THE MORE YOU KNOW, THE MORE THEY GROW

How four school systems help their students soar with powerful growth data from NWEA

NWEA

"Are my students learning?"

This is the fundamental question educators face every day. Discovering the answer lies in measuring **growth for every student**.

And to gain true insight into how your students are learning—and, most crucially, how you can help them achieve more—you must **measure growth well**. Without reliable measures and insights, you face questions like:

"Is it okay if my high-performing students flatline while I focus on other needs?"

"Should I base decisions on assessment data if I'm not 100% confident the data is valid?"

"Am I willing to leave my struggling students behind this year?"

The answer to such worries, of course, is a resounding "No!" That's why for nearly 40 years, NWEA™ has been creating powerful research-based assessments—like Measures of Academic Progress® (MAP®) and Skills Navigator®—that educators rely on to **make good on the promise of growth for all students**.

A great growth measure like MAP tells you more than what students know—it also reveals exactly what each student is ready to learn next, then illuminates the pathway toward that knowledge. This insight is what helps you **improve learning for all students and drive transformative change** in your schools—because the more you know, the more they grow.

In these pages, you'll learn how four schools have used data from the most valid and reliable assessments on the market to improve growth and achievement for their students. Their stories are testaments to the power of excellent growth measurement and **practical examples for all educators who wish to see their students soar**.

Educators speak: hear more inspiring growth stories

Are you using the best assessments and getting the best data to provide the best outcomes for your students? Find out how and why educators use quality growth data from MAP to accelerate learning for their students in this powerful video series.

WATCH NOW

THE MORE YOU KNOW, THE MORE THEY GROW

Stunning growth results from four data-driven schools

ADVANCED LEARNING ACADEMY, CA

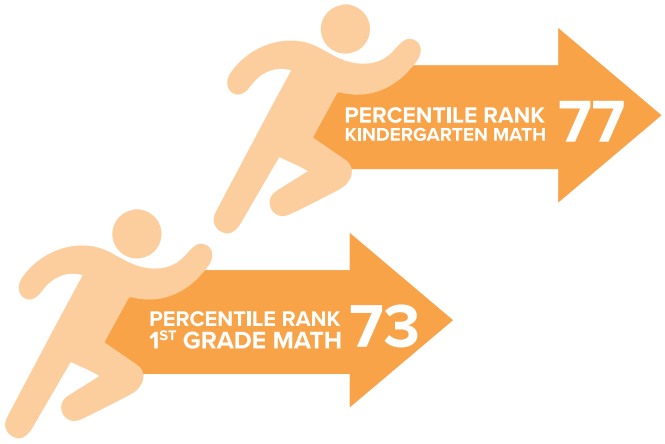
Using MAP as an investigation point, teachers evaluated and refocused instruction to **increase growth for fifth-graders** to match the tremendous growth levels of the fourth- and sixth-graders.

OUR LADY OF HUNGARY, IN

With the help of MAP and professional development, students' **state test passing rates grew 20.4%** across all grades and subjects in the span of one year.

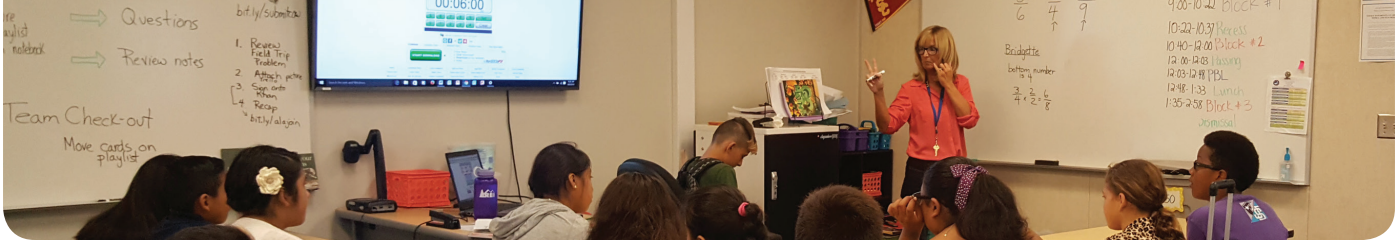
STEPSTONE ACADEMY, OH

Kindergarten and 1st grade students **grew by leaps and bounds** in percentile rankings with the guidance of MPG data.



