

**Parent Toolkit:**  
**A guide to NWEA assessments**

August 2004



## About NWEA

Northwest Evaluation Association is a not-for-profit organization committed to helping school districts throughout the nation improve learning for all students. It partners with more than 1,300 school districts representing more than three million students. As a result of NWEA tests, educators can make informed decisions to promote your child's academic growth.

This *Parent Toolkit* was created by NWEA as a resource and guide for parents. It includes *Frequently Asked Questions*, *Tips for Parents*, a list of web sites for parents and kids, and information on Lexile—a tool for measuring text difficulty. NWEA hopes you find this toolkit helpful and invites you to have conversations with your school district personnel about NWEA's assessment tools.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What are the different NWEA Assessments?

The NWEA assessments are:

**MAP**—NWEA's computerized adaptive tests are called *Measures of Academic Progress*, or *MAP*. When taking a MAP test, the difficulty of each question is based on how well a student answers all the previous questions. As the student answers correctly, questions become more difficult. If the student answers incorrectly, the questions become easier. In an optimal test, a student answers approximately half the items correctly and half incorrectly. The final score is an estimate of the student's achievement level.

**ALT**—NWEA's paper and pencil tests are called *Achievement Level Tests*, or *ALT*. ALT tests are different than wide-range grade-level tests where one test is constructed for each grade. ALT consists of a series of tests that are aligned with the difficulty of the test content rather than a student's age or grade. The items—or questions—in a single ALT level have a small, targeted range of difficulty, and are designed to provide an enhanced 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 makes it possible to collect a great deal of information about a student's achievement.

**ISAT**—*Idaho Standard Achievement Tests*, or *ISAT*, are the tests adopted by the state of Idaho. There are two versions: *ISAT Computerized Version* and *ISAT Paper and Pencil Version*.

### What are computerized adaptive tests?

Computerized adaptive tests are test taken on a computer. The difficulty of a 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.

### **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. Districts typically 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 tests 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. If a school uses MAP or the ISAT Computer Version, the computer adjusts the difficulty of the questions so that each student takes a unique test. If a school uses 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?**

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 his or her birthday. This is a growth chart. It shows how much he or she has 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 tests are important to teachers because they keep track of progress and growth in 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 see the *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 or 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 working together benefits 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.

**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.**
- **Discussing school matters.**

- 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 learns 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 chapter in a book or a magazine article, have your child explain his or her favorite event.

### Ways to help your child with reading

- Provide many opportunities for your child to read books or other materials. 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 interest—find fiction and nonfiction books that tie into this interest.
- Work crossword puzzles with your child.
- Give a magazine subscription for a gift.

### Ways to help your child with math

- Spend time with kids on simple board games, puzzles, and activities that encourage better attitudes and 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 such as 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, such as doubling and dividing cookie recipes.

#### 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

- 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 such as planting a garden, building a bookshelf, or figuring how long it will take to drive to your family vacation destination.
- Children should learn to read and interpret charts and graphs such as those found in daily newspapers. Collecting and analyzing data will help your child draw conclusions and become discriminating readers of numerical information.

## Web sites for Kids and Parents

### Math

<a href="http://www.aaamath.com">www.aaamath.com</a>	Math practice and activities
<a href="http://www.coolmath.com">www.coolmath.com</a>	Interactive math games
<a href="http://www.funbrain.com">www.funbrain.com</a>	Great site for kids
<a href="http://www.aplusmath.com">www.aplusmath.com</a>	A+ Math
<a href="http://mathforum.org/dr.math/">http://mathforum.org/dr.math/</a>	Ask Dr. Math
<a href="http://www.gomath.com">www.gomath.com</a>	On line math help
<a href="http://www.tangram.i-p.com/">www.tangram.i-p.com/</a>	Interactive tangrams
<a href="http://www.mathleague.com/help/help.htm">www.mathleague.com/help/help.htm</a>	Math League help topics
<a href="http://www.edhelper.com">www.edhelper.com</a>	Help for all subjects

### Language Arts/Reading

<a href="http://www.funbrain.com">www.funbrain.com</a>	Language Arts games and more
<a href="http://www.m-w.com/game/">www.m-w.com/game/</a>	Merriam Webster Word Game of the Day
<a href="http://www.vocabulary.com">www.vocabulary.com</a>	Vocabulary activities
<a href="http://www.superkids.com/aweb/tools/words">www.superkids.com/aweb/tools/words</a>	Vocabulary builders
<a href="http://helponenglish.homestead.com">http://helponenglish.homestead.com</a>	English help
<a href="http://www.writesite.org">www.writesite.org</a>	Interactive Language Arts and Journalism
<a href="http://www.lexile.com">www.lexile.com</a>	Lexile Framework

[www.kidsreads.com](http://www.kidsreads.com)

Book reviews, games, authors, and more

<http://ccpl.carr.lib.md.us/read/>

The Reading Corner



## 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. 10L is at the low end of the scale and 1700L is at the high end. Books for beginning readers are listed as BR on the scale. The Lexile range is included on individual student progress reports. It 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, and are stimulating their learning processes while rewarding their current reading abilities.

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. A Lexile also measures semantic difficulty—a measure of vocabulary. This measure looks 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. You can access the Lexile website at [www.lexile.com](http://www.lexile.com). You can search 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 frequently asked questions, 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 or 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 or she may already be familiar with some of the vocabulary necessary to comprehend the text.

### Some Examples of Books

Green Eggs and Ham	30L	Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets	940L
Amelia Bedelia	140L	Hatchet	1020L
Clifford, the Big Red Dog	220L	Pride and Prejudice	1100L

Bony-Legs	370L	The Adventures of Robin Hood	1270L
Curious George	400L	Little Women	1300L
Sarah, Plain and Tall	560L	Profiles in Courage	1410L
Charlotte's Web	680L	The Good Earth	1530L
Jurassic Park	710L	The Principles of Scientific Management	1670L
The Fellowship of the Ring	860L	Discourse on the Method and Meditations on First Philosophy	1720L

## Commonly Used Terms

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

**ALT**—*ALT - Achievement Level Tests (ALT)* are a series of paper and pencil assessments that measure a student's general knowledge in reading, language usage, and math.

**ISAT**—*Idaho Standard Achievement Tests, or ISAT*, are the tests adopted by the state of Idaho. There are two versions: *ISAT Computerized Version* and *ISAT Paper and Pencil Version*.

**RIT**—Tests developed by NWEA use a scale called *RIT* to measure student achievement and growth. RIT stands for *Rasch UnIT*, which is a measurement scale developed to simplify the interpretation of test scores. The RIT score relates directly to the curriculum scale in each subject area. It is an equal-interval scale, 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 to 190 level in the third grade and progress to the 240 to 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 rank**—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 was a group of approximately 1,000,000 students from across the United States. A student's percentile rank indicates that the student scored as well as, or better than, the percent of students in the norm group. In other words, a student with a percentile rank of 72 scored as well as, or better than 72% of the students in the norm group.

**Lexile**—A Lexile is a unit for measuring text difficulty. This unit is linked to the RIT score. By determining the level of text difficulty students can comprehend, Lexiles can be used to determine student reading ability.