Better Together

How Smarter Balanced districts can gain critical teaching and learning data with MAP today

NWEA
Northwest Evaluation Association
Partnersing to help all kids learn*
INTRODUCTION

Rigorous. Inspiring. Exciting. Challenging. Whatever your day-to-day viewpoint, the new college and career readiness standards provide a framework for 21st century education that affects both teachers and students. State Departments of Education find themselves working hard with administrators, teachers, parents, and students as they transition to these meaningful standards and new assessments.

Changing standards shift definitions of proficiency, however. More than ever, educators must understand:

- what information the new assessments will—and won’t—provide
- the nature of the proposed assessments and online resources
- the potential impact on students and their learning as they transition to new standards and the new assessments

Because the Smarter Balanced test is both new and assesses more stringent standards, most states and educators anticipate the first few years of implementation will show a drop in the number of students rated as proficient.

Several states have already seen the impact of the new standards on student scores in their assessments. In New York, two years of relatively stable test results have required educators to address a multitude of questions. While statewide pass rates in math increased from 31% in spring 2013 to 36% in spring 2014, results on the English language arts test held steady at 31% over the same time span. Percentages in both years show a significant drop from 2012, when the pass rate was 55% in ELA and 65% in math. This is just one example of what many states are already facing and what SBAC will face as well when they establish cut scores that benchmark students’ performance in terms of college and career readiness.

Rather than stakeholders seeing changes as a signal that more stringent measures are in place, however, lower scores and proficiency rates threaten to undermine the standards’ perceived success as well as student confidence in their own abilities. In “The phantom collapse of student achievement in New York,” published in Phi Delta Kappan, Northwest Evaluation Association™ (NWEA™) researchers note, “The [NY] proficiency standards increased in difficulty, and, as a result, proficiency rates dropped. But this did not mean that student performance collapsed. Unfortunately, reports of declines in proficiency rates—rather than actual declines in scores—created the erroneous impression of a collapse in student achievement.” Using Measures of Academic Progress® (MAP®) interim assessment data from six NY districts, the article goes on to illustrate that “schools with apparent declines in proficiency rates actually showed improvements in student achievement between 2012 and 2013.”

NWEA supports the rationale for developing the Smarter Balanced summative assessment, and suggests pairing it with MAP so you can identify instructional needs and provide a more well-rounded view of student achievement and growth throughout the year—even if you experience proficiency level drops on your SBAC summative assessment.

During and after your transition to new standards, you’ll find MAP continues to provide what you need: consistent, useful, instructionally relevant, and reliable data.

Teachers and education researchers created NWEA nearly 40 years ago. Today, we continue to be advocates for computer adaptive interim assessments—ideally given in fall, winter, and spring—with a mature, stable scale that measures not only on- or off-grade level proficiency, but growth over time. When teachers have growth information for every one of their students, starting in the fall, they will be able to better prepare their students for the new accountability assessments.
"MAP demonstrates how you can make assessment a common experience by focusing on measuring and tracking student growth. It gives us a certain kind of picture of student achievement that complements our local and state assessments."

— R.J. WEBBER, ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT OF ACADEMIC SERVICES, NOVI COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT, MICHIGAN

WHAT’S AN INTERIM ASSESSMENT?

While districts must carefully consider each assessment implemented, many have found that using a balanced assessment model that includes an interim assessment is a reliable strategy to help drive student learning. Interim assessment happens at select intervals in instruction during the school year; its data provide an objective measure of progress toward learning objectives, measure student academic growth, and inform instruction.

Interim assessments should have three primary purposes:

- providing information to help educators guide instruction for all students in a manner that supports student growth and achievement
- providing educators and parents with an accurate measure of the student’s growth over time
- predicting student proficiency on summative assessments

When properly implemented, interim assessments serve as a time-efficient means of measuring student progress within a general subject area. A typical computer adaptive interim test design:

- includes 30 to 50 items
- takes the average student less than an hour to complete
- produces both an accurate estimate of student performance in a subject area and an estimate of performance on the standards within that subject area

Interim assessments have the potential to provide educators with information they can use to plan individual student or group instruction. During the transition to new standards and assessments, both teachers and students will find this benefit more important than ever.