BULLOCH COUNTY, GA

50% of students in a summer math program **achieved a full year's worth of growth in mathematics**.



ADVANCED LEARNING ACADEMY, CALIFORNIA

Starting strong: 1.5 years' worth of growth in a school's first year

Dr. Michelle Rodriguez, assistant superintendent for teaching and learning at Santa Ana Unified School District, faced an exciting challenge: open a brand-new charter school that would act as a model of personalized learning for the entire district—and prove the concept by achieving one and a half years' worth of student growth in the first school year. Dr. Rodriguez's response: "We're ready. Let's do good things for kids." After a lot of planning and collaboration with a dedicated team of educators, the Advanced Learning Academy (ALA) opened its doors—and what happened next is a testament to the hard work of the educators involved and proof that quality assessment data is an invaluable tool in helping kids grow.

MAP quickly became a key instrument for tracking and achieving growth at the school. "I don't think we ever thought about not using MAP," shares Dr. Rodriguez. "We wanted to develop a coherent system where we could see student growth over an extended period of time with a continuous scale score, which MAP provides. It's very rare anywhere else." Since MAP was already widely used in the district, Dr. Rodriguez knew that it could also serve as a common language when replicating the school's unique teaching approaches—like competency-based learning and project-based learning—in other schools.

With the help of a small but mighty staff—including principal Kim Garcia, who helped educators understand how to personalize instruction using data from MAP—ALA surpassed everyone's expectations by achieving their English Language Arts (ELA) growth goal a full two months ahead of schedule. Dr. Rodriguez says it would have been hard to know if they were meeting that goal and truly accelerating student growth without MAP.

What ALA is doing differently to achieve accelerated growth

Teachers use MAP data to understand each student's needs, then take immediate action by adjusting instruction and re-grouping students, so they're always getting the specific instruction they need to advance. With longitudinal data from MAP—plus more granular skills mastery data from Skills Navigator and other formative measures—informing their flexible curriculum and instruction, the staff at ALA builds a personal pathway to success for each student. Teachers make sure students understand that growth is not just about increasing a number; it's about improving students' knowledge and skills so they're performing at or even above grade level in all areas.

School Snapshot

Type: Charter school

Location: Santa Ana, California

Student population: Serves ~134 students in grades 4 – 6; 90% of students are Hispanic; 65% are English learners; 18% are in special education

Economic markers: 82% free or reduced-price lunch

Using MAP to inspire students and evaluate programs

Teachers are excited about the growth they see in each student, and they're not the only ones. Principal Garcia says she sees a lot of students who are proud of the gains they've made and feel more confident in their abilities. "I'm so glad that we have a growth measure for the students," Garcia shares. "I think it does so much for the students to just build their self-esteem and help them want to get to the next level."

ALA's fourth- and sixth-graders, in particular, had huge growth gains. And while fifth-graders also made gains, they weren't as large in comparison. Having MAP data helped ALA to objectively re-evaluate their programs in order to improve them for those fifth-graders. "It helped us to really focus our instruction," says Garcia.

Creating a bright future with powerful assessment data

While MAP assured teachers that they had achieved their impressive growth goal for the school year, it also gave them the confidence to shoot for an even higher goal the following year. ALA now believes they can achieve about two years' growth in the next school year.

And since MAP provides a continuous measure of growth over time, ALA can keep supporting students through their entire careers. This includes preparing all students for success in college and careers, which is ALA's mission. Since the NWEA mission is partnering to help all kids learn®, this partnership is a natural collaboration in using data to make a difference.

