

One coherent system to drive action

Nebraska is committed to supporting the connection between curriculum, instruction, and assessment



NEBRASKA PUBLIC SCHOOLS DEMOGRAPHICS

244
DISTRICTS

320,000
STUDENTS

APPROACH

Integrated through-year assessment from NWEA

SUBJECTS AND GRADE LEVELS

ELA: Grades 3–8

Mathematics: Grades 3–8

BENEFITS

- Increased efficiency and simplicity
- Ultimate coherence across assessments
- Instructional utility rooted in proficiency expectations
- Maximum opportunity for students and schools to show growth

The challenge: Making statewide assessments student-centered

In 2017, the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) embarked upon a journey toward a balanced, student-centered assessment system. The state had recently adopted College and Career Ready (CCR) standards for English language arts (ELA) and mathematics and approved CCR standards for science. The NDE needed a statewide system that would effectively assess higher order thinking skills without increasing testing time or taking too long to produce results. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) had also recently passed, bringing with it new accountability requirements and the opportunity for states to consider multiple measures of student learning. It was time for the NDE to determine whether its assessment system, based on a stand-alone summative test, was providing the right information at the right time for stakeholders in this evolving context.

Feedback that the NDE had been receiving from Nebraska educators helped define the challenge. Educators had long indicated to the department that they used and valued MAP® Growth™, an interim assessment from NWEA®, because it provided timely data to inform and differentiate instruction as well as a way to monitor student growth over time. In contrast, they told the NDE that it was harder to see the value in the annual summative test, as it was time-consuming and stressful for both educators and students yet produced results that arrived too late in the year to be useful—in a format that was not designed with educator needs in mind.

The goal: Co-creating a solution to focus on teaching and learning

The NDE determined it was time to pursue an innovative, comprehensive approach to statewide assessment that took advantage of options allowed under ESSA in order to effectively measure student performance relative to rigorous standards, support multiple measures of student learning, and bolster educator efforts to foster student learning. In defining its goals for the new system, the state prioritized student engagement; timely return of results to educators, students, and families; and accurate measurement of student progress over time. As a result, they were particularly interested in computer adaptive systems that precisely measured growth on a vertical scale.

The department wanted a system in which the interim tests so valued by educators were more than predictive of summative results—they were seeking a system that fully integrated interim and summative measures to provide meaningful feedback for all impacted stakeholders. The NDE placed a heavy emphasis on educator involvement in developing items and engaging in the standard-setting process for the system. They also sought a strong professional learning element to deepen assessment literacy across Nebraska districts, supporting educators in triangulating data from different components of the system to inform next instructional steps.

“From day one, we’ve been working toward assessments that are more directly connected to teaching and learning. We’re excited to partner with Nebraska districts and NWEA to deliver on that vision.”

Dr. Matthew Blomstedt,
Nebraska Commissioner of Education

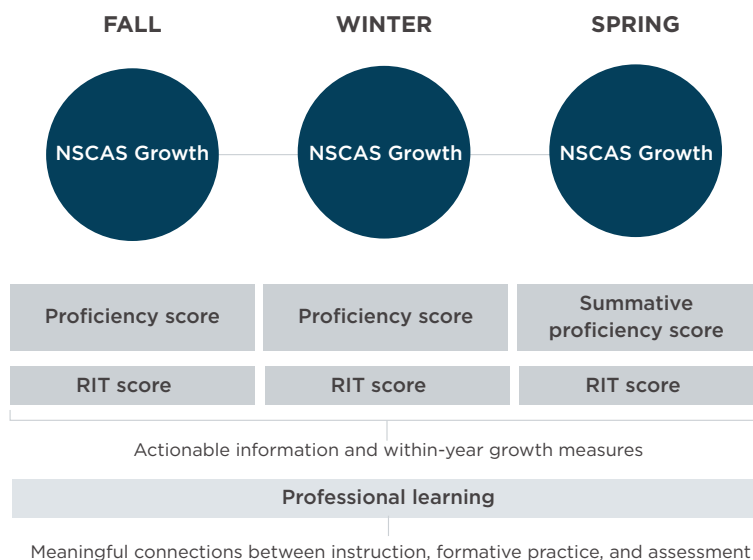
The solution: Integrating district and state measures with a through-year assessment model

The NDE selected NWEA to co-create its new approach to assessing and supporting school performance. The department took a measured approach to evolving the system to allow for educator involvement, thoughtful assessment design, and research studies. As such, they started with a balanced system in which the department provided formative assessment tools and a robust professional learning program; MAP Growth; and an on-grade adaptive summative assessment. Their ultimate goal, however, was to work toward a streamlined assessment model that would unify state and district tests in a single instrument designed to reduce overall testing events, support instruction, and improve student outcomes with actionable results at both the classroom and systems levels. The department determined in partnership with NWEA that the approach they would eventually adopt was integrated through-year assessment.



