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Introduction

Wondering what students think—and know—about assessment? In 2014 Northwest Evaluation Association™ (NWEA™) commissioned a nationally representative survey that asked students, teachers, and district administrators what they thought about assessment. It’s the first time any formal study has asked students’ opinions, and their responses are making news across the country.

Across all groups surveyed, you’ll see strong agreement that there’s a need for assessments that directly inform teaching and learning.

We’ve compiled the study’s highlights into four distinct sections:

3 Key Findings on Student Perceptions of Assessment
Opinions from those closest to assessment

3 Ways Educators Can Engage Students in the Assessment Process
Recommendations for engaging students in the what, when, why, and how of assessment and its accompanying results

3 Key Findings on How Educators View Assessment
Thoughts on using assessment data to directly inform teaching and learning

Top 3 Ways MAP Makes Assessment Personal
Features that make Measures of Academic Progress® (MAP®) K – 12 interim assessments unique

For the full results, read Make Assessment Matter: Students and Educators Want Tests that Support Learning, an independent study conducted by Grunwald Associates LLC.
3 Key Findings on Student Perceptions of Assessment

Give students a voice in the assessment debate and they’ll share freely.

One: The vast majority of students recognize that assessment plays a valid role in their education—and in their futures. They understand that assessments, overall, are important for keeping track of what they’re learning in school.

- 95% of students agree that assessments are “very” or “somewhat” important for helping them and their teachers know if they are making progress in their learning during the year.
- 88% agree that assessments are important for setting goals for their learning.
- 94% agree that tests are important for getting into a good college.

Most students (55%) believe they take state accountability tests to evaluate their schools; only 19 percent believe they take classroom tests for this purpose.

Three: Students want feedback on performance. And like other stakeholders, students want timely results!

- 89% said that after one week, assessment results are not very helpful to them or their teachers.

Student Voices

“Since [state accountability] tests do not impact us at all, it seems silly that it takes so much of our time”
— Ninth grader

“[Subject/classroom] tests tell me if I need to work on this and I need to work on that”
— Fifth grader

What do these findings tell us? Students aren’t averse to assessment as long as it serves their learning. They recognize the practical role assessment data can play in helping them demonstrate, track, and understand their learning. Finally, students want assessment to be useful to them and their teachers. This clear-sighted view of assessment comes from those closest to it.
3 Ways Educators Can Engage Students in the Assessment Process

Transform student thoughts about assessment into strategies that boost engagement.

One: Give students a voice in their assessment plan.

- 79% of students believe assessments help them do what they want to do in life.

Students understand that educators need different kinds of information about their academic performance. Like the teachers and educational leaders surveyed, students see the need for multiple measures. When students share ownership of their learning—which includes their assessment—learning becomes more personal. You can support student-centric learning by:

- providing students with assessment options
- bringing students into the planning conversations around classroom-based assessment
- exploring peer- and self-evaluation
- training students to apply scoring rubrics to their work and the work of peers

The more involved and engaged students are in their assessment plan, the more they will understand how to leverage the results so that they can do what they want to do in life.

Two: Keep students informed of coming changes in standards and assessments.

- 29% of students say they have heard of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).
- 20% of students have heard about new state accountability tests.
- 37% of students report never seeing accountability assessment results.

Students know that things like standards and accountability assessments carry weight and influence their lives, though perhaps in ways less tangible than classroom-based assessments. They understand that schools are evaluated using summative assessment data. Students want to be informed of what to expect, what changes occur, and what it means to them.

Three: Boost engagement by helping students use their assessment data to set challenging, yet achievable, learning goals.

- 94% of students agree that tests are important for understanding what they are learning.
- 88% of students agree that tests are important for setting goals for their learning.

While students clearly prefer interaction with their teachers and peers, teachers report that they are only able to provide an average of three minutes of feedback per student on assessments.

What do these findings tell us? Students see how assessment results can connect to setting learning goals and getting more personalized classroom instruction. Increasing students' assessment literacy and talking to them about changes that affect them will engage them as collaborators in their assessment. If you want your students to take a more active role in their learning, keep them informed and involved.
3 Key Findings on How Educators View Assessment

Discover what the assessment landscape looks like for educators.

One: Teachers really do rely on assessment results to inform teaching. 96% of teachers say they use assessment results to improve teaching and learning where it counts—in their classrooms. They use the results to:

- adjust instructional strategies (74%)
- plan and differentiate instruction for high-, average-, and low-performing students (67%)
- set challenging yet achievable learning goals for their students (58%)

Two: Collaboration builds confidence.

