

## **Northwest Evaluation Association’s MAP Online Assessment Debuts Supports for Students with Visual Disabilities**

### ***Accessibility and accommodations capabilities provide greater equity for underserved student population***

Portland, OR (June 23, 2016) – Representing a true breakthrough in education technology, not-for-profit Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) has developed and integrated accessibility and accommodations capabilities into its flagship Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment. Starting fall 2016, any student with visual disabilities or impairments and a JAWS screen reader will be able to take the MAP assessment online.

According to the National Federation of the Blind, roughly 60,000 students have a visual impairment in the United States. A small percentage of the national student population, their unique educational needs can be overlooked and underfunded.

“NWEA’s mission is *partnering to help all kids learn*, and in order to help ALL kids we need to provide them equitable opportunities to achieve,” said Matt Chapman, CEO of NWEA. “With these new features, we’ve successfully removed barriers for students with visual impairments, and are heartened by their enthusiastic reactions.”

Using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a foundation, MAP now supports the most widely used visually assistive software and devices: JAWS screen reader that converts computer text into speech and braille, ZoomText magnification and color contrast software, mouse-free keyboard navigation, and refreshable braille devices that convert computer text into braille characters. This new capability is compatible with computers and tablets.

NWEA conducted successful field tests on the accessibility and accommodation capabilities, created for grades 2-12, at the Governor Morehead School for the Blind in Raleigh, North Carolina, and the Arizona State Schools for The Deaf and The Blind in Tucson, Arizona. Student feedback was positive, and their constructive insights were incorporated into refinements. Today, a total of seven schools have started using the accessible MAP assessments in math, science, language usage, and reading.

“For our students, equity means they can access information just as easily as sighted students,” said Dr. Sarah McManus, Director of Digital Learning at Governor Morehead School for the Blind. “It doesn’t mean they are doing it the exact same way, but it means it’s just as easy. With this particular product they know this was built for them and they can actually access it. They don’t have to struggle with the technology side of it; they just have to focus on the questions themselves.”

In a further contribution to the education-technology field, NWEA has created and is sharing freely with developers an instructive style guide for describing images using words or phrases, known as alt text (alternative text), or alt tags. NWEA developed this new process with long-time partner, the Carl and Ruth Shapiro Family National Center for Accessible Media ([NCAM](#)), based at WGBH in Boston, MA.

“NWEA has really embraced universal design, accessibility, and has taken great care to infuse these into MAP,” said Bryan Gould, NCAM’s Director of Accessible Learning and Assessment Technologies. “The new alt text guidelines they’re providing should prove to be an invaluable resource to others looking to deliver online accessibility and accommodations.”

At the upcoming ISTE Convention in Denver (June 26-29) NWEA will offer attendees an interactive experience with special eyewear to simulate MAP with the new accessibility and accommodation capabilities. NWEA’s Booth will be # 3714.

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### ***About NWEA***

[Northwest Evaluation Association](#)<sup>™</sup> (NWEA<sup>™</sup>) is a global not-for-profit educational services organization known for our flagship interim growth assessment, [Measures of Academic Progress](#)<sup>®</sup> (MAP<sup>®</sup>); [Skills Navigator](#)<sup>®</sup>, a skills mastery and progress monitoring tool; and as the U.S. provider of the PISA-based [OECD Test for Schools](#) assessment. More than 7,800 partners in U.S. schools, school districts, education agencies, and international schools trust us to offer PreK-12 assessments that accurately measure student growth and mastery and inform instruction; professional development that fosters educators' ability to accelerate student learning; and research that supports assessment validity and data interpretation. Educators currently use NWEA assessments with nearly eight million students. Learn more at [nwea.org](#).

### ***About The Carl and Ruth Shapiro Family National Center for Accessible Media (NCAM)***

The Carl and Ruth Shapiro Family National Center for Accessible Media (NCAM), part of WGBH, is a research, development and consulting unit dedicated to expanding access to present and future media for people with disabilities, exploring how existing access technologies may benefit other populations, and representing its constituents in industry, policy and legislative circles. NCAM’s staff represents the leading experts in the field and our success is exemplified by a history of accomplishments and continuous growth, the integration of innovative products and services into society at large, and the enthusiastic support of the audiences served, including 36 million people in the U.S. who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind or have low vision.