



Parent Toolkit

A Guide for Parents

The Northwest Evaluation Association is a not for profit membership organization committed to helping school districts improve learning for all students. It partners with more than 1,000 school districts representing more than 3 million students. The “Parent Toolkit” was created by NWEA as a resource and guide for parents. It includes commonly used terms, frequently asked questions, tips for parents, websites for parents and kids, and information on Lexile – a tool for measuring text difficulty. NWEA hopes you find this resource helpful and invites you to have conversations with your school district personnel about this assessment tool.

Commonly Used Terms

MAP - Measures of Academic Progress are the NWEA computerized adaptive tests. In the MAP system, the difficulty of the test is adjusted to the student’s performance. The complexity of each question is based on how well the student has answered all of the questions up to that point. As the student answers correctly, the questions become more challenging. If the student answers incorrectly, the questions become less challenging. Within an optimal test, the student answers approximately half the items correctly and half incorrectly. The final score is an estimate of the student’s achievement level.

ALT - Achievement Level Tests are the NWEA paper and pencil tests. The NWEA ALT assessments are different than grade-level tests. Rather than constructing one test for every grade, ALT consists of a series of tests that are aligned with the intricacy of the content rather than the age or grade of the student. The items of a single ALT level have a small, targeted range of complexity, designed to enhance the match of the test to the set of students who take it. The range of difficulty for a single ALT level is far smaller than the range of difficulty for a wide-range test. This allows a lot of information to be collected concerning a student’s achievement.

ISAT - Idaho Standards Achievement Tests are the state tests adopted by Idaho. There are two versions: ISAT computerized version and ISAT paper and pencil version. These are customized versions of MAP and ALT.

RIT - All of the tests developed by NWEA use the RIT (Rasch Unit) scale to measure student achievement and student growth. The RIT score relates directly to the curriculum scale in each subject area. It is an equal-interval score, like feet and inches, so scores can be added together to calculate accurate class or school averages. RIT scores range from about 150 to 300. Students typically start at the 150-190 level in the third grade and progress to the 240-300 level by high school. RIT scores make it possible to follow a student’s educational growth from year to year.

Standards - Standards are statements, developed by states or districts, of what students should know and be able to do related to specific academic areas.

Percentile - The percentile rank is a normative statistic that indicates how well a student performed in comparison to the students in the norm group. The most recent norm sample included a group of approximately 1,000,000 students from across the United States. A student’s percentile rank indicates that the student scored better than that percent of students in the norm group. In other words, a student with a percentile rank of 72 scored better than 72% of the students in the norm group.

Lexile - A Lexile is a unit for measuring text difficulty. By determining the level of text difficulty students can comprehend, Lexiles can also be used to determine student reading ability.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the different NWEA Assessments?

MAP – Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) are a series of computerized adaptive tests that measure a student’s general knowledge in reading, language usage, math, and science.

ALT – Achievement Level Tests are the series of paper and pencil assessments that measure a student’s general knowledge in reading, language usage, math, and science.

ISAT – Idaho Standards Achievement Test are the state adopted tests of Idaho. There are paper and pencil and computerized versions of these tests.

What are computerized adaptive tests?

Computerized adaptive tests are test taken on a computer in which the difficulty of the test is adjusted to the student’s performance so each student sees different test questions. The difficulty of each question is based on how well the student has answered the questions up to that point. As the student answers correctly, the questions become more difficult. If the student answers incorrectly, the questions become easier.

What subjects do MAP and ALT assess?

MAP and ALT include Math, Reading and Language assessments. In addition, some districts may choose to include Science assessments as well.

How long does it take to complete a test?

Although the tests are not timed, it usually takes students about one hour to complete each test.

When will my student be tested and how often?

Districts have the option of testing their students up to four times a year. Typically districts will test students at the beginning of the school year in fall and at the end of the school year in spring. Some districts may also choose to test students in winter and summer.

Do all students in the same grade take the same test?

