

Norwalk, CT



District Gives 11,000 Students More Instructional Time

MAP Growth Enables Norwalk Public Schools to Eliminate 24 Assessments

Two years ago, Dr. Steven Adamowski, Superintendent of Norwalk Public Schools, challenged his leadership team to make sure that Norwalk's assessment system effectively supported efforts "to raise the bar and close the gaps" for all students.

Dr. Michael Conner, Chief Academic Officer, and Diane Filardo, Director of Assessment Accountability, conducted a comprehensive audit of the existing system and found that far too many assessments were not providing teachers and school leaders with quality data that could inform decision-making. They needed a better way to measure student progress and growth.

Norwalk knew NWEA™ could provide this kind of data. What they didn't expect was that implementing MAP® Growth™ would enable them to drastically reduce the number of other assessments the district needed to use.

Taking a Close Look at the Existing Assessment System

"Assessment coherence is a key priority for us," Filardo notes. "Our assessments need to be tied to our strategic goals." When Conner and Filardo evaluated the district's current system, they kept this in mind. Here's what they found: schools were administering close to 30 distinct assessments, many of which did not align to the district's strategic priorities or provide reliable data on student growth.

Their solution needed to accomplish three things: enable the district to cut down on the number of different assessments its schools were administering; preserve instructional time; and provide consistent measures that could be used to drive decision-making at both the school and district levels.

Norwalk began restructuring its assessment system by eliminating assessments that did not align with the district's strategic priorities—or the needs of teachers, school leaders, parents, and community members. The district prioritized assessments that 1) advanced its core goals of closing achievement gaps and 2) promoted educational equity, especially for students who were in more than one high-needs group.

Implementing a New Approach to Assessment

Norwalk conducted extensive research on assessments that would meet the district's requirements for usability, high-quality data, and assessment rigor—as well as provide predictive outcomes for state standardized tests. MAP Growth was Norwalk's top choice. "We wanted to improve the instructional time in the classroom and decrease the number of assessments that we were administering. But, it was critical to implement a true assessment system that gives us quality information for school leaders, as well as for teachers," says Conner.

The district was also deliberate with its implementation strategy, and piloted MAP Growth in eight schools

the first year before expanding across the district. This enabled Norwalk to engage teachers and school leaders in the implementation process, and address any challenges. Consequently, “MAP Growth buy-in has been seamless,” says Filardo.

The results have been remarkable. In the year Norwalk piloted MAP Growth, the district eliminated 11 assessments that were not serving the district’s needs. In year two, Norwalk eliminated another 13 assessments, representing nearly an 80 percent decrease overall in the number of assessments the district requires.

“Choosing MAP Growth was a win-win situation... We decreased the number of assessments, but we also have this assessment system that gives us the quality information that we need.”

Dr. Michael Conner, Chief Academic Officer
Norwalk Public Schools, CT

Aligning Assessments to District Priorities

One of Norwalk’s central goals has been to help teachers and school leaders across the district to better use assessment data to inform instruction and decision-making. As Filardo notes, educators need to be able to use the assessments effectively and understand what the information is telling them about student learning needs. “We’ve talked about differentiation for years, but the tools we had before were not the ones that you could use to do it,” says Filardo.

In addition to using professional learning to help schools improve assessment practices, the district has also created school-level leadership teams to spearhead conversations about assessment literacy and using data to inform differentiated instruction. Norwalk emphasizes continuity among schools, to avoid widespread variance wherein one school is implementing one practice and another school is implementing a different practice. As Conner notes, “If you see a huge variance in school discussions around data, then the assessment practices have to change. You want to create coherence.”

This coherence between schools also facilitates collaboration. Teachers and leaders now routinely reference MAP Growth data, including RIT scores and national norms. They also use the predictive growth data in the context of the Smarter Balanced test, as well as other insights available to them through MAP Growth reporting. The utility of the information that MAP Growth provides for multiple stakeholder groups has been a significant source of value for Norwalk.

“The conversation has become really rich. Principals really know the data and own their data,” says Conner. “But more importantly, you’re starting to see an organizational and cultural change around this system of decision-making and assessments.”



District Snapshot

NORWALK, CT



PRE-K — 12TH GRADE STUDENTS

11,393

LEARNING NEEDS

15%

OF STUDENTS ARE ENGLISH LEARNERS

13%

ARE ELIGIBLE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

ECONOMIC MARKERS

49%

OF STUDENTS QUALIFY FOR FREE OR REDUCED-PRICE LUNCH

PRODUCT USE

IMPLEMENTED MAP GROWTH AND MAP SKILLS IN

2015

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