**NYCDOE Leverages TAO
for Its Gifted & Talented Programs and the Spanish LOTE Exam**

The New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) is the largest school district in the U.S., serving 1.1 million students in over 1,800 schools. Each student learns differently. In response, the NYCDOE offers a variety of programs to support different educational needs: for instance, the Gifted & Talented programs for exceptional students ages 4 through 8.

Recently, the NYCDOE was exploring a redesign of its G&T placement tests for its 14,000 4-year-olds who apply for the program annually. They chose to work with TAO, an Open Source assessment platform. Since it's Open Source, the source code is free.

In a feasibility study, school district staff created a series of non-verbal digital questions, in which students were asked to interact with puzzle pieces.
After test administrators guided them through the answer process in practice sessions, the children answered 10 questions independently, using either a tablet or a desktop computer.

TAO made it possible to develop innovative test items with ease, and its standards-compliance ensured compatibility with other systems. The assessment went so smoothly that the NYCDOE decided to expand its use of TAO to other assessments—for instance, the Language Proficiency Exams.

The NYCDOE offers comprehensive proficiency exams in a total of 21 Languages Other than English (LOTE), to enable their high school students to meet the Advanced Regents diploma requirements. These exams contain four components: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. However, it's difficult to schedule native-speaker teachers to provide the live "listening" sessions in each school, and to assign a specific test-time for every student, especially given the sheer volume—20,000 students a year for Spanish alone. It's also a logistical nightmare to deal with the large amount of paper-based testing materials.

TAO's ability to support multimedia made it the ideal solution to this problem. It enabled the NYCDOE to streamline the listening component of the exam with audio recordings, which eliminated the need to have native speakers onsite. The NYCDOE digitally administered the listening component of the Spanish exam to a class of 9th to 11th grade students. The use of TAO made the administration process smoother and easier, not to mention the students much preferred taking the test online.

Now that the NYCDOE has discovered ways to assess learning with more flexibility and accuracy, they plan to continue leveraging TAO, the Open Source testing platform, to broaden their options for more digital assessment programs in the future.