No, NWEA assessments are designed to target a student’s academic performance in math, language usage, and reading. These assessments are tailored

to an individual’s current achievement level. This gives each student a fair opportunity to show what he or she knows and can do. We know that not all students in the same grade are exactly the same height. We also know that not all students in the same grade are achieving the same, therefore, our assessments are designed to find out how “tall” each student is academically. If a school is using MAP or the ISAT computer version, the computer adjusts the difficulty of the items so that each student takes a unique test. If a school is using ALT or the ISAT paper and pencil version, there may be four or five different levels of tests given in a single classroom.

What are NWEA assessments used for?

All NWEA assessments are used to measure your student’s progress or growth in school. You may have a chart in your home on which you mark your child’s height at certain times - such as on their birthday.

This is a growth chart. It shows how much they have grown from one year to the next. NWEA assessments do the same sort of thing, except they measure your student’s growth in reading, language usage, and math skills. The scale used to measure your child’s progress is called the RIT scale (Rasch Unit). The RIT scale is an equal interval scale much like feet and inches on a yardstick. It is used to chart your student’s academic growth from year to year.

How do teachers use the test scores?

NWEA assessments are important to teachers because they keep track of the progress or growth in the basic skills. They let teachers know where a student’s strengths are and if help is needed in any specific areas. Teachers use this information to help them guide instruction in the classroom.

What can parents do to help their students prepare for testing?

Please reference our Tips for Parents section for helpful information.



Tips for Parents

Ways to help your student prepare for testing:

- Meet with your child's teacher as often as needed to discuss his/her progress. Ask the teacher to suggest activities for you and your child to do at home to help prepare for tests and improve your child's understanding of schoolwork. Parents and teachers should work together to benefit students.
- Provide a quiet, comfortable place for studying at home.
- Make sure that your child is well rested on school days and especially the day of a test. Children who are tired are less able to pay attention in class or to handle the demands of a test.
- Give your child a well-rounded diet. A healthy body leads to a healthy, active mind.
- Provide books and magazines for your child to read at home. By reading new materials, a child will learn new words that might appear on a test. Ask your child's school about a suggested outside reading list or get suggestions from the public library.

Ways to help your child with language:

- Talk to your child and encourage him or her to engage in conversation during family activities.
- Give a journal or diary as a gift.
- Help your child write a letter to a friend or family member. Offer assistance with correct grammar usage and content.
- Have a "word of the week" that is defined every Monday. Encourage your child to use the new word throughout the week.
- Plan a special snack or meal and have your child write the menu.
- After finishing a magazine article or a chapter in a book, have your child explain his or her favorite event.

Ways to help your child with reading:

- Children learn to read best when they have books and other reading materials at home and plenty of chances to read.
- Read aloud to your child. Research shows that this is the most important activity that parents can do to increase their child's chance of reading success. Keep reading aloud even when your child can read independently.
- Make time for the library.
- Play games like Scrabble, Spill and Spell, Scattergories, and Balderdash together.
- Follow your child's interests – find fiction and nonfiction books that tie into these interests.
- Work crossword puzzles with your child.
- Give a magazine subscription as a gift.

Ways to help your child with math:

- Point out ways that people use math every day to pay bills, balance their checkbooks, figure out their net earnings, make change, and how to tip at restaurants. Involve older children in projects that incorporate geometric and algebraic concepts like planting a garden, building a bookshelf, or figuring how long it will take to drive to your family vacation destination.

Did you know?

Parents cannot assume that schoolwork makes up for too much TV. Children of all ages watch as much TV in one day as they read for fun in an entire week. Overall, children under age 13 spend 90 minutes a day in front of the TV- one-quarter of their free time. – U.S. Department of Education



- Spend time with kids on simple board games, puzzles, and activities that encourage stronger math skills. Even everyday activities such as playing with toys in a sandbox or in a tub at bath time can teach children math concepts like weight, density, and volume. Check your television listings for shows that can reinforce math skills in a practical and fun way.
- Encourage children to solve problems. Provide assistance, but let them figure it out themselves. Problem solving is a lifetime skill.
- The kitchen is filled with tasty opportunities to teach fractional measurements, like doubling and dividing cookie recipes.
- Children should learn to read and interpret charts and graphs like those found in daily newspapers. Collecting and analyzing data will help your child draw conclusions and become discriminating readers of numerical information.