“The basic argument for interim assessments is actually quite compelling: let’s fix our students’ learning problems during the year, rather than waiting for high-stakes state tests to make summative judgments on us all at the end of the year, because interim assessments can be aggregated and have external referents (projection to standards, norms, scales).”

— MARSHALL (2006)

NWEA K – 12 INTERIM ASSESSMENTS

MAP assessments from NWEA quickly reveal the precise achievement of every student by adapting to each student’s learning level. Within 24 hours of assessing, you’ll have essential information about what your K – 12 students know—and are ready to learn—on rigorous new state standards.

Suggested test schedule: fall, winter, and spring.

Testing time: While MAP is an untimed test, times for the typical student follow:

MAP for Primary Grades: under 30 minutes/subject area.
MAP and MAP for Science: under 60 minutes/subject area.

OVERVIEW OF MAP AND MAP FOR PRIMARY GRADES (MPG)

- Measure instructional readiness and student growth on Common Core State Standards (CCSS).
- Compare and predict student achievement and growth over time via research-based normative and growth information.
- Predict your grade 8+ students’ college readiness with data that align to ACT® benchmarks.
- Create and reinforce data-informed instructional practices.
- Evaluate academic programs and identify professional development needs.
- Connect assessment results to digital instructional resources via NWEA instructional content providers, including Compass Learning®, Study Island®, Triumph Learning™, and Khan Academy.
- Empower teachers to create student-specific learning ladders via the interactive Learning Continuum.

**UNIVERSAL SCREENING TOOLS**
The National Center on Response to Intervention (NCRTI) recognizes MAP (Grades 3 – 12) and MPG (K – 2) as universal screening tools.

### Inside MAP

**Our mature, stable and reliable scale stays constant no matter the standards in use**

MAP assessment design continues to earn educators' confidence for many reasons, but it all starts with a well-documented and established theory of measurement called Item Response Theory (IRT). Under IRT, the difficulty of test questions and student’s achievement level can be measured using the same scale.

The MAP RIT scale—stable for more than two decades—offers you valid, reliable, and consistent data about every student’s achievement and growth as they adjust to the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Short for Rasch UniIT, the RIT scale remains consistent regardless of adopted standards, and enables NWEA to provide you with high-value comparative data within and across states as you implement CCSS.

### SPOTLIGHT: EARLY LEARNING (K – 2)

The National Education Goals Panel (NEGP), National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE), Division for Early Childhood (DEC), and National Research Council (NRC) all support developmentally appropriate early childhood assessments.

Collectively, the above organizations recommend assessments for pre-kindergarten through age 8 children be:
- multi-method in nature
- purposeful
- instructionally aligned
- beneficial

Again and again, early childhood researchers find children’s experiences from birth to 5 affect their academic, cognitive, social, and emotional foundations for years to come. Hart & Risley (1995) note that language experience before age 3 is an excellent predictor of reading ability in third grade. Tarlov (2004) states kindergarten readiness plus a positive start in school create a cascading series of positive events that carry through to adulthood. Without quality practices to gauge development, however, providing children with appropriate intervention or enrichment is a challenge.

As of winter 2015, Smarter Balanced has no plans to offer interim or summative assessments for the early grades. For a thorough understanding of whether your younger students are on track to demonstrate evidence of learning on the grade 3 Smarter Balanced summative assessments, use MAP for Primary Grades (MPG). During the critical kindergarten and early primary years, MPG interim assessments aid your efforts to help K – 2 students on, above, and below grade level learn and grow.

