Important information about NWEA testing at St. Jude

Dear St. Jude Parents,

We are sending home a packet of information about your child's most recent NWEA MAP scores. This cover letter is meant to provide an overview of NWEA and some guidance on how to use the data to understand your child's learning.

What is NWEA?

The Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) was founded in Washington State in 1977 with a mission of developing a valid, scientifically-grounded process of evaluation for schools. Today their assessments are used by over 10 million students in the U.S. More information can be found on their website: https://www.nwea.org/about/.

What type of NWEA assessment is St. Jude using?

St. Jude is administering the *Measures of Academic Progress* (MAP) for Grades 3-8 and *MAP for Primary Grades* for K-2. Students are tested in the areas of Mathematics, Reading, and Language (Gr. 2-8). MAP is an adaptive test (see below) that allows us to monitor students' core learning growth within and between grade levels. More information about MAP, how to use information provided by the assessment, and links to helpful websites can be found in the parent toolkit: https://www.nwea.org/content/uploads/2011/07/A-Parents-Guide-to-MAP-.pdf.

What does it mean that NWEA is an 'adaptive' test?

The test is adaptive because the computer tracks whether or not students are getting answers right or wrong. It selects subsequent questions that are more or less difficult based on the participant's responses. The assessment attempts to find the level of questions that the student will answer correctly approximately 50% of the time. This allows the computer to determine an accurate range for the child's learning (reflected in the RIT score, the percentile, and the Lexile). It is important that we help students understand that the test does not determine mastery of skills. This may be frustrating for those who expect to get 100% correct on tests. Instead students should view MAP as a challenge and an opportunity to show how much they can do, but in the end it will provide information about the level at which each child is prepared to continue his or her learning moving forward.

If my child has an IEP or qualifying learning plan, does he/she received accommodations on the MAP?

Yes. The test is not timed so that is not a necessary accommodation. Test sessions are normally expected to last about one hour each but can go longer. Other typical accommodations such as having frequent breaks, testing alone or in a small group, and having non-comprehension portions read aloud are provided. We have decided not to allow calculators on the assessment, except for portions that already provide an on-screen calculator, because the test will automatically adjust to the student's computational abilities and we will get a more accurate understanding of their ability.

What types of information does the MAP assessment provide?

The "RIT" score is a student's raw score within a statistical range of variability. RIT is an equal interval scale spanning all grade levels indicating overall test performance. The RIT score increases as a child's learning increases.

Growth target – This indicates your child's projected RIT growth based on the average growth of all others at that same RIT score. If students want to improve their percentile they need to strive to *exceed* their growth target.

The percentile range – Percentiles range from 1 (lowest) to 99 (highest). 50 is the median or overall average score. Students' performance is compared to the national norm (average) *for students taking the equivalent grade-level administration* (fall, winter, spring, or summer). So in other words, 5th grade fall results are compared to other 5th grade fall scores, nationally.

Lexile score – This is a proprietary formula used to measure text complexity. Lexile scores are valuable for determining the type of text that a child can read independently while providing enough challenge to improve his/her reading level, the ultimate goal being to achieve college-level readiness. (More information on Lexile is provided below).

Strengths and weaknesses – assessed within each subject showing how a student performs on different sub-standards.

What are some ways that teachers will use NWEA results?

Most importantly it provides teachers with a measurable understanding of our students' progress. It is relatively simply to give some assessments and declare that a student is working at, below, or above their grade level, but this glosses over the huge amount of variability that can be seen even within one class of students. We may have classrooms where some students are ready for work that is a year or two above their grade level and others who are just as far behind. The data will help teachers find ways to more effectively group students in different subjects and learning contexts and differentiate instruction to their ability level. These are ongoing conversations that we have been having all year and will continue to use as part of the culture of our approach and methods for better instruction.

Following student progress over multiple administrations of MAP will be valuable for determining which students are progressing appropriately. If some students to not meet their learning targets and remain within lower percentile ranges or even drop, it will help both teachers and parents make more informed decisions about interventions and, for example, whether or not to assess for a disability.

What should parents do with their NWEA results?

One of the most important things to do is look at your child's areas of strength and weakness. Regardless of whether he/she scores higher, lower, or close to the norm (50th percentile), every student should have areas of confidence in which he/she enjoys learning as well as areas where learning may require renewed effort and commitment. Parents can assist by reinforcing responsible work and study habits while looking for creative ways to help their students practice skills at home. Some examples of resources to help students meet their learning goals will be provided below.

Meanwhile if a parent has concerns about their child's results, a conference with the teachers is strongly recommended. These results will be discussed at parent conferences in November but this does not mean that parents should wait until that time if their child's performance needs attention now.

What are we asking students to do with their NWEA results?

This is one of the most exciting and innovative outcomes of using this assessment. This year we want to emphasis helping students develop understanding, ownership, and participation in their learning. For too many decades teachers and parents have discussed student data (and not always very well) but not put it in front of their own children to challenge them to embrace and own the learning process. Looking at end-of-term grades tells a lot about a student's self-worth but does little to teach them how to understand or improve their learning process. This is a huge mistake. Our collective educational purpose is to help our students embrace and become self-motivated in their learning so that they will someday be self-motivated adults who view themselves as lifelong learners.