In the 2021-22 school year, Nebraska districts will pilot NSCAS Growth, the state’s name for its through-year system, and in 2022-23 the system will be operational. In this system, interim assessments administered in the fall, winter, and spring provide instructionally relevant information throughout the year and produce annual summative scores for accountability. These assessments replace the traditional summative test and existing interims like MAP Growth, maximizing instructional time and eliminating the need to manage separate state and district testing protocols/platforms.

NSCAS Growth is a criterion-referenced assessment that measures student achievement relative to Nebraska standards at the depth and breadth required by the state blueprint for assessing grade-level performance. The test engine supports fine on-grade adaptivity to capture student development from beginning to advanced levels of understanding for each Nebraska standard. The assessments will also adapt off grade as determined by The NDE and retain access to grade-independent learning level and normative information by providing RIT scores each term. The starting point on each test is informed by where a student was on the preceding test. Students have multiple opportunities to show what they know and are never penalized for not showing proficiency prior to spring.



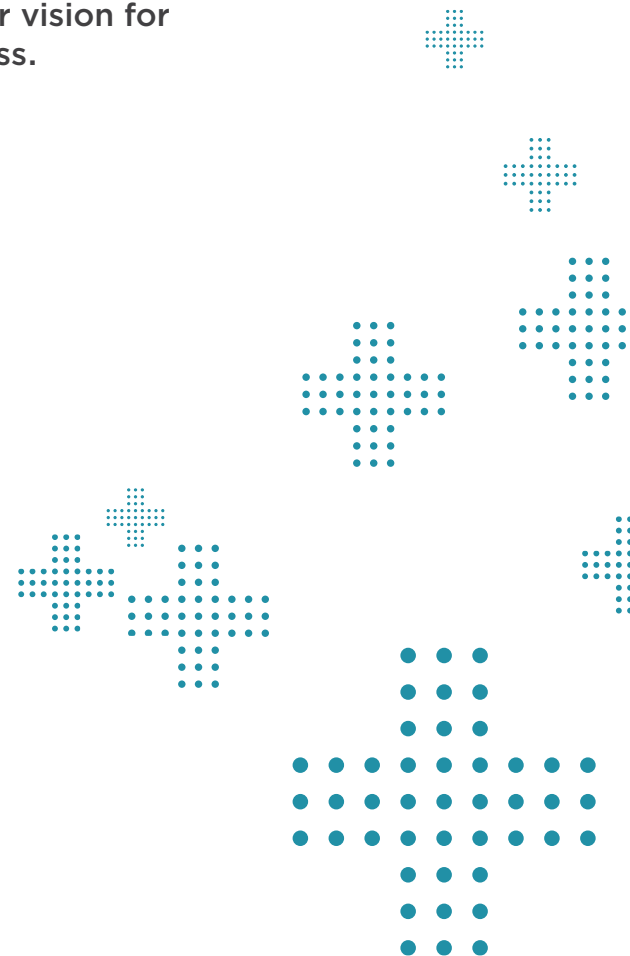
Through-year assessment fully integrates and unifies state and district testing, providing a single compass to drive stakeholder action.

“Our new system helps us emphasize the instructional feedback provided by interim assessments and further incorporate growth in accountability metrics.”

Jeremy Heneger, Director of Statewide Assessment
Nebraska Department of Education

The NSCAS Growth through-year system provides the ultimate in coherence, as each assessment in the system measures student performance relative to a state’s scale, avoiding the use of one compass in the classroom and another in accountability frameworks. It also shows student growth from fall to winter to spring and across years, providing a fairer and more holistic view of student and school performance.

Connect with us at [NWEA.org/state-solutions](https://www.nwea.org/state-solutions)
to learn how we can partner with your state
to create a system that reflects your vision for
student learning and success.



nwea

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