You’ll find MPG provides valid, reliable, real-time growth data that enable educators to quickly and precisely target instructional next steps for individual students, skill-based groups, and entire classrooms. Its growth and norms data permit you to evaluate student achievement independent of grade, over time, and in relation to K – 2.
WHY GROWTH NORMS MATTER

Q: If a student’s test scores grow by 10 scale points, how can I tell whether that’s exceptional growth?

A: You can’t, unless your assessment offers growth norms. Growth norms give context to an individual student’s growth—and projected growth—by permitting one to compare and contrast a student’s scores with his or her peer group. With accurate norms data, you’d discover that your student’s peers grew by an average of 15 scale points—meaning that a 10-point gain puts your student’s growth in the “below average” bucket.

Growth norms are an integral part of MAP K – 12 assessments.

students across the U.S. And because MPG and MAP are on the same vertical scale and part of the same assessment system, you can seamlessly track growth across your entire population of K – 12 students.

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT SMARTER BALANCED ASSESSMENTS

OVERVIEW OF SMARTER BALANCED GRADES 3 – 12 SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Use: End of school year

Although the Smarter Balanced summative assessment hasn’t been evaluated against the new Federal Peer Review requirements, the test is expected to meet federal and state accountability requirements and appropriately measure grade level proficiency. The estimated completion time for the typical student is 11 hours.

- Part 1: Computer Adaptive Test*
  - Assesses the Common Core in English language arts/literacy and mathematics for students in grades 3 – 8 and 11
  - Measures current student achievement
  - Includes a variety of question types: selected response, short constructed response, extended constructed response, and multiple choice

* In the initial years, Smarter Balanced will be offering a paper and pencil version of their summative assessment. This will limit the types of items students will experience; additionally, it’s anticipated to increase schools’ time in receiving student results and summary data as the answer sheets will need to be shipped to the scoring vendor and then scanned electronically before reports will be available.

- Part 2: Performance Tasks
  - Extended projects demonstrate real-world writing and analytical skills
  - Require one to two class periods to complete
  - Included in both English language arts/literacy and mathematics assessments
  - Applicable in all grades being assessed
  - Will be scored by teachers using consistent scoring rubrics

KEY GAPS (SUMMATIVE/END-OF-YEAR):

1. Challenging items may overwhelm struggling and mid-range students. Pairing this with a raised level of proficiency could discourage and alarm many students and their parents.

2. Lacks the ability to inform school year instruction as summative tests are not designed to measure interim student growth or to provide instructional insights.

3. Fails to link to earlier state or state-approved assessments or provide multi-year growth and proficiency data until such data are available.

4. Focuses on assessing student understanding of on grade Common Core standards; at best, will provide limited information about students who are above or below grade level.

5. Fails to permit comparisons between old scores and new scores (educators will have no ability to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional programs used in the buildup to Smarter Balanced assessments).

6. Fails to track student performance under CCSS until 2015-16 or later.
7. Lacks an early learning component, leaving educators without information related to K – 2 students’ progress on the new CCSS.

**SOLUTION:** Bridge between old and new standards by pairing cross-grade, growth-focused MAP K – 12 interim assessments with your Smarter Balanced summative assessment. MAP and MPG give you a more complete picture of student achievement and growth. You’ll find MAP assessment data especially relevant during Year 1 of your Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment use, as this is when Smarter Balanced will be establishing proficiency benchmarks and cut scores. Receive key instructional insights into all student populations, including high- and low-performing students, special needs students, and early learners.