For this reason our teachers in Grades 3-8 are in the process of conferencing with their students. They are being shown their RIT (scaled) score, their reading Lexile range, their areas of relative strength/weakness and being asked to develop serious, measurable goals in each subject. Students are being asked to work daily or weekly on their goals in order to meet or, preferably, exceed their spring target score. We have explained that while no amount of effort can make children grow faster physically, effort can have an important and very significant effect on how fast their learning grows! This process will probably be repeated after the winter and/or spring assessments in order to develop goals for summer learning and review. Finally, conferencing helps build positive rapport and trust between students and their teachers which can further improve the motivation and growth we see from our students.

How is NWEA different than ISTEP?

ISTEP is currently given once per year only to students in Grades 3-8. The ISTEP question set is still being rewritten and calibrated in the wake of Indiana's 2014 College and Career Readiness standards revision. ISTEP is not an adaptive test. Unlike MAP It can only indicate if a child is at or below grade level. The 2015 ISTEP test took close to 12 hours to administer (reportedly now reduced to 9 hours for 2016). As of today ISTEP data from the test first administered in March of 2015 is not scheduled to be released until December 2015. A turnaround time of 9 months is no help to educators or parents. It will cost the State of Indiana close to $28 million to develop and administer ISTEP for 2016.

NWEA MAP has already been calibrated to assess for 2014 Indiana standards. Meanwhile, the MAP test takes approximately 3 hours per child, per administration (so still approximately 9 hours per year total), but the results are available to teachers, parents, and students *the next day*. The test can be administered up to four times a year if desired. The grant the State of Indiana provides to *make this test available to all schools costs a mere $12 million*. Once the new ISTEP test is finalized NWEA will be able to conduct a study that correlates its results to ISTEP so that it can predict a student's likelihood of passing ISTEP. Nevertheless, the ISTEP exam will be administered each spring as long as it is part of the State's legal accountability framework (the school's A-F report card grade is based on ISTEP data), but NWEA will be the far more informative assessment for setting goals and making educational decisions.

NWEA is a powerful took in our toolbox, but <u>we do need to share some caveats about the data</u>.

• <u>It is never advisable to rely on one assessment alone to make educational decisions</u>. St. Jude teachers employ a variety of assessment tools, both formal and informal, both formative and summative, quantitative and qualitative, local and standardized. NWEA is powerful because of the strength, validity, and reliability of the question bank that it uses, but there are still limits to what the data can tell us. MAP provides a snapshot of each child's current performance but in no way, shape, or form should limit our understanding of our students' unique personalities, gifts, and talents.

• <u>Attitude and effort are huge factors</u>. There is little that humans or computers can do to account for students who may take a lackadaisical attitude toward the test (or any test). Some students may have experienced good or bad test days. That is why a ***score range*** is provided, which acknowledges there is a statistical probability that students' "actual" level of ability will most likely fall somewhere within that score band, but exceptions can and do always exist. A significantly poor effort can result in a seeming drop in RIT progress (that goes outside the standard margin or error). This does not mean that a child has "unlearned" from the previous test, but does warrant a discussion as to why he or she might not have been able to give their best effort on a given test session.

• <u>As with any data-driven process, the more data that is received, the more reliable results will be</u>. Each successive administrations of the MAP will narrow in much more accurately to each student's level of performance, gaining a better understanding of each child's long term academic progress is the goal.

Commonly suggested goals for students:

• Read ___ number of minutes per day or week.

• Diversify the genres or fiction being read or try to read more non-fiction sources (including poetry, biographies, etc.)

• Practice math facts ___ number of minutes per day or week. (Also seek websites or mobile apps to practice math skills)

• Write in a personal diary or journal – one paragraph each day with best penmanship and use of conventions

• Practice writing a short letter do a different person or "audience" each day

• Create one "real world" math problem each day that can be solved with estimation

• Proofread a draft of science article and ask an adult know to be good with writing/grammar to proofread as well

• Go to a website such as Khan Academy (see below) and study a different tutorial each day in a math-related topic

• When reading, keep an index card bookmark and use it to write down three new/interesting vocabulary words each day. Look up the words, write them down, or practice using them in a sentence.

Resources for parents to use:

• 2015 RIT Norms (used to determine percentile and give an approximation of your child's mean grade level): https://www.nwea.org/content/uploads/2015/08/2015-MAP-Normative-Data-NOV15.pdf

• Scholastic book index to look up Lexile and SRC points available: https://readingcountsbookexpert.tgds.hmhco.com/bookexpert/

• Information about Lexile scores: https://lexile.com/

• Scholastic Lexile correlation chart: http://encompass.ousd.k12.ca.us/files/SRI_-_Lexile_Scores_Chart.pdf

• Khan Academy website with student/parent-friendly tutorials in various subjects: https://www.khanacademy.org/

• Newsela—current events articles for students with adjustable Lexile readability: https://newsela.com/
(Possibly a good source for middle school science articles!)