



USING ASSESSMENT DATA TO SHAPE INSTRUCTION

Assessment data give us a way to measure learning and inform instruction. Here, two educators share how they are using data as a compass to steer students' learning paths.

Administrators and educators do a great job of gathering data, but many of us get a “needs improvement” on applying that data to guide instruction and improve student achievement. Yet data give us a way to measure learning and progress toward goals and create an opportunity to achieve important outcomes.

Knowing exactly how students are performing and what their needs are lets teachers see where they need to differentiate instruction. They can develop better connections and address gaps. They can boost engagement and mastery. They can create an environment where students can exercise agency and grow.

So how do we start? It begins with the right tools — tools that will serve as a compass for the learning and instructional journey.

A ROAD MAP

Data-informed instruction is easier with tools specifically designed to help educators and administrators gather, assess and put into operation data on student learning and progress. [MAP® Growth™ from NWEA®](#) adapts to each student's learning level and precisely measures individual progress and growth by district or state standards. The solution gives teachers essential information about what each student knows and is ready to learn within 24 hours via a detailed data report.

Educators can then apply the findings to adapt instruction, engage students, monitor trends and evaluate programs. The information enables teachers to target instructional resources and provide differentiated instruction quickly and effectively. MAP Growth reports also facilitate communication among teachers, students and parents about the progress of individual students. PLCs and other teacher groups use the data to collaborate on interventions that improve overall school performance.

DATA AS A GAME CHANGER

"We analyze data by individual child and student groups because it lets us know where to push," said Cherise Easley, principal at the Edward Bain School of Language and Arts in Kenosha, Wis. The school, part of the Kenosha Unified School District, serves about 640 students.

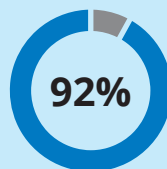
Easley said that formative assessment is a game changer because having data in real-time and aligned with standards gives teachers more time to analyze it, plan lessons and adjust their teaching to meet student needs.

"When we find children 10 points away from moving to the next strand, we can provide immediate and individualized interventions," Easley said. "When we find kids who are 5 to 10 points [beyond] a strand, we develop scaffolding activities so they don't fall back below." MAP Growth is especially powerful for PLCs and other teacher groups. "We look at the intervention block and see which kids got it, when it was taught and what teacher's children scored the best," she said. "Then we regroup kids with similar challenges and switch them to that teacher, while the other teachers deliver enrichment instruction to the students scoring higher."

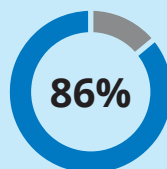
The data also help the team [align student learning objectives, school improvement plan and state report card](#). "Knowing where our kids are growing and need to grow is incredibly helpful."

HOW TEACHERS USE ASSESSMENT DATA:

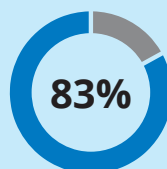
[2016 survey of educators](#) by NWEA



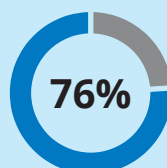
Adjust instructional strategies



Set instructional goals



Collaborate with peers and administrators



Collaborate with grade- or subject-level teachers



TIPS FROM EDUCATORS

We asked two experienced building and district leaders to share their tips for using assessment data to improve engagement, ensure learning and provide differentiated learning:

Embrace Data. “As teachers begin to work with data, some become intimidated by it. Don’t shy away from the data, own it!” asserted Cherise Easley, principal at the Edward Bain School of Language and Arts. “Dig into it to see what it’s saying. Know the numbers and how they connect to each child’s learning continuum — that’s where you begin to take quantitative data to inform your instruction. Then align it with your district curriculum and figure out how to use data to drive teaching. **Looking at numbers isn’t data-driven instruction, translating data into practice is.**”

Personalize Standards. Some teachers, especially new ones, underestimate the power the Common Core State Standards have over learning. “If standards are not unpacked into a logical sequence of skills aligned to instructional strategies, then personalized learning cannot occur,” noted Amanda Rychel, chief of staff for Distinctive Schools. “The words ‘standard’ and ‘personalized’ are opposite terms. We need to ... personalize standards through formative assessment data to create strategies that drive learning tasks for students at their instructional level.”

Assess Often. “So many teachers teach, teach, teach, and then do assessment on Friday,”

Easley lamented. “It’s much more effective to check for understanding as you go with formative assessments. We may think we’ve taught an awesome lesson, but if we’re not checking for learning, we can’t know for sure. Assessments let us identify confusion right away, so we catch it fast and adjust our instruction immediately.”

Encourage Engagement. Real-time assessments get students engaged and connect them to the learning. “We live in an on-demand world,” Rychel explained. “Our students are used to choice, voice and feedback instantly in their daily lives. They watch a Netflix show, they rate it and review it and then get curated content of what to watch next based on their feedback. There is something that we as educators need to tap into in this process as we curate content and learning experiences or we will constantly fight student engagement.”

Nurture Relationship. Use MAP Growth goals as the endgame for driving the student-teacher relationship, advised Rychel. “At Distinctive Schools, we talk about how going one-to-one doesn’t mean device and student. It means teacher-to-student,” she said.

As you foster this relationship, Rychel maintained, you open the doors to reach goals and see your program succeed. **“Make your students love you and love learning. We learn from those we love, and we reach goals together as a teacher-student team,”** Rychel concluded.

BUILDING STUDENT AGENCY

At Distinctive Schools, educators and students use skill-specific information from [MAP® Skills™](#) to create learning paths to close the achievement gap. Distinctive Schools is a network of charter schools serving about 2,600 students at four schools in Illinois and Minnesota.

“MAP Skills builds student and teacher agency because it drives conversations between [them] to identify exactly what is needed to show mastery,” explained Chief of Staff Amanda Rychel. “Our students are able to articulate the steps they need to take to grow. MAP Skills is making those conversations possible.”

Rychel cited as an example seminars during which students work with their teachers on grade-level curriculum through direct instruction informed by MAP Growth outputs. The data also help teachers make better use of instructional content to provide more targeted resources for students.

“We use MAP Skills to align digital programs and resources at a student’s instructional level to build their capacity and ability to demonstrate mastery,” Rychel said. “During workshop, students work on devices to fill skills gaps that are essential for student growth.” ■



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ABOUT NWEA

NWEA is a research-based, not-for-profit organization that supports students and educators worldwide by creating assessment solutions that precisely measure growth and proficiency—and provide insights to help tailor instruction. For 40 years, NWEA has developed pre-K–12 assessments and professional learning offerings to help advance all students along their optimal learning paths. Our tools are trusted by educators in 140 countries and more than half the schools in the US. Visit [NWEA.org](https://nwea.org) to find out how NWEA can partner with you to help all kids learn.

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