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**NWEA & Smarter Balanced**

How to provide well-rounded growth and achievement data to your educators and families

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**NWEA**

GRADE-INDEPENDENT MEASURE OF ACHIEVEMENT AND GROWTH

- Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) and MAP for Primary Grades (MPG) Interim Growth Assessments
  - **Data insight:**
    - Start-of-year status, growth norms & projections
    - College Readiness Projections and benchmarks
    - Student Goal Setting

- MAP / MPG Interim Growth Assessment
  - **Data insight:**
    - Mid-year status norms
    - Mid-year growth norms and projections
    - Student goal setting

- MAP / MPG Interim Growth Assessment
  - **Data insight:**
    - End-of-year status, growth, norms & potentially predict performance on summative College Readiness Projections

**SBAC**

**Smarter Balanced Optional Assessments**

- Interim Comprehensive Assessments (ICA): Fixed-form test to practice new item types. Scoring and reports are still in development. Hand scored by teachers.
- Interim Assessment Blocks (IAB): Short blocks of items; can be reused by teacher anytime; no growth data; limited item bank. Hand scored by teachers.
  - **Data insight:**
    - Limited by both number of items and assessment blocks. Not available until 2015.

**Smarter Balanced Summative Performance Assessment**

- Collections of questions and activities that are connected to a single theme or scenario.
  - **Data insight:**
    - Meant to measure capacities such as depth of understanding, writing, and research skills, and complex analysis.

**Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment**

- Scores will be reported in new achievement levels on a new scale. Limited insight until year two of assessments.
OVERVIEW OF SMARTER BALANCED GRADES 3 – 12 OPTIONAL INTERIM ASSESSMENTS AND ONLINE DIGITAL LIBRARY RESOURCES

To date, Smarter Balanced has focused their efforts on developing and publishing their new summative assessment, which is aligned to Common Core State Standards (CCSS). They now plan to offer a modified version of the planned optional assessments sometime early in 2015. Both of these new assessment types are interim in terms of delivery timeframe only; neither will provide growth data for teachers and students and they aren’t computer adaptive.

- Interim Comprehensive Assessment (ICA): this practice test will feature new item types for students, but will not provide a student with scores. The number of hours required for taking the ICA are not yet known.

- Interim Assessment Blocks (IAB): these will feature a non-secure item bank that will allow teachers to use testlets or test blocks that focus on a few standards. No growth data will be available during the 2014-15 academic year. This type of assessment model is new and has a low likelihood of accurately measuring a student’s achievement.

Since the test blocks are non-secure, teachers will be able to use these test blocks one, two, or many times; with this type of overexposure, the usefulness and validity of the results may be in question.

- Digital Library Resources: Smarter Balanced has worked with educator teams and formative assessment experts to develop an online resource that features formative assessment modules and provides information on using formative practice in the classroom.

KEY GAPS, INTERIM COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENTS (ICA)

1. Fails to link to earlier state or state-approved interim or summative assessments.

2. Provides a scale without growth norms, creating an incomplete picture of student growth.

3. Lacks information about students with below or above grade level performance, leaving them without much-needed support for their learning growth.

4. Serves as a simple practice test to help get students comfortable with test question types, but lacks ability to help educators guide instruction for all students in a manner that supports growth and achievement.

5. Fails to produce scores.

6. Is not computer adaptive

Smarter Balanced Interim Assessments and item overexposure

The initial item pool size and fixed-form nature of the Smarter Balanced Interim Comprehensive Assessment (ICA) and Interim Assessment Blocks (IAB) may expose students to the same test items during subsequent testing occasions.

The breadth and depth of both the ICA and IAB assessments will be determined this year by the number of available test items, after the summative test has been produced.

KEY GAPS: INTERIM ASSESSMENT BLOCKS (IAB)

- Focuses on smaller concepts (between 4 – 17 blocks per subject per grade).

- Permits teachers to access and use the non-secure item bank anytime and on multiple occasions, creating problematic overexposure and validity concerns.

- May or may not have item availability that will truly support all grades and standards during the first years of implementation.

- Fails to link to earlier state or state-approved interim or summative assessments.

- Fails to provide measures of student growth; also lacks longitudinal growth scale (meaning no longitudinal history of or for students).
- Lacks information about students with below or above grade level performance, leaving them without much-needed support for their learning growth.

