

nwea

WHITE PAPER

When your data counts, can you count on your data?



Can you trust the insights from your assessment solution?

A high-quality assessment is beneficial, purposeful, and aligned to instruction. But can an assessment still be considered high quality if the accuracy of the data leaves room for doubt?

Imagine what's possible with trustworthy data

A high-quality assessment can drive informed decision-making at every level.

Classroom teachers rely on high-quality assessments to measure progress, monitor understanding, and track growth. The insights and actionable data assessments provide help teachers determine the unique needs of their students to provide interventions or enrichment. Reliable data can also guide whole-class, small-group, and independent instruction, as insights from high-quality assessments provide a clear view of where students are in their learning and what they're ready to learn next.

School leaders use insights from assessments to measure the effectiveness of a curriculum, compare results across classrooms and grade levels to mine for best practices, and mobilize additional support and resources in areas where students struggle.

At the district and state level, administrators use year-to-year data to develop strategic plans and goals, make projections for state summative assessments, and set bold visions for the future.

But the many benefits of assessment are only possible with accurate, trustworthy data. This resource will explore the hallmarks of trustworthy data:

- Precise
- Valid
- Objective
- Reliable

It will also demonstrate how [MAP® Growth™](#), and other assessments from [NWEA®](#), are developed from the ground up to deliver an unparalleled assessment experience and dependable, actionable results educators can count on.

Precise

Trustworthy data begins with precision. To put this need in a familiar context, think of the way a parent would measure a child's height. If they began by measuring the child's height in inches with a ruler, they would not switch to measuring in centimeters with a measuring tape. The measurements would be inconsistent, and it would be difficult to compare measurements from different points in time. For the same reason, high-quality assessments should be measured on a consistent, stable scale. This allows teachers to compare scores from season to season and year to year.

MAP Growth assessments from NWEA use RIT—carefully constructed measurement scales that span grade levels—to offer educators precise and accurate estimates of student achievement within a subject. With the RIT scale, teachers can compare student growth from season to season, or even grade to grade. However, before assessment data can be useful to educators, it needs to be evaluated within a coherent interpretive context. Growth norms from NWEA provide one source of context.

Norms help educators see if students are growing at an expected pace, regardless of where a student started. They allow educators to see what kind of growth is typical and atypical and compare achievement status and growth to students' performance in the same grade at a similar time of the school year.

NWEA conducts norming studies every three to five years to ensure any comparisons reflect current academic standards and student demographics. We use anonymous assessment data from over 10 million students to create national norms. By drawing from an incredibly wide pool of anonymized test records, we're able to accurately represent the US school-age population.

Analyzing and comparing student results with this level of precision helps educators at every level make efficient, data-informed decisions they can stand behind.

Precision is paramount. Does your assessment pass the test? Consider these guiding questions.

- Does the assessment use a consistent scale that's stable from season to season and grade to grade?
- Does the assessment provider conduct frequent norming studies?
- If so, is their catalog of anonymized data deep enough to accurately represent your school or state, or the US school-age population?
- Is the norms data flexible to account for varied instructional weeks or calendars?

Valid

An assessment should measure what it is intended to measure and nothing more. This is content validity. For example, the summative test for a unit on American mountain ranges should not include questions about the Andes. Doing so does not provide valid insights into what students know and can do.

To ensure every question is straightforward, purposeful, and developmentally appropriate, each item on a high-quality assessment should undergo a thorough, multilevel development and review process.

When it comes to content validity, here's what to look for in a high-quality assessment provider:

- General assessment design principles control for readability
- Content experts are involved in review cycles
- An evidence-centered design methodology is in place
- Statistical analysis of student performance on test items is available

High-quality assessments are designed from the ground up to keep content validity front and center. NWEA treats these processes with the utmost care, resulting in a standards-aligned item pool with the vast breadth and depth required to fully assess performance and provide educators with actionable insights tightly aligned to curriculum and instruction.

To determine if your assessment solution prioritizes content validity, consider these guiding questions:

- What is the intended purpose of the assessment, and does the assessment meet this specific need?
- What does it mean if a student performs well on the assessment?
- Do students' results provide actionable insights for teachers?



Objective

Objectivity matters. In the classroom, assessment data is used to make instructional decisions and determine which students require interventions. It's critical that content and results are uninfluenced by factors beyond a student's control.

High-quality assessments should be objective in content, administration, and scoring. Fair, culturally relevant assessments can foster equity and help close systemic learning and opportunity gaps. Objectivity in administration and scoring may look like technology-enabled group administration and automatic scoring, to prevent any kind of proctor bias.

MAP Growth is standards aligned and curriculum agnostic. As such, MAP Growth can be used to measure student growth regardless of the curriculum, texts, or resources schools use to cover specific areas. Additionally, questions and passages in the item pool undergo sensitivity checks to ensure the content is developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant.

MAP Growth is a computer-adaptive test, administered to an entire class using desktop computers, tablets, or laptops. Automatic scoring ensures objective, trustworthy results, absent of outside influence.

Is your assessment data objective? Consider these guiding questions:

- Does a teacher or proctor administer the assessment to students one on one?
- Is the teacher or proctor responsible for determining a student's score?
- Can a student's score move up or down depending on who is administering the assessment?
- Does the content undergo sensitivity checks or reviews to encourage equity and cultural relevance?

Reliable

Reliability refers to the consistency of the assessment results. It is the degree to which student results are the same when they take the same test on different occasions, when different scorers score the same task, and when different but equivalent tests are taken at the same time or at different times.

Educators select an assessment to provide insights into what students know and don't know. If the assessment is reliable, they can trust the tool to provide consistent information each time. This means items assessing the same area at the same level should not drastically differ in difficulty from season to season or student to student, and any retakes should be similar to the original test form.

Reliability is imperative if assessment insights are used to make data-informed decisions about student grouping, interventions, or enrichments. Assessments like these are usually administered on a larger scale, so their reliability is determined through a process called equating. Through statistical analysis, two or more forms of an assessment can be compared to determine if they're the same degree of difficulty. Equating is traditionally performed by psychometricians, experts in the science of measurement traditionally in the fields of education and psychology.

NWEA is home to an experienced team of researchers and psychometricians who create and investigate strategies to advance education through the design, purpose, and impact of assessment on learning. This team prioritizes reliability and consistency, with lengthy review processes throughout content creation.

Reliability is a hallmark of trustworthy data. To determine if your high-quality assessment meets the standard, consider these guiding questions:

- Are different forms of the same assessment similar in difficulty and scope?
- Does the assessment change drastically from year to year in difficulty and scope, making it difficult to draw accurate comparisons?
- Does the assessment provider have a robust team of content designers and item writers to determine consistency?

A better way is possible today

To help students close gaps and make the gains they need, a good-enough assessment isn't enough. Without data that is precise, valid, objective, and reliable, educators run the risk of making ill-informed decisions that can have lasting consequences.

Trustworthy data helps educators make informed decisions to help students make transformational learning gains. The decisions are too significant—and students too important—for anything less.



NWEA, a division of HMH, supports educators worldwide by providing responsive, evidence-based assessment solutions that illuminate learning needs and fuel student growth. For more than 40 years, NWEA has developed innovative pre-K-12 assessments, including its flagship assessment—MAP Growth, and professional learning that helps educators strengthen their practice and improve student outcomes. As part of its commitment to bring valuable insights to the education community, NWEA engages in research examining issues that shine a light on inequities and other barriers to academic opportunities. Visit [NWEA.org](https://www.nwea.org) to find out how NWEA partners to help all kids learn.

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