> "We wanted to develop a coherent system where we could see student growth over an extended period of time with a continuous scale score, which MAP provides. It's very rare anywhere else."
>
> —Dr. Michelle Rodriguez, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, Santa Ana Unified School District, CA

OUR LADY OF HUNGARY CATHOLIC SCHOOL, INDIANA

From below norms to above average—and still growing!

Our Lady of Hungary Catholic School (OLH) principal Kevin Goralczyk and the parish's pastor, Reverend Kevin Bauman, faced educators' universal challenge: "You know what you need the kids to know, but how do you know that they learned it? We didn't want to teach our kids to pass a test; we wanted to make sure that we had our kids learning from year to year, and that their learning transferred across years."

Due to recent demographic shifts, 40% of the school's K – 8 students now receive English Language Learner (ELL) services. "We needed to address more basic general knowledge issues with our students than in the past," shares Bauman. Before they could elevate all students' learning, though, Goralcyzk knew the school's professional development (PD) would require what he calls a "paradigm shift" to establish and enable a strong professional learning community. "The traditional 'sit-and-get' model wasn't going to work," he underscores.

Refocusing on learning to keep all students growing

Bauman already knew NWEA assessments had a solid track record in helping educators close achievement gaps and push high achievers; Goralczyk found the organization's PD well-suited to helping the school become a more collaborative and academically successful community. The school saw significant changes during their first year using MAP and Children's Progress Academic Assessment™ (CPAA™), an early learning skills assessment, as well as NWEA PD focused on classroom formative assessment strategies. Student growth accelerated, teachers' skills strengthened, and students became more engaged with their personal learning journeys.

Middle school English teacher Melissa Wroblewski recalls the school's first fall MAP test: "We anticipated classes being below the test's national norms. Some were slightly below, a lot of others way below. But as the year went on, the kids became more invested and the teachers became more invested and changed up their teaching practices." Because MAP provides immediate information about student learning, OLH could analyze fall data to determine strategic shifts that could improve every student's academic growth, including targeted tutoring and a summer program for ELL students and those in the lowest-achieving classes. By spring, everyone's MAP scores grew, and the school was on track for further growth the next year.

Supporting teachers drives student growth

Despite best efforts, observation plus highly variable winter MAP test results made it clear that OLH teachers' comfort level with the new tools and strategies varied. While some classrooms were making large gains in student growth, others were not. Goralczyk called for teachers to renew their formative assessment PD practice, then stepped back. "You have to trust your staff," he emphasizes. "You have to lay the framework for what the change would be, then you identify your leaders in the building—your master teachers. They help you empower everyone else."

Kari Wuszke emerged as one such teacher-leader. "You can have all the data in the world. But if you don't know how to navigate it and what to do with it, then who cares?" muses Wuszke. "Being given the tool of formative assessment and different ways to use it was my lifesaver."

By using new formative skills in combination with MAP data, Wuszke gained better day-to-day understanding of her students' learning, and tailored her instruction to reflect that knowledge. She explains, "A couple of kids in my class were on the low end in reading, language usage, and math. But I didn't realize how low they were until we got our MAP data." She used MAP reports to identify the skills students were struggling to learn, then selected formative assessment strategies to use with those students. "The light bulb went off. I could do this to help all students, including those at the higher end." The shift enabled her to see "better and better evidence of growth," and she shared her insights with other teachers to lift up all the school's students.

The school's dedication to data-driven instruction and PD paid off. By the end of their second school year using MAP, teachers were seeing growth reflected in the scores as well as every day in the classroom. All classes improved their mean MAP score in all three test areas; additionally, four out of nine classrooms ended the year with scores above the average MAP norms in reading and language usage. Goralczyk credits the team's ongoing PD for helping them reach each student. "We ask, 'What would a highly effective teacher do in this circumstance?' Then we ask ourselves if we're zeroing in on those things to make a difference." Leadership's decision to invest in NWEA PD has "energized" teachers, says Wuszke. "We feel entrusted as well as emboldened to do what we do—what God has called us to do. And it's really been a special thing for us."

