

Question: *The focus question for this brief.*

What are some considerations for selecting District-Determined Measures (DDMs) appropriate for educators who work with students with disabilities (SWDs)?

District Readiness: *Work to be completed before answering the focus question of this brief.*

- Identify the district team responsible for making decisions about DDMs for SWDs.
- Enlist educators with expertise working with SWDs in the DDM selection and review process.

Next Steps: *Suggested next steps for districts after reading this brief.*

- Identify the different functions educators of SWDs perform and the setting in which they work in the district.
- Identify where existing DDMs are appropriate and where new measures are needed.
- Create a process to ensure that the selected DDMs provide an equal opportunity for all students to demonstrate growth.

DDM Development

This Implementation Brief is relevant to the highlighted steps:

- **Selecting**
- Administering
- Scoring
- Analyzing
- Adjusting

This brief is designed to address key questions and considerations for identifying DDMs for educators who work with students with disabilities (SWDs). It recognizes that educators work with SWDs in a variety of settings and perform a variety of roles in these different settings, including both general and special education teachers. Districts will need to determine if the selected DDMs are appropriate or additional measures are needed. DDMs should provide fair and useful information about student progress – regardless of disability.

These Implementation Briefs are designed to provide targeted guidance focused on timely questions around the implementation of District Determined Measures. These briefs highlight important questions, resources, and approaches for districts to consider, and are not exhaustive resources on the subject. Please continue to share your own examples, suggestions, and questions with us at EducatorEvaluation@doe.mass.edu.

Four Key Messages about Student Impact Ratings

Use Multiple Measures



DDMs and SGP are part of comprehensive evaluation system

Focus on Students



The focus of measuring student impact is improving student learning.

Build Capacity



Developing DDMs builds knowledge about assessment and data use.

Engage Educators



Educators have expertise developing and evaluating assessments.

Considerations for All Educators

As stated in [Technical Guide B](#), the selection of DDMs is guided by two key questions: (1) are the measures **aligned to content?** and (2) are they **informative to educators and the district?** As districts work to identify DDMs that achieve these two purposes, it is important to consider the unique contexts for teachers working with SWDs.

Aligned to Content: An educator's DDMs should be aligned to his or her responsibilities. As a result, the particular role that an educator plays and the population of students for whom he or she is responsible will impact what types of DDMs are appropriate. Considering that the majority of educators are responsible for teaching and supporting students' learning of academic content, content-based DDMs are the first place for a district to start. The district must be careful to understand the educator's role in the content instruction. For example, a special educator may work with a student with a disability in a general education math class, but his role may be supporting that student's ability in reading that will allow access to the math content. In this instance, selecting a measure of a student's access to written mathematical text may be better aligned with the content for which the educator is responsible than a DDM that assesses mastery of mathematical computation skills.

Legal Considerations

The implementation of DDMs must be consistent with requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act ([IDEA](#)), No Child Left Behind ([NCLB](#)), and all other special education related [laws and regulations](#). DDMs are considered a part of regular and ongoing general classroom assessment for all students. They are not intended to be a part of the formal evaluation of a student's disability. However, as ongoing classroom assessments districts must ensure that students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) receive any necessary accommodations and modifications described in their IEPs.

Statewide Growth Measures and Special Education Students

A district is required to use median Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs) as one measure to determine a teacher's Student Impact Rating for all teachers who teach 20 or more students for whom SGPs are available in the teacher's content areas (ELA, math, or ESL). This requirement applies equally to educators who teach students with disabilities. General education teachers and administrators responsible for SWDs may not exclude those students' SGPs when determining their median SGPs.

While 20 students is the threshold for required use of median SGPs, districts may choose to use median SGP for educators with 8-19 students as well. Districts may also choose to use SGPs as one piece of evidence to assess students' growth when an educator works with 7 or fewer students. However, when dealing with very small groups of students, additional information is required for the purposes of a DDM. The implementation brief on [Using Student Growth Percentiles](#) provides additional information on this topic.

Evaluators using SGPs to make a determination of an educator's Student Impact Rating must consider the population and the measure. While SWDs often demonstrate high growth compared to other groups, SWDs have a lower average SGP. As a result, educators working primarily with SWDs may be more likely to meet the definition of low growth set by ESE than to attain moderate or high growth. This is one reason why professional judgment is such a critical part of the process of determining an educator's Student Impact Rating.