- Fails to offer the ability to measure student effort in aid of assuring test validity.

- Lacks on-site, regional, or online professional development to help teachers use data to inform instruction.

- Places the scale’s stability in question by exposing test items and student responses to teachers.

- Lacks ability to create virtual comparison groups to examine specific “apples to apples” cohorts of students across the U.S.

- Lacks a proven ability to implement and support large-scale assessments.

- Lacks an early learning component, leaving educators without information related to K – 2 students’ progress on the new CCSS.

**SOLUTION:** Use MAP K – 12 interim assessments to provide valid, reliable, and real-time growth data. MAP and our interactive MAP Learning Continuum deliver instructional insights that help accelerate student learning by enabling you to quickly and precisely target instructional next steps for individual students, skill-based groups, and entire classrooms. Additionally, you’ll find our growth and norms data permit you to evaluate student achievement independent of grade, over time, and in relation to students across the U.S.

### WHAT WILL YOU GET THIS YEAR TO HELP YOUR STUDENTS GROW?

#### SMARTER BALANCED INTERIM ASSESSMENT BLOCKS (IAB) VS. NWEA MAP INTERIM ASSESSMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product Feature</th>
<th>SMARTER BALANCED Interim Assessment Blocks (Grades 3 – 12)</th>
<th>NWEA MAP Interim Assessments (Grades K – 12)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to serve as a transition between new standards and prior state standards for consistent growth measures</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proven, stable scale to measure student growth</td>
<td>New scale developed in late 2014</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capable of measuring student growth for students performing on, above, or below grade level</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides a score</td>
<td>Unclear what type of score will be provided</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicts college readiness</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early learning assessments to measure student growth and progress for Grades K – 2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliable information for teachers based on assessment results that informs the best instructional path for each student</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links to instructional content providers for automatic selection of appropriate learning modules for each student</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product Feature</td>
<td>SMARTEST BALANCED Interim Assessment Blocks (Grades 3 – 12)</td>
<td>NWEA MAP Interim Assessments (Grades K – 12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer adaptive with secure item selection scripts and items, enabling high precision of growth measurement</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proven ability to implement and support large scale assessments</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-site, regional, or online professional development to help teachers use data to inform instruction</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to measure student effort in aid of assuring test validity</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative studies for prediction and comparison of student growth</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability for virtual comparison groups that allow for comparisons of specific “apples to apples” cohorts of students</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Information based on documents publicly available as of December 15, 2014*

**SPOTLIGHT: PREPARING STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS BY USING MAP TO INFORM INSTRUCTION**

In Michigan, commitment to an integrated, balanced assessment program has helped Novi Community School District (NCSD) prepare students for rigorous new college and career readiness standards. After spending the last four years creating a K – 12 curriculum fully aligned to Common Core State Standards (CCSS), district teachers use MAP data to help uncover each student’s learning gaps and adjust instruction.

Says Assistant Superintendent of Academic Services R.J. Webber, “NWEA believes MAP is a way versus the single answer for a school or district. And what we’ve created at NCSD is not the way to assess students’ learning to help them grow. It’s just a way to do it. But it’s clear that using MAP gets us closer to where we want to be.”

Several years into implementation, NCSD was only using MAP annually instead of the recommended two to four times per year. Webber recalls, “I told leadership, ‘It’s not enough that we’re going to have a spring state assessment. We need some before and after snapshots of how kids are doing, and we need immediate results now.’” He received the green light to use MAP twice a year.

In reflecting on the district’s many changes since they overhauled their curriculum and assessment protocol, Webber states candidly, “We’ve had both struggle and growth.” He praises his teachers for working “exceptionally hard” to help align the district curriculum to CCSS, and applauds the growing understanding that a systemic approach to data allows educators to shift direction quickly with a student, classroom, grade—or even district-wide. “MAP gives us actionable data, data that help us do what we say we want to be doing for our kids,” he states.