Educators who discuss assessment results with their colleagues are more confident in their ability to interpret and use these results to support teaching and learning. The majority of educators collaborate at least once a month.

- 80% of teachers and 91% of district administrators report peer interactions are part of using assessment results to inform instruction.
- Interestingly, teachers in elementary schools (84%) and middle schools (80%) are significantly more likely than teachers in high schools (69%) to report that they collaborate on using assessment results to inform instruction.
- 81% of teachers who participate in professional learning communities (PLCs) say their PLC discussions include assessment results.

Three: Major gaps persist in assessment literacy.

- Most teachers and district administrators think they understand the different types of assessments, but findings suggest that certain areas are less understood than others.
- 77% of district administrators report training or professional development on the interpretation and use of assessment results compared to only 60% of teachers.

What do these findings tell us? Collaboration using assessment data to inform instruction is an iterative, ongoing process that builds teacher competency and confidence. By using test data purposefully, educators can increase the value of assessments for students. Professional learning communities can play a valuable role in increasing all educators’ understanding of assessments.
Top 3 Ways MAP Makes Assessment Personal

Support the desire for test results that help identify each student’s unique learning strengths and challenges.

One: MAP creates a unique assessment experience by adapting to each student’s learning level.

Due to its deep item bank and adaptive test design, research-based MAP quickly reveals the precise achievement of students on, above, or below grade level.

Each untimed MAP test begins the same way, with a question appropriate for the individual student. If a student answers correctly, the test algorithm selects a more difficult item; if a student answers incorrectly, the follow-up item is easier. This computer adaptive item delivery repeats throughout the test.

By adjusting the difficulty of items up or down, MAP precisely measures every student’s achievement as well as growth over time. And by meeting each student where he or she is, MAP reduces the chance for student boredom or anxiety.

MAP is personal because it adapts to each student’s ability level, not their predetermined grade level.

Two: MAP provides accurate information that helps educators transform student learning.

MAP assessments use our RIT (Rasch Unit) scale to create a grade-independent RIT score, which indicates the level of question difficulty a given student is capable of answering correctly about 50% of the time. Because each test item has a single RIT value associated with it, RIT scores carry the same meaning in terms of student ability no matter which test or set of standards was used to obtain them.

A student’s RIT score helps you understand what he or she knows, is ready to learn, and is projected to achieve.

Our mature, stable, and reliable RIT scale ensures that the RIT scores you see are both accurate and fair.

We developed our RIT scale more than 30 years ago. Today, we continue to obtain the RIT value of each test item using a rigorous calibration process that ensures our assessments’ integrity. Before we include an item in MAP tests, we field test it with thousands of students across the nation and calibrate it to a measurement scale to ensure accuracy.

Thanks to our scale you can compare your students’ academic performance relative to:

- national achievement and growth norms
- state standards, including College and Career Readiness (CCR) standards

MAP is personal because every student’s score is highly accurate, enabling educators to guide each student on his or her unique learning path.
Before using MAP, we were missing the full picture of how to teach kids who were gifted and talented, or struggling to learn, or were English language learners....But now that we know what our students are ready to learn before we even begin teaching them, growth is inevitable—even for our gifted and talented and Title I students.

— Linda Foote, Instructional Technology Specialist, Poway Unified School District, California

Three: MAP supplies real-time data educators can use to accelerate student learning.

Despite a short testing time, MAP comes with substantial rewards: you’ll have essential information about what each student knows and is ready to learn on rigorous new state standards within 24 hours. You can use your data to help differentiate instruction and make a district-wide impact—and students can use it to better connect with their learning goals.

Quick, accurate results from MAP help you create highly targeted, 1:1 instruction

- Plan individual, small group, or whole classroom instruction
- Measure student growth and achievement
- Diagnose student strengths and opportunities
- Increase student and parent engagement

Reliable MAP data empower you to support effective strategies

- Predict state summative assessment performance
- Predict college readiness as measured against ACT® benchmarks for students grade 8+
- Analyze school or district performance
- Provide teachers and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) with clear, specific instructional next steps
- Gain insights for school improvement planning

MAP is personal because it delivers data when educators need it the most: when there’s still time to make a difference in every student’s learning.

Computer adaptive K – 12 MAP interim assessments help you answer a crucial question: Are my students learning?

We look forward to discussing how MAP data can help you maximize every student’s learning.

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.