Informative: For DDMs to be a powerful tool for improving an educator's impact on student outcomes, the measures must yield meaningful and useful information to support effective instruction. Educators may use determinations of high, moderate, and low growth to reflect on their own practice, evaluate curriculum, or target additional resources. For example, an educator may notice that students who receive support in small reading groups may demonstrate high growth compared to students who practice reading independently. These results would support expanding the number of students who participate in small reading groups. Similarly, an educator may observe that students he supports in mathematics consistently demonstrate high growth, while those he supports in ELA demonstrate moderate or low growth. This observation may allow him to consider investigating reasons for this discrepancy (nature of the students' disabilities in relation to the reading tasks, text selection, stronger instructional skills in math than reading, etc.) and thereby inform professional development choices.

Students with disabilities may demonstrate their learning differently than students without disabilities, and a measure should reflect these differences.

Fairness: Although districts can use the same DDM with SWDs as they use to measure growth in students without disabilities, districts need to consider issues of fairness. For DDMs to be appropriate and yield meaningful information, **all students should have an equal chance of demonstrating growth.** A high-quality measure of growth provides an opportunity for all students, including those with disabilities, to demonstrate their learning by taking into account pre-existing knowledge and skills. However, SWDs may demonstrate their learning differently than students without disabilities. A measure should reflect these differences. Potential issues of unfairness can be mitigated by including special educators in the process of setting parameters for high, moderate, and low growth (see the Implementation Brief on [Scoring and Setting Parameter Setting](#) for more about this process). ESE encourages districts to include special educators in the decision making about the parameters for high, moderate and low growth. In some situations, it is reasonable to complete the parameter-setting process explicitly for SWDs to ensure that measures address the different ways these students may demonstrate growth.

In addition to drawing on the professional judgment of special educators in the parameter setting process, districts can investigate assessment results for signs of potential concerns related to fairness (see the Implementation Brief on [Investigating Fairness](#) for some strategies). For example, a district should see a similar percentage of SWDs being rated as having high growth as any other group of students. While there is no fixed percentage of students expected to fall in each category, if there are systematic differences between the determination of growth of SWDs and other populations of students, districts must address this issue in a fair and timely manner.

Shared Responsibility

Often two educators share responsibility for supporting a student to learn certain content. An ELA teacher may teach lessons on reading strategies to a whole class, while a special education teacher offers additional instruction to a group of students in the class who have IEPs to reinforce the lesson and ensure necessary accommodations are known and provided. The same DDM based on growth in reading would be appropriate for both of these educators. The ELA teacher's impact would be determined using results from all students, while the special education teacher's impact could be determined using results from the students in the class with IEPs.

Districts are discouraged from trying to assign partial responsibility to educators. This approach would belie the intention of classroom settings that involve general education teachers and special education teachers working together to facilitate a class and sends the message SWDs "belong" only to their special education teachers. Individuals concerned about attribution should remember that there are always many factors that impact a student's learning – another teacher is one factor among many.

Accommodations: If a student is eligible to receive an accommodation to access the content as described in the Individualized Education Plan (IEP), that student is also eligible to receive all appropriate accommodations when completing a DDM. Since accommodations allow the student access to the content being assessed by the DDM, the accommodations support fairness and comparability across all students.

