

McKinney Independent School District, TX



Moving every child: Building a data culture to promote growth

McKinney Independent School District (ISD), a rapidly growing school district in Texas, is one of the highest performing public school systems in the nation. The graduation rate is above 97%, and SAT® and ACT® scores are consistently above the national average.

A guiding principle at McKinney ISD is that students from all economic backgrounds can and should reach high levels of academic achievement. To that end, McKinney ISD has built a strong district culture around the use of assessment data to make informed decisions around curriculum and instruction. In four years of using MAP®Growth™ assessments, they have expanded their use of test data to guide all levels of district planning, from individual student goal setting to norms-based national comparisons.

Introducing a data culture

McKinney ISD began their partnership with NWEA® in 2008. They used MAP Growth as a universal screener, testing all students at the start of the school year and employing the test data to identify students at risk, as well as those in need of advanced academic services—the talented and gifted. Chief Accountability Officer Geoff Sanderson, encouraged by the accuracy of the data and the immediate turnaround for test results, was quick to recognize the potential of MAP Growth data as a tool that could be used to work through other daunting district challenges.

“We were really trying to get out of the business of goal setting based on the state summative assessment,” he said. Sanderson resolved to establish goals around MAP Growth data instead. When he met with his board of trustees and McKinney parents to build understanding around the concept, he found that they too were enthusiastic about the positive aspects of a data culture, in general, and a growth model, in particular.

Empowering students and teachers

The shift to a data culture has been well received in McKinney classrooms, as well. Both teachers and students embraced data-based individual student goals. Jennifer Wilhelm, Coordinator of Elementary Science, explained, “We sit down and conference with the children one-on-one about the data. We talk about what growth looks like for that year and that grade level. This empowers students to take ownership of their learning.” Sanderson adds, “When they are able to see tangible numbers, it allows them to see their progress. They understand it conceptually.”

Identifying individual student need

After phasing in MAP Growth, the assessments are now used in McKinney ISD fall, winter, and spring for every student in grades 2–8. The comprehensive data that resulted has quantified and clarified issues that the school administration previously could only approach with

guesswork. Sanderson states, “In some cases and on some campuses, our kids are not coming to us as ready to learn as students on other campuses. And that’s where the awareness has been raised.”

He further explains, “MAP Growth has been pivotal for us in raising the bar for all. It’s about making sure that teachers have the information they need to be able to intervene.”

How McKinney ISD uses MAP Growth data:

- + Assessing learning levels (universal screener)
- + Detecting and adjusting for discrepancies in curriculum
- + Projecting proficiency on state assessments
- + Making comparisons against a national norm
- + Informing professional development choices
- + Guiding curriculum development
- + Identifying students at risk
- + Targeting flexible groupings
- + Identifying talented and gifted students
- + Guiding individual student goal setting
- + Engaging parents in their child’s learning
- + Monitoring student growth trajectories

Informing curricular decisions

As the chief administrator overseeing 33 schools, Sanderson is also interested in schoolwide and district-wide performance. For a big picture overview, he uses NWEA normative data to ascertain if McKinney students are ahead of the national average, and whether they are growing at or above the pace of their national age cohort. He also looks at MAP Growth reports related to building analysis and grade level analysis. In that way, he has been able to pinpoint what he calls “disconnects in the curriculum.”

Today McKinney ISD uses MAP Growth assessment data for a wide range of decision-making, and always with the goal of promoting individual student growth—“moving every child,” as Wilhelm says. “We may have started using MAP Growth initially as an intervention/identification tool,” she says, “but we’ve grown in that area. Now we use it to enrich the learning for all students.”



NWEA is a not-for-profit organization that supports students and educators worldwide by providing assessment solutions, insightful reports, professional learning offerings, and research services. Visit NWEA.org to find out how NWEA can partner with you to help all kids learn.

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District Snapshot

MCKINNEY ISD, TX



PRE-K-12TH GRADE STUDENTS

25,000

PRODUCT USE

IMPLEMENTED MAP GROWTH IN

2008

“The culture we’ve developed is about using data to inform instruction and enhance what we do in the classroom. We do not use data to separate or humiliate. It’s not a two-by-four... it’s a tool. We use MAP Growth to inform us so that we can be better facilitators in the classroom.”

Joe Miniscalco, Former Assistant Superintendent of Learner Support
McKinney ISD, TX