School Snapshot

Type: Catholic school

Location: South Bend, Indiana

Student population: Serves ~200 students in grades pre-K – 8; 80% of K – 8 students are Latino, with 40% receiving English Language Learner (ELL) services

Economic markers: 100% free or reduced-price lunch

> "We didn't want to teach our kids to pass a test; we wanted to make sure that we had our kids learning from year to year, and that their learning transferred across years."
>
> —Kevin Goralczyk, Principal, Our Lady of Hungary Catholic School, IN

STEPSTONE ACADEMY, OHIO

Skyrocketing growth from the start: young learners excel

Stepstone Academy is a Cleveland, Ohio urban charter school serving grades K – 5 with an innovative blended learning model. The school is located in the Cleveland Central Promise Neighborhood and partners with the Cleveland School District. Many of the families it serves face significant economic challenges. The majority of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch (96%), live within five miles of the school (85%), and are African-American (94%).

Stepstone's educational leaders knew they needed a research-based assessment to support differentiation and track performance against rigorous state standards. They chose computer adaptive MAP for Primary Grades (MPG) to keep the team's mix of face-to-face and technology-based instruction focused on student learning and growth.

Curriculum specialist Colleen Lennon explains the decision to add MPG to Stepstone's toolkit: "To be honest, there was no contest. It's the most well-researched test out there. I'm continually impressed by the norm studies and other research NWEA publishes. I feel good about the quality of the results. When I'm asked about the credibility of the test, I know what I'm saying is research-based and there are many studies to back it up. We've been thrilled to be able to work with a company like this."

College and career readiness companion

MPG reinforces educators' efforts by aiding in-the-moment instructional practices, tracking growth throughout the school year, and predicting performance on high-stakes summative assessments. "It's a winning combination," says Lennon. "We're working to make a lasting difference to help break the cycle of poverty."

All students take MPG three times a year: fall, winter, and spring. The computer based format of the assessment fits in seamlessly with other activities. "Our students are so used to technology, they actually perform better on the computer than with paper and pencil," says Lennon. Each season, the interim assessment results help guide the team in evaluating programs and differentiating instruction.

MPG data help Stepstone teachers keep small group work and daily online instructional time focused. Lennon says, "We use MPG reports to ensure our college and career readiness alignment is great. We've started to develop a list of skills to incorporate into our teaching so that we can be sure we're setting students up for success."

School Snapshot

Type: Charter school

Location: Cleveland, Ohio

Student population: Serves ~300 students in grades K – 5

Economic markers: 96% free or reduced-price lunch

Growth by leaps and bounds

"Looking at our MPG assessment results, it's pretty incredible to see what the students could do. I've been in urban education for 10 years, but I've never seen anything like this. The growth was off the charts," Lennon shares.

In kindergarten mathematics, Stepstone students achieved a mean growth of 26 points on the RIT scale—a jump from the 4th to the 77th percentile in just one year. In 1st grade mathematics, students soared from the 8th to the 73rd percentile. In reading, the mean growth was almost 25 RIT points in both kindergarten and 1st grade (from the 12th to the 63rd percentile in kindergarten and to the 65th percentile in 1st grade).

Lennon reflects, "I believe the growth is a combination of everything we're doing: the daily computer time, the differentiation, the focused work on skills we've identified as needing improvement with the help of MPG. Seeing how far we've come this year, we're absolutely thrilled. As we move forward, our goal is for all of our students to be able to reach the benchmarks. We're working to prepare them for our state's upcoming summative assessment, PARCC. We're ready to continue raising the bar."

> "Looking at our MPG assessment results, it's pretty incredible to see what the students could do. I've been in urban education for 10 years, but I've never seen anything like this. The growth was off the charts."
>
> —Colleen Lennon, Curriculum Specialist, Stepstone Academy, OH

BULLOCH COUNTY SCHOOLS, GEORGIA

Improved instruction creates lasting growth

Fifteen schools comprise the Bulloch County School District in southeastern Georgia, including nine elementary schools (pre-K – 5 or K – 5), four middle schools (6 – 8), and three high schools. Seventeen percent of their students live at or below the poverty line, and 58% receive free or reduced-price lunch. All elementary and middle schools in the district have Title I status. The student population has grown in recent years and funding has been reduced, but the district is consistently high-achieving.