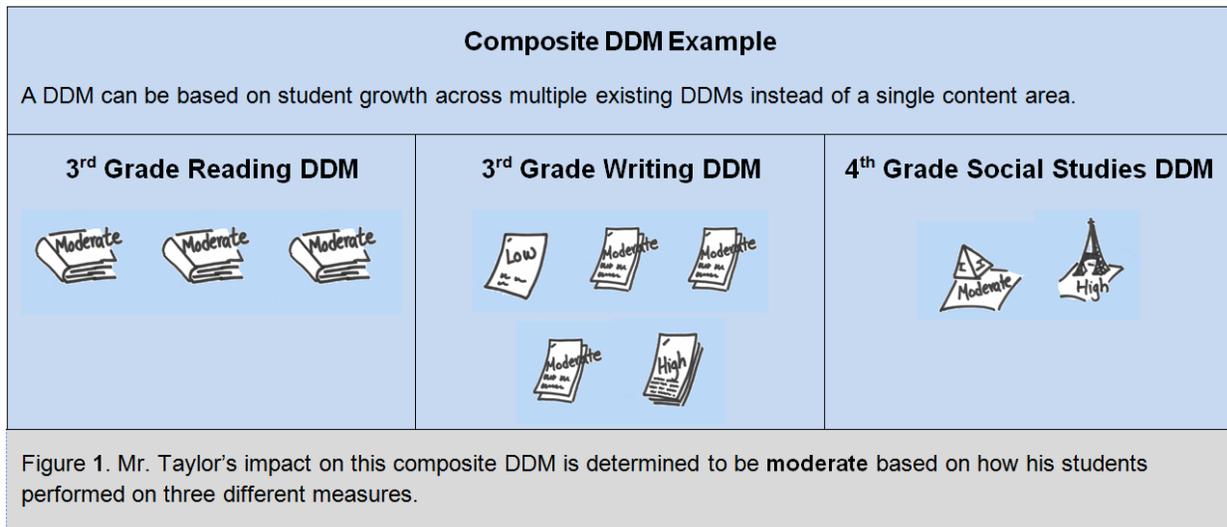
Using Content Area DDMs for Special Education Teachers

When selecting DDMs for special education teachers, districts should consider the setting in which the instruction occurs. General education teachers' roles are often defined by either a grade level or subject matter. As a result, aligning these educators to DDMs is fairly straightforward. In contrast, special education teachers often teach in a variety of settings: general education classrooms, resource rooms or other small-group settings, and substantially separate classrooms. The challenge with selecting DDMs for special education teachers is that their responsibilities are often aligned with students' needs rather than by grade or subject. Districts may need to design a flexible plan for selecting DDMs for these educators. Wherever possible, these measures should be the same DDMs used with all students, however, there are many cases when modifications or new measures are appropriate.

Composite DDMs: Some special educators work with a sufficient number of students in a given content area that it is appropriate for a DDM to be based on student growth in only one subject area. Others work with a few students across a wide variety of subject areas. As a result, it may not be appropriate to use a measure in only one content area because educator impact would be based on only a few students and would necessitate the use of additional evidence. One solution for educators working with students across multiple content areas is a DDM that is a composite of different measures.

For example, Mr. Taylor is a special education teacher who works with ten SWDs in a variety of content areas: three third grade students in reading, five third grade students in writing, and two fourth grade students in social studies. Mr. Taylor provides instruction to these students using a combination of push-in and pull-out settings, planning closely with the general education

teachers. Each of these students completes an assessment in their general education classrooms that will be used for DDMs for their general education teachers. So what about Mr. Taylor? Using the shared responsibility approach described above, Mr. Taylor’s impact could be measured by how his students performed in relation to the different DDMs. However taken separately, the fact that such a small number of students completed each measure opens the door for error. A composite DDM approach can help mitigate this error. The determination of growth for the composite DDM would be determined by looking across the three different measures. If the majority of his 10 students demonstrated moderate growth on the different measures, then Mr. Taylor’s impact would be determined to be moderate on the composite DDM.



One caution about this approach is that it assumes that the different measures are of comparable difficulty. That is, a determination of high growth on the third grade writing DDM means the same as a determination of high growth on the fourth grade social studies DDM. While comparability across grades and content areas is one of the goals of DDMs, it is possible that some DDMs will be harder or easier than others, especially in the first few years of implementation. Fortunately, districts will be able to check the comparability of measures over time and make necessary adjustments to the measures or the district parameters for high, moderate, and low growth (see the Implementation Brief on [Investigating Fairness](#) for more on comparability). In fact, a potential benefit to the composite DDM approach is that it highlights the importance of comparability, and may provide a meaningful context to have this conversation with educators. While lack of comparability may be a source of some error in this measure, it is important to remember that no DDM will be completely free of error. This is why an educator’s Student Impact Rating is determined by professional judgment based on multiple measures over multiple years.

Another consideration for using a composite DDM is that because it does not reflect a specific content area, it can be challenging to interpret. The reasons why one student had low growth in one content area may be very different than why another student demonstrated low growth in a different content area. It will be important for districts to check-in with special educators to learn if and how composite DDM results prove useful to informing the instructional strategies they use with their students.

