

Parent Toolkit

A Guide to NWEA Assessments

About NWEA

Northwest Evaluation Association™ (NWEA™) is a not-for-profit educational services organization located in Portland, Oregon. NWEA partners with educational organizations worldwide to provide research-based computerized adaptive assessments, professional development for educators and research services. As a result of NWEA tests, educators can make informed decisions to promote your child's academic growth.

NWEA was built on the belief that kids can be the owners of their own learning and that accurate information about their learning helps to make that possible. Testing tools and reports from NWEA provide specific insight into your child's learning, and wide-ranging information to help every student, classroom and school succeed.

You are receiving this because your child's school is using NWEA's Measures of Academic Progress® (MAP®) assessment system to identify your child's learning growth. This brochure should answer common questions about NWEA and the MAP assessments.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the different NWEA assessments?

The NWEA assessments are:

Measures of Academic Progress® (MAP®) – These computerized tests are adaptive and offered in **Reading, Language Usage, and Mathematics**. When taking a MAP® test, the difficulty of each question is based on how well a student answers all the previous questions. As the student answers correctly, questions become more difficult. If the student answers incorrectly, the questions become easier. In an optimal test, a student answers approximately half the items correctly and half incorrectly. The final score is an estimate of the student's achievement level.

MAP for Science – This computerized adaptive test provides useful information about where a student is learning in two areas of science: **General Science** and **Concepts & Processes**.

MAP for Primary Grades – The computerized MAP for Primary Grades tests include Screening (diagnostic) tests, Skills Checklist (diagnostic) tests, and Survey with Goals (adaptive) tests in **Reading** and **Mathematics**. These assessments:

- Provide teachers with an efficient way to assess achievement levels of early learners so they can spend more time teaching and less time administering individual diagnostic tests.
- Provide information to guide instruction during the early stages of a student's academic career. Early learners enter school with a wide variety of educational experiences. Early identification of achievement levels is foundational for teachers establishing an environment for early academic success.
- Identify the needs of all primary grades students, from struggling to advanced learners.
- Utilize engaging test items that encourage student participation for more accurate results.

How long does it take to complete a test?

Although the tests are not timed, it usually takes students about one hour to complete each MAP test. MAP for Primary Grades tests take about 15 to 30 minutes to complete.

Do all students in the same grade take the same test?

No. NWEA assessments are designed to target a student's academic performance in mathematics, reading, language usage, and science. These tests are tailored to an individual's current achievement level. This gives each student a fair opportunity to show what he or she knows and can do. With MAP assessments the computer adjusts the difficulty of the questions so that each student takes a unique test.

How are NWEA assessments used?

NWEA assessments are used to measure your student's progress or growth in school. You may have a chart in your home on which you mark your child's height at certain times, such as on his or her birthday. This is a growth chart. It shows how much he or she has grown from one year to the next. NWEA assessments do the same sort of thing, except they measure your child's growth in mathematics, reading, language usage, and science skills. The scale used to measure your child's progress is called the RIT scale (Rasch unIT). The RIT scale works much like feet and inches on a yardstick. It is used to chart your child's academic growth from year to year.

How do teachers use the test scores?

MAP assessments are important to teachers because they keep track of progress and growth in basic skills. The results let teachers know where a student's strengths are and if help is needed in any specific areas. Teachers use this information to help guide their instruction in the classroom.

Can parents discuss assessment data directly with NWEA?

Unfortunately, due to privacy laws regarding student information (specifically stemming from the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act, FERPA), NWEA is unable to discuss any student information, test results, or district assessment programs directly with parents.

In addition, each district implementation of any NWEA assessments is unique based on decisions made by the district, such as which tests to administer, when students will be tested, and so on. Because each district's implementation is unique, parents will need to direct specific questions and concerns to their local school district resources.

Commonly Used Terms

Here are some terms you will hear and use as you are talking with teachers and your child about MAP scores and reports.

District Average: The average RIT score for all students in the school district in the same grade who were tested at the same time as this student.

Norm Group Average: The average score observed for students in the norm group. The most recent NWEA norm sample was a group of over 2.8 million students from across the United States.

Percentile Range: Percentiles are used to compare one student's performance to that of the norm group. Percentile means the student scored as well as or better than that percent of students taking the test in his/her grade. There is about a 68% chance that a student's percentile ranking would fall within this range if the student tested again relatively soon.