Director of Student Growth and Accountability Nick Kalakailo reinforces Webber’s point by circling back to the core purpose of MAP data: helping teachers teach. “One of the best things about MAP growth data is that when you put your thumb over scores and percentile ranks and look at the rest of the report, you find out you have someone willing to engage in learning with you as a teacher, and the only thing you have to do is make use of some of that information. You don’t have to make use of it all at once, either. Just look at what you have and begin to think, ‘How can I help that student?’”
By including MAP in their suite of assessments, Novi educators can share a broader picture of student achievement with parents, community members, policy leaders, and others—one that includes positive statistics about student progress and growth.

No matter how your students perform on the Smarter Balanced summative assessment, you’ll find growth data from MAP and MPG interim assessments provide context to scores. Use MAP/MPG to support students’ optimal learning paths and ensure learning moves forward before, during, and after your transition to CCSS.

CONCLUSION

However you build your assessment program, MAP and MAP for Primary Grades complement your choices and help you, your teachers, and your students track progress toward Common Core standards in 2015 and beyond.

MAP:

- enables you to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement for your students, track student progress from fall to spring, and generate valid growth data to use when evaluating programs within and across your school
- helps you boost your students’ comfort with computer adaptive assessments and lets them "try out" new item types planned for the Smarter Balanced assessments such as new Reading items with common stimuli, authentic literary and informational texts, and new Technology-Enhanced Items
- includes representation of Depth of Knowledge across DOK levels 1, 2, and 3
- aligns with MAP for Primary Grades, letting you measure early learners’ progress and growth on the CCSS and ease their transition to MAP
- empowers teachers to create student-specific learning ladders by using information in the interactive Learning Continuum to streamline instructional planning, differentiate instruction for both individual students and skill-based activity groups, and better engage students in their learning
- permits you to leverage your MAP data via NWEA instructional content providers (including Compass Learning®, Study Island®, Triumph Learning™, and MetaMetrics®); use test results to quickly match each student with appropriate learning activities
APPENDIX: RESOURCES

RESOURCES

- Common Core MAP
- “Proficiency Guidance from NWEA on New State Summative Assessment” [an NWEA publication]
- “Discover the Benefits of a Balanced Assessment System” [an NWEA publication]
- NWEA Common Core blogs
- “Early Childhood Assessment: Implementing Effective Practice” [an NWEA publication]
- Excerpt, Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experiences of Young American Children “Cascading Effects of Enhanced Early Childhood Education and Development: A Life Course Perspective.”
- Effective Early Childhood Programs: Turning Knowledge Into Action

LINKS USED IN THIS DOCUMENT

- “Mixed Bag for N.Y. State Students in Second Year of Common-Core Tests”
- “The phantom collapse of student achievement in New York”
  http://pdk.sagepub.com/content/96/2/60
- Early Childhood Assessment: Implementing Effective Practice [an NWEA publication]
  http://info.nwea.org/rs/nwea/images/EarlyChildhoodAssessment-ImplementingEffectivePractice.pdf
- Excerpt, Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experiences of Young American Children
  http://www.aft.org/newspubs/periodicals/ae/spring2003/hart.cfm
- Cascading Effects of Enhanced Early Childhood Education and Development: A Life Course Perspective.”
- NWEA Common Core blogs
  http://www.nwea.org/blog/category/common-core
- Common Core MAP
  https://www.nwea.org/resource/product/map-common-core/
- “Discover the Benefits of a Balanced Assessment System” [an NWEA publication]
- Proficiency Guidance from NWEA on New State Summative Assessments
  https://www.nwea.org/resources/proficiency-guidance-on-new-state-summative-assessments-from-nwea/
Northwest Evaluation Association™ (NWEA™) has nearly 40 years of experience helping educators accelerate student learning through computer-based assessment suites, professional development offerings, and research services. Visit NWEA.org to find out how NWEA can partner with you to help all kids learn.