

How are MAP tests Different than Traditional Tests?

Certainly, there is no shortage of tests today. Weekly spelling tests, student self-assessment on writing projects, placement exams, and annual state-mandated assessments are only a few of the assessments found in classrooms.

Not all tests are created equally. Because tests have different purposes, each test is designed based on different principles. For example, Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) Tests differ from traditional standardized tests in three ways:

1. MAP tests are adaptive.
2. MAP scores indicate a student's instructional level.
3. MAP scores are reported on a cross-grade scale.

Adaptive tests

No one test is appropriate for every student in your classroom. Before the bell dismisses students after the first week of school, teachers know their students are academically diverse. While some students are ready to learn the key concepts of writing stories, others are struggling to write a complete sentence.

MAP assessments are designed to respect each student by automatically adjusting to his or her instructional level. When a student first sits at a computer to take a MAP test, he will see a question at grade-level. If he answers it correctly, he'll get a more difficult question. Conversely, if he answers incorrectly, the next question will become easier.

Within about seven questions, all students are working on their unique versions of the test where they get about half the answers right. As a result, students who typically get frustrated as they struggle on a test discover that all of the items they see are appropriately challenging. Likewise, students who find traditional tests boring discover MAP tests challenge them.

By creating a unique test for each student, educators receive highly accurate information about their students. Rather than indicating what a student might be able to do relative to grade-level standards, MAP tests indicate what a student is ready to learn relative to state standards--not bound by grade. In addition, the validity of scores is increased because each student is engaged in a test designed for him or her, reducing the propensity for students to randomly guess answers. Cheating is also reduced since students cannot look to a neighbor in the hopes of finding the answer when all students are taking unique tests.

Instructional level

A positive testing experience means that teachers receive information about each student's instructional level—that is, what the student is ready to learn. At the point when students are answering about half of the questions correctly, at this point in time this is when a student is working at their instructional level.

Traditional tests often check for mastery of grade-level content. Long before traditional tests are administered, teachers know which students will do well. The results of this type of test provide little insight into what students who are above or below grade level are ready to learn.

MAP tests provide a great deal of information about **what all students are ready to learn**, regardless of where they fall within meeting grade-level standards. As a result, MAP test scores suggest where on the continuum each student is learning, and what instructional focus will provide the strongest opportunity for academic growth.

MAP test scores can be correlated with specific learning statements about what each child is ready to learn. Because both the tests and learning statements are aligned to the content and structure of state standards, the results are relevant. In addition, communicating with parents and other educators is facilitated when a teacher can share what skills a student is working on.

Cross-grade scores

Traditional tests use a variety of scores that are not translatable across grades. For example, a percentage correct score is dependent on the number of questions asked. It is difficult to say how much a student who received a 78% correct score in second grade and an 80% correct score in third grade grew academically. Likewise, a percentile score that compares a student with other students in the grade level is dependent on performance of all the students in the grade level. Therefore, if a student was at the 55th percentile in sixth grade and the 65th percentile in seventh grade, the change could indicate as much about the norm group used as it does about the student.

With MAP tests, for example, teachers learn which students in their fourth grade class are actually working on concepts that most students learned in second grade. This is because the adaptive nature of MAP tests does not limit the questions to a student's grade level. As every teacher knows, what a student is ready to learn is based less on his or her age (that is, grade level), and more on his or her past experiences.

The underlying scale of MAP assessments, the RIT scale, spans the continuum of learning. For example, the Reading RIT scale begins with letter recognition and extends to adult reading comprehension. Students attempt items that are within their instructional level on the scale.

Because the scale is continuous across grades, academic growth can easily be measured by comparing a student's previous score with the most recent score. For example, a third grade teacher might look up the test scores of her students from last year's second grade class and compare them with the test scores of her class in the fall. The difference in each student's score indicates how much academic growth occurred between the test last spring and the test in the fall.

When analyzing and using test results, it is essential to understand what the numbers indicate. Knowing how MAP assessments are different from other assessments will help you use the assessment data. As a result of your efforts, students are challenged and growing.