The first step in instituting MAP in Bulloch County was for school leaders to help their faculty appreciate that it was a tool to help them better understand student needs, and a means to improve their instruction. At Brooklet Elementary School, principal Marlin Baker introduced MAP with ongoing small group sessions, and watched the staff's skills with data analysis grow. "Having them bring data to these meetings and discuss it," he says, "and being able to access their students' data, see the changes and identify the needs—that's been very powerful. That data analysis piece has been critical and enlightening for teachers, and it's extremely important."

"And it's been very powerful in the classroom," Baker continues. "One of the strongest points of MAP is the ability to inform instruction. I don't know of another instrument that is as detailed in providing relevant information for teachers moving forward as MAP has been for us."

To formalize the practice of informed instruction, the district instituted scheduled "intervention and enrichment" time based on MAP data. Dr. Jody Woodrum, assistant superintendent for teaching and learning, pre-K – 5 programs, explains, "It used to be that we talked about differentiation but we didn't really provide a lot of time or resources or focus for that. And MAP has given us a way to focus on the different needs of different students." Now, Woodrum says, "teachers have a plan for how they use time for either intervening with students that need it, or providing enrichment to challenge those higher-level students."

Evaluating programs for optimal gains

For Bulloch County Schools, with a tightened budget and growing student population, MAP data has become a key component in assessing the impact of specific programs. A summer school project conducted with 66 of their lowest-performing students led to enormous gains, as evidenced by MAP math scores, with half of the participants gaining a full year's equivalent in achievement in math. Because MAP scores show conclusively that it works, a special reading program has been in place at Bulloch County Schools for the past several years. And when a math program was instituted, the accuracy of MAP data allowed administrators to see precisely how much math growth had occurred with participating students.

School Snapshot

Type: Public school district

Location: Bulloch County, Georgia

Student population: Serves ~10,000 students in 15 elementary, middle, and high schools

Economic markers: 17% at or below poverty line; 58% free or reduced-price lunch

"It's refined what we're doing," says Dr. Lewis Holloway, superintendent of Bulloch County Schools. "We are doing a better job of looking at what makes a difference with students. And if we have a program that's not showing results on MAP, then we get rid of it. It helps us utilize our resources better."

Empowering students to own their academic success

Ultimately, success with MAP depends on each student's interest in owning their academic success, and at Bulloch County Schools enthusiasm is high. "In individual student conferences they look at goal setting," says Baker. "The student can see how much they need to grow in each area, and that adds a lot to the ownership." He adds, "We do try to set expectations, and we encourage intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. And after a child finishes they can see their test results immediately, so that in turn helps that student take part in the whole process because it's right there for them."

"I get excited about this," Holloway says. "When I go into school, especially when they're taking MAP tests, every kid will have their target MAP score taped to their desk. And they know if they've got to make a 220, they're focusing on a 220. So when they punch 'done' and get their score back, and they made their target growth, it's high-five time."

> "One of the strongest points of MAP is the ability to inform instruction. I don't know of another instrument that is as detailed in providing relevant information for teachers moving forward as MAP has been for us."
>
> —Marlin Baker, Principal, Brooklet Elementary School, Bulloch County Schools, GA

Educators speak: hear more inspiring growth stories

Are you using the best assessments and getting the best data to provide the best outcomes for your students? Find out how and why educators use quality growth data from MAP to accelerate learning for their students in this powerful video series.

WATCH NOW

NWEA is a global not-for-profit educational services organization known for our flagship interim assessment solution, MAP. For nearly 40 years, educators have trusted our assessments, professional development offerings, and research to help advance all students along their optimal learning path.

NWEA

LP34901862 DEC 2016

Partnering to Help All Kids Learn® | NWEA.org | 503.624.1951 | 121 NW Everett St., Portland, OR 97209