Number of Students per DDM

The amount of evidence needed from each student, for a district to have confidence in the overall measure, will greatly depend on the number of students who contribute data for a DDM. A relatively brief measure administered to hundreds of students will give a reliable measure of an educator's students' performance in that area. In contrast, educators working with fewer students will require more evidence of growth per student in order to achieve the same level of confidence. There is no minimum number of students who must be contributors for a DDM. Including more students improves confidence in the measure, but will be balanced with feasibility.

One solution for educators with a few students is to use multiple pieces of evidence for each student. For example, teachers working with only four students who use the MCAS-alt assessment could consider the evidence for each strand independently. If each strand was comparable to a typical hour long classroom assessment, and the educator collected evidence from six strands for each student, the educator would have evidence of growth from a total of 24 strands, similar to how a classroom teacher may have evidence of growth for 24 students. This would be sufficient evidence for a DDM.

Another solution for educators working with small groups of students is to combine information. An educator working with a small group of students on reading skills may combine evidence from students' SGPs with other evidence of growth on local assessments to construct a DDM with greater precision.

Using Unique DDMs for Special Education Teachers

The previous section describes how special education teachers can use the same DDMs as general education teachers. There will be situations where it is appropriate for districts to select DDMs that will only be used in relation to SWDs.

Small Group DDMs: Some special educators work with small groups of students with a modified curriculum. These educators are responsible for teaching the same standards, but make modifications to support SWDs. These educators may also teach other content, such as developmental, social or organization skills. An educator working with a small group of students can use a DDM that is closely aligned with the content skills covered. For example, if a special education teacher works with a group of third graders on phonics for eight weeks, a DDM could be developed with this group of students in a similar way as DDMs are developed for other content areas, with parameters of high, moderate, and low growth based on the population being taught (see the callout box on how the number of students impacts the design of a DDM).

Individualized DDMs: Making a determination of high, moderate, or low growth can be very challenging in the context of SWDs because the definition of growth is relative to academic peers (see discussion in the [sidebar on page 7](#)). There may be cases where the content or appropriate parameters for high, moderate, and low growth are developed for individual students rather than for a group of students. Districts can consider a standardized approach that

identifies measures and parameters for high, moderate, and low growth that are individualized for each student, but is explicitly designed to be comparable.

One well established measure that uses an individualized, yet standardized approach is called Goal Attainment Scaling (GAS) (a resource describing the GAS approach can be found [here](#)). The advantage to this type of measure is that it allows for comparisons across potentially very different measures by comparing a student's growth to a professional expert's expectation.

An example of this process would be if a group of special educators, with knowledge about the individual students and the curriculum associated with each student, uses professional judgment to complete the following steps:

1. Determine the appropriate content for each student;
2. Select an appropriate measure to assess that content; and
3. Determine the levels of performance on that measure that would represent high, moderate, and low growth for each student after a determined period of time.

The team would complete these steps for each student. After a pre-determined period of time, the team would assess students using the measures identified in step 2. Each student's determination of high, moderate, and low growth would be based on the parameters the team set during step 3.

For example, consider a district that uses this approach with Ms. Weinberg, a speech-pathologist. A group of special educators considers each of Ms. Weinberg's students, beginning with the student Marsha, a student with a hearing impairment. She assesses the student's progress in oral articulation with a speech inventory measure. The team determines that this measure is an appropriate reflection of Marsha's progress. Looking at Marsha's previous progress, the team determines that a score in May above 20 would be evidence of high growth, while a score of between 10 and 20 would be evidence of moderate growth, and a score below 10 would be evidence of low growth. In May Marsha scores an 18 on the speech inventory, and is determined to have moderate growth. Marsha's determination of moderate growth is one student in a DDM comprised of other students with individualized measures that will be used to determine Ms. Weinberg's Student Impact Rating.

This approach may use either IEP goals or MCAS-alt assessment as a starting point. Below is a discussion of the considerations for each of these specific situations.

IEP Goals: Some districts preparing to implement DDMs have considered using IEP goals as a basis for a DDM because they provide a good foundation for determining individualized

Academic Peers

In the educator evaluation [regulations](#), ratings of high, moderate, and low on DDMs are defined "relative to academic peers in the grade or subject." For most students this represents other students in the same grade. However, this may not be appropriate for SWDs because certain disability categories are characterized by atypical rates of progress.