Percentile Rank: The percentile rank is a statistic that indicates how well a student performed in comparison to the students in the norm group. A student's percentile rank indicates that the student scored as well as, or better than, the percent of students in the norm group. In other words, a student with a percentile rank of 72 scored as well as, or better than, 72% of the students in the norm group.

RIT: Tests developed by NWEA use a scale called RIT to measure student achievement and growth. RIT stands for Rasch UnIT, which is a measurement scale developed to simplify the interpretation of test scores. The RIT score relates directly to the curriculum scale in each subject area. It is an equal-interval scale, like feet and inches, so scores can be added together to calculate accurate class or school averages. RIT scores range from about 100 to 280. Students typically start at the 180 to 200 level in the third grade and progress to the 220 to 260 level by high school. RIT scores make it possible to follow a student's educational growth from year to year.

Standards: Standards are statements, developed by states or districts, of what students should know and be able to do, related to specific academic areas.

Tips for Parents

Ways to help your child prepare for testing

- Meet with your child's teacher as often as needed to discuss his or her progress. Ask the teacher to suggest activities for you and your child to do at home to help prepare for tests and improve your child's understanding of schoolwork. Students benefit from parents and teachers working together.
- Provide a quiet, comfortable place for studying at home.
- Make sure that your child is well rested on school days and especially the day of a test. Children who are tired are less able to pay attention in class or to handle the demands of a test.

- Give your child a well-rounded diet. A healthy body leads to a healthy, active mind.
- Provide books and magazines for your child to read at home. By reading new materials, a child learns new words that might appear on a test. Ask your child's school about a suggested outside reading list or get suggestions from the public library.

Ways to help your child with language

- Talk to your child and encourage him or her to engage in conversation during family activities.
- Give a journal or diary as a gift.
- Help your child write a letter to a friend or family member. Offer assistance with correct grammar usage and content.
- Have a "word of the week" that is defined every Monday. Encourage your child to use the new word throughout the week.
- Plan a special snack or meal and have your child write the menu.
- After finishing a chapter in a book or a magazine article, have your child explain his or her favorite part of the narrative.

Ways to help your child with reading

- Provide many opportunities for your child to read books or other materials. Children learn to read best when they have books and other reading materials at home and plenty of chances to read. Read aloud to your child. Research shows that this is the most important activity that parents can do to increase their child's chance of reading success. Keep reading aloud even when your child can read independently.
- Make time for the library.
- Play games together like Scrabble®, Spill and Spell™, Scattergories®, and Balderdash™.
- Follow your child's interests. Find fiction and nonfiction books that tie into these interests.
- Work crossword puzzles with your child.
- Give a magazine subscription to your child as a gift.

Ways to help your child with mathematics

- Spend time with your child engaging in simple board games, puzzles, and activities that require mathematics skills. Even everyday activities such as playing with toys in a sandbox or in a tub at bath time can teach children mathematics concepts such as weight, density, and volume. Check your television listings for shows that can reinforce mathematics skills in a practical and fun way.
- Encourage children to solve problems. Provide assistance, but let them figure it out themselves. Problem solving is a lifetime skill.
- The kitchen is filled with tasty opportunities to teach fractional measurements, such as doubling and dividing cookie recipes.

- Involve older children in projects that incorporate geometric and algebraic concepts such as planting a garden, building a bookshelf, or estimating how long it will take to drive to your family vacation destination.
- Children should learn to read and interpret charts and graphs such as those found in daily newspapers. Collecting and analyzing data will help your child draw conclusions and become a discriminating reader of numerical information.

Web Sites for Children and Parents

Mathematics

www.aaamath.com

www.coolmath.com

www.funbrain.com

www.aplusmath.com

www.mathforum.org/dr.math

www.mathleague.com/help/help.htm

www.edhelper.com

Math practice and activities

Interactive math games

Interactive math and reading activities

Math games and puzzles

Common math questions answered

Math help resource

Math problems to solve

Language Arts/Reading

www.funbrain.com

www.merriam-webster.com

www.vocabulary.com

www.superkids.com/aweb/tools/words

www.edhelper.com

Language arts games and more

Word of the Day and word games

Vocabulary activities

Vocabulary builders

Reading and vocabulary activities