Websites for Kids and Parents

Math

www.aaamath.com
www.coolmath.com
www.funbrain.com
www.aplusmath.com
mathforum.org/dr.math
www.gomath.com
www.tangram.i-p.com/
www.mathleague.com/help/help.htm
www.edhelper.com

Math practice and activities
 Interactive math games
 Great site for kids
 A+ Math
 Ask Dr. Math
 On line math help
 Interactive tangrams
 Math League help topics
 Help for all subjects



Language Arts/Reading

www.funbrain.com
www.m-w.com/game/
www.vocabulary.com
www.superkids.com/aweb/tools/words
helponenglish.homestead.com
www.writesite.org
www.lexile.com
www.kidsreads.com
www.gigglepoetry.com
ccpl.carr.lib.md.us/read

Language Arts games and more
 Merriam Webster Word Game of the Day
 Vocabulary activities
 Vocabulary builders
 English help
 Interactive Language Arts and Journalism
 Lexile Framework
 Book reviews, games, authors, and more
 Giggle Poetry
 The Reading Corner



Three kinds of parental involvement at home are consistently associated with higher student achievement: actively organizing and monitoring a child's time, helping with homework and discussing school matters.

Lexile

A Lexile is a unit for measuring text difficulty that is linked to the RIT score. Lexile is reported on an equal interval scale, like the RIT scale with 10L being low and 1700L being high. Books that are for beginning readers are listed as BR on the scale. The Lexile range is available on the individual student progress reports and allows educators and parents to find books, periodicals, and other reading material that is appropriately challenging for each student.

Students are considered to be at an appropriate level when they can comprehend approximately 75% of the material they read. This ensures that students are neither frustrated nor bored, thereby stimulating their learning processes while rewarding their current reading abilities.

MetaMetrics was the first organization to take readability of text and comprehension of students and put the two together. By expressing these two things on the same scale, teachers and parents are better able to target and personalize reading selections.

A Lexile measures syntactic complexity – the number of words per sentence. We know that longer sentences are more complex and require more short-term memory to process. It also measures semantic difficulty – a measure of vocabulary. This is measured by looking at the frequency of words in a text compared to a body

of over 400 million words. This is the largest repository of text in the world and is quickly approaching 500 million words.



The Lexile database currently includes over 30,000 books. The Lexile website can be accessed at www.lexile.com. You can search the titles (both Spanish and English) at the website free of charge. The regular search feature allows you to search by title, author, ISBN, subject, or Lexile range. By using the detailed search on the same page, you can also search by theme, interest, or content area. Other features of the website include FAQ, the Lexile Times Newsletter, a Parent link, and a Reading Calendar. Check it out!

It is very important for parents to keep in mind that Lexile does not evaluate genre, theme, content, or interest. Even though a student might be able to read books at a certain Lexile, the content or theme of the text may not be appropriate for that particular student because of his/her age or developmental level. Also, a student may be able to read more difficult content if it is an area of interest for that child since he/she may already be familiar with some of the vocabulary necessary to comprehend the text.

Lexile: Some Examples of Books

<i>Green Eggs and Ham</i>	30L	<i>Hatchet</i>	1020L
<i>Amelia Bedelia</i>	140L	<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	1100L
<i>Clifford, the Big Red Dog</i>	220L	<i>The Adventures of Robin Hood</i>	1270L
<i>Bony-Legs</i>	370L	<i>Little Women</i>	1300L
<i>Curious George</i>	400L	<i>Profiles in Courage</i>	1410L
<i>Sarah, Plain and Tall</i>	560L	<i>The Good Earth</i>	1530L
<i>Charlotte's Web</i>	680L	<i>The Principles of Scientific</i>	
<i>Jurassic Park</i>	710L	<i>Management</i>	1670L
<i>The Fellowship of the Ring</i>	860L	<i>Discourse on the Method and</i>	
<i>Harry Potter and the</i>		<i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i>	1720L
<i>Chamber of Secrets</i>	940L		