Given the variability with which students with disabilities acquire skills and knowledge, it may be difficult to determine appropriate academic peers. In these cases districts should focus on setting parameters for high, moderate and low growth so that any individual student would have an equal chance of demonstrating growth. This is why it is critical to engaging educators in the parameter setting process, because it promotes meaningful conversations about student learning.

parameters. While this is understandable since they represent targeted learning, there are a number of challenges associated with using IEP goals as DDMs. These include:

- Variations in IEP timelines (i.e., IEP goals are set and checked across the whole year, or in many cases, the IEP does not have the same start and end dates as the school year);
- IEP goals are designed to be dichotomous, that is either met or not met. DDMs require three levels (high, moderate, and low).
- IEP goals are developed with the expectation that they will be met. In contrast, determinations of high, moderate, and low growth are designed to describe a range of growth without a predetermined expectation.
- Educators may not be responsible for a certain IEP goal. (e.g., a reading support teacher is not responsible for a goal supported by the occupational therapist).
- IEP goals are not designed to be comparable across students.
- IEP goals must meet specific legal requirements, such as parental involvement, that may not be consistent with the process of determining goals of a DDM.

Districts may still find that IEP goals provide a meaningful starting point for DDMs, but it is important to make a distinction between the assessment purpose of each. A DDM's purpose is to make determinations of high, moderate, and low student growth; an IEP's purpose is to determine an appropriate goal for achievement for a given student. **Districts should be careful not to confuse these two purposes.**

MCAS-Alt: The [MCAS-Alt](#) is not designed to provide a comparable definition of high, moderate, and low growth for different students. However, a similar process of systematically collecting evidence from student work used in the MCAS-Alt would be appropriate for a DDM. In particular, the systematic process of tracking evidence in the MCAS-Alt could be modified to support a comparable definition of high, moderate, and low growth if an effort was made to ensure that goals are comparable.

In addition, a district may consider an approach similar to the MCAS-Alt to collect a portfolio of evidence of growth for an individual student or a given group of students. The challenge would be to create a portfolio designed to measure growth instead of demonstrating knowledge. A district may consider developing a growth rubric that could evaluate this type of portfolio (see Part 8 of the [DDMs and Assessment Literacy Webinar Series](#) for more information about growth rubrics).

Using Indirect Measures for Special Education Teachers

Some educators support SWDs in ways other than by providing direct instruction. For example, many special education teachers are focused on supporting student's access to the curriculum, not necessarily instruction in the curriculum content. Other members of the special education team may also not work directly with students on a daily basis. A school psychologist may be responsible for providing a thorough evaluation of student's eligibility for receiving special education services. Since these educators contribute to a student's learning through an intermediary process, a district may consider using an indirect measure of student learning to

assess an educator's impact (see the Implementation Brief on [Indirect Measures and Specialized Instructional Support Personnel](#) for more on using indirect measures as DDMs).

Frequently Asked Questions

Can a DDM assess student growth in behavioral, social, or emotional domains? Yes. DDMs must be related to curriculum frameworks (see the definition of District-Determined Measures in [603 CMR 35.02](#)). Therefore, when behavioral, social, and/or emotional learning is an explicit part of an educator's curriculum, such as in the case of certain special educators and support personnel, a DDM assessing growth in one or more of those areas would be appropriate. However, it would not be appropriate to use a measure like this when behavior, social, or emotional skills are not directly taught as part of a curriculum. ESE recommends that where such an educator also provides academic instruction, the measures reflect this dual responsibility (i.e., one DDM assesses academic growth and the other assesses behavioral/social/emotional growth).

Do districts need to use the same DDM measure for all students with whom that educator works? No. Districts should use assessments that support comparability. In some cases identical measures best support a claim of comparability. However, when assessing SWDs, appropriately modified assessments may provide greater comparability. Learn more about comparability in the Implementation Brief on [Investigating Fairness](#).

Can I use assessment information that I am already using? Districts are encouraged to use assessment information that is already in use. Example of assessments and assessment information that some districts are planning on using with Special Education teachers include: MCAS assessment information, Study Island benchmark assessments, Key Math Inventory, WADE Wilson Reading Program, Read Naturally, Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Screening component of the CELF-5, Test of Pragmatic Language, and Edmark Reading Program, as well as measures developed and adapted by educators. You can learn more about how to bring together multiple assessments into a DDM that measures growth by reading our guidance on [Using Current Assessments](#).