA comparability criteria, grounded in IADA regulations and federal law, are similar to peer review requirements for state assessments. Meeting peer review requirements for existing and newly developed state assessments requires states to commit substantial time and resources. For a state department of education to compile and submit evidence for the peer review process can require a year of work. Carrying out such a task was daunting for the IAPP's district-led consortia, particularly given that no specific funding was attached to their pilots. Each consortium relied on partnerships with assessment vendors and, in some cases, small amounts of philanthropic support to carry out its pilot work, and these partnerships were strained by the need to collect and organize large amounts of evidence.

Delays due to the pandemic and changes in state standards. In addition to the preexisting challenges of this work, new issues were caused by the cancellation of testing, due to the pandemic, in 2020 and by the state revising its ELA and mathematics content standards for use in 2023–24 and 2025–26. Those two challenges set the consortia back at least one year, stalling development work and creating a moving target in terms of alignment of new assessments to content standards. As a result, GMAP was never able to field test a full through-year approach, and, as previously described, neither consortium moved as quickly as originally intended.

Tension between IAPP work and commercial product development. Although both Navvy and NWEA were committed to their district partnerships to carry out the IAPP work in Georgia, each vendor partner is also a business working to develop commercially viable products. In Year 3, Navvy's acquisition by Pearson demonstrated its potential value as an assessment product that could be made available to schools and districts around the country. Similarly, NWEA was working to develop a through-year assessment product that might serve other states. Tensions between developing products specifically for Georgia, strongly aligned to the state's standards and accountability requirements, and developing products that are more generic (though potentially customizable) in nature were occasionally apparent in discussions with the TAC. For example, GMAP's new item development was driven by NWEA achievement level descriptors, rather than by state versions, and Navvy sought additional nondisclosure assurances before sharing proprietary information with the TAC.

Other challenges. Other setbacks during the IAPP included NWEA staff turnover on the GMAP project, which led to lost time as new staff learned about the purpose and design of the GMAP assessments. Also, although good discussions about the design and implementation of the Navvy assessment were held, little concrete data or other evidence was ever shared with the TAC. Lastly, current federal law requires that states implement a single statewide assessment system for accountability purposes. Although the ED-approved IADA pilot in Georgia included two potential new assessment systems, the state would ultimately have had to select a single assessment system (one of the IAPP systems or the existing Georgia Milestones assessments) to move forward. This requirement, coupled with the design of the pilot in Georgia, undermined one of the central goals of the IADA: the sharing of knowledge among diverse organizations pursuing the same goal (advancing student learning) in vastly different ways. Having to select a "winner" meant that, from the beginning, the consortia were disincentivized to share information with each other or GaDOE. Ultimately, one consortium would have spent years working on an assessment system that would be discarded.

SUCCESSSES

Despite the fact that neither innovative assessment was ultimately able to serve either as a replacement for the Georgia Milestones assessments, the consortia did achieve some successes. For example, within each consortium, districts came together and worked well toward a common purpose. GMAP had high numbers of participating districts and a high amount of active engagement with consortium leadership. Putnam’s focus on giving standards-level feedback to teachers and students offered a potential “bottom-up” approach to statewide assessment. Also, the work that each consortium carried out on the details of through-year assessment, including when to bank scores, how prescriptive a schedule to implement, what reporting metrics can be effective, and how to calculate a summative score, provided information to move the field forward.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, while both assessments offered new approaches to statewide assessment, with different strengths and opportunities, the IAPP’s structure created substantial barriers to their success. The idea that Georgia would have three state assessments all feeding data into an accountability system, even for a short period of time, was never feasible. However, much was learned about considerations for through-year assessment. Future efforts in Georgia would benefit from a more focused process—perhaps including only one new assessment system—with a defined role for GaDOE and strong support from the State Board.

APPENDIX

Process for using the innovative assessments in lieu of the state assessments under IADA:

- 1) **Create Comparability Evidence.** Each consortium was supposed to use the comparability guidelines to collect and summarize information needed to meet each criterion. The consortia were given two opportunities to submit evidence in Year 4 (October 2022 or March 2023). Evidence was to be submitted electronically to WestEd.
- 2) **WestEd Review.** WestEd staff would then review the evidence for completeness and provide any necessary feedback to the consortia to supplement their submissions prior to TAC review.
- 3) **TAC Review.** WestEd would have then notified TAC members that evidence was ready for review. The plan was for TAC members to first review information individually, with TAC meetings held in December 2022 and May 2023 to discuss their findings. The TAC would have then made a recommendation to GaDOE regarding the strength of the evidence submitted.
- 4) **GaDOE Review.** Following the submission of a consortium’s full set of comparability evidence and TAC review, GaDOE planned to review the full body of evidence and the TAC’s recommendations and present that information to the State Board for consideration.
- 5) **State Board Approval.** Based on the TAC and GaDOE reviews, the State Board would have then approved (or denied) the assessments for use in lieu of the Georgia Milestones assessments. This approval would need to have taken place in the July before the start of the school year in which the new test would have been implemented.
- 6) **Communication to Schools and Communities.** Once State Board approval was received, districts would have been notified and could choose to participate in the new assessments in lieu of Georgia Milestones during the IADA period, via a formal school board approval process. This decision would then have been communicated to families, staff, and students prior to the start of the school year (likely in August). It is important to note that the consortia were required to double-test at least a sample of students (i.e., administer both their assessment and Georgia Milestones) in order to complete IADA-required annual comparability analyses.