



Nebraska's Transition to NSCAS Growth

Frequently Ask Questions (FAQ)

As our districts and schools move towards implementing the new Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System (NSCAS) Growth assessment, built in partnership with school communities across the state, the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) wants to provide answers to questions district leaders principals, educators, and other stakeholders might have about the new assessment system. We will continue to provide information and ongoing support as we implement the new NSCAS Growth assessment.

NSCAS Growth Background

1. What is NSCAS Growth?

The Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System (NSCAS), pronounced "en-skass," is a new statewide assessment system that embodies Nebraska's holistic view of students and helps them prepare for success in postsecondary education, career, and civic life. It uses multiple measures throughout the year to provide educators and decision makers at all levels with the insights they need to support student learning.

NSCAS Growth is one of the measures included in the NSCAS system. NSCAS Growth consists of assessments that take place in the fall (optional in the 2022-23 school year), winter (always optional), and spring (mandatory) for mathematics and English language arts (ELA) in grades 3 – 8.

2. What are the benefits to NSCAS Growth?

The NSCAS Growth assessments help to unify district and state assessments that measure student academic growth and mastery of Nebraska's College and Career Ready Standards, and growth relative to national norms. This approach to measure growth and proficiency throughout the year in the unified assessment system provides coherence across the assessments, helping to inform instruction with timely results to teachers within 72 hours, and meeting accountability requirements – all while reducing the overall number of assessments students are required to take.

3. Why did we change from the previous assessment program?

In 2016, the NDE and the Nebraska State Board of Education (the Board) embarked on a journey to develop a new Strategic Plan to shape and guide the direction of education in Nebraska over the following decade. As part of that process, the NDE and the Board engaged with a wide range of stakeholders. Educators and school leaders were clear – they wanted a system that would provide them with multiple measures of proficiency to inform instruction. As part of the new strategic plan, the NDE and the Board prioritized the development of a coherent assessment system to measure achievement and growth in grades 3 – 8 that provides educators with timely information to support instruction in the classroom. NSCAS Growth is a reflection of the strategic plan adopted by the Board and will continue to be a priority as transitions happening at NDE.

4. What input did educators and district leaders have in the decision to transition to NSCAS Growth?

Six years ago, we began a conversation with Nebraskans about the future of teaching and learning. Key voices from across the state – educators, families, students, and community groups – emphasized the importance of good data on student progress, but also expressed frustration at the rigidity and lack of connection of our state assessment program with our vision for education in Nebraska.

NSCAS Growth Assessment Design

1. How are instructional weeks taken into consideration when determining a student's assessment score?

In the MAP Growth assessments, instructional weeks are provided to help contextualize the estimated amount of instruction a student receives relative to the student's performance. The instructional weeks were used to estimate the MAP Growth norms for fall, winter, and spring. The default instructional weeks of 4th, 20th, and 32nd weeks, respectively, were used to construct the achievement status and growth norms tables for MAP Growth. The MAP Growth technical documentation on developing those norms notes that even when a school's testing calendar does not conform to the instructional weeks used to develop the tables, the normative references provided through the MAP Growth reporting system still allow appropriate comparisons to be made. In Nebraska, the majority of districts use the default instructional weeks when obtaining their MAP Growth scores. Likewise, NSCAS Growth provides achievement norms that use the default instructional weeks, that is the 4th week for Fall, the 20th week for Winter, and the 32nd week for Spring.

2. How will NSCAS Growth measure student growth?

The NSCAS Growth summative scale allows for student growth to be measured as the difference of NSCAS Growth scale scores between at least two different points in time, including within a school year and across school years as students moves progress year over year. As more

students engage in fall and winter NSCAS Growth, trend data from fall to winter to spring will provide the basis for analyses to determine what is “typical” growth from one administration to the next.

3. How did the NDE set NSCAS Growth cut scores? How will NDE continue to evaluate cut scores?

Cut scores are typically determined with standard setting, a rigorous content-based psychometric process of involving a representative group of educators to derive cut scores that separate performance by achievement levels in a systematic and methodical way. In the case of NSCAS Growth, EdMetric, an industry leader in standard setting, facilitated and trained Nebraska educators representing 44 districts who actively participated as panelists and table leaders in the process of examining test items and content, along with achievement level descriptors, to recommend the resulting cut scores. During the multi-day workshop, NDE provided policy guidance and historical perspective, and NWEA provided resources and content expertise. The cut scores for ELA and mathematics were determined in the summer of 2018, after significant changes between the 2016 and 2017 administrations in Nebraska’s statewide assessment system for ELA and mathematics. (A full description is provided in Section 6 of the [2018 NSCAS Summative Technical Report](#).) In the summer of 2023, NDE will conduct a standard setting for mathematics as well as a new standard setting for ELA.

4. How similar are NSCAS Growth scores to MAP Growth RIT scores?

Before comparing performance on assessments, it is important to be sure what they measure (i.e., their construct) is similar. NSCAS Growth and MAP Growth measure very similar constructs; that is within English language arts on NSCAS Growth and Reading and Language Usage on MAP Growth, and within Mathematics on both assessments. In addition to similar constructs, student performance across assessments has been similar at the aggregate levels. Since we’ve attempted to be responsive to Nebraska districts by adjust the test model for NSCAS Growth, such as but not limited to expanding the grades assessed, particularly in fall and winter, and suppressing proficiency reporting before the end of the year, we’ll need to conduct additional analyses to ensure stability and similarity of student performance over time. NWEA has and continues to investigate student performance on NSCAS Growth and MAP Growth through multiple psychometric analyses. In one study of students taking both assessments, there were very little meaningful differences in student scores, and the overall standard error of measurement found on the assessments was practically identical. To be sure, NWEA has developed a comprehensive score evaluation framework that was vetted by a group of nationally renowned testing experts. The relevant analyses include dimensionality assessment, item and person fit analysis, and population-based classification consistency analysis. The results of these ongoing analyses will be provided to NDE and Nebraska’s Technical Advisory Committee (TAC).

5. How are test questions for NSCAS Growth developed?

Content designers develop items for tests. In Nebraska, our content designers are primarily Nebraska educators, though some content is created by content specialists at NWEA. Content designers are experts in a content area (English language arts, math, science, etc.) and have a deep understanding of what students should know, when they should know it, and how you can tell they know it. When they are creating items for state assessments, they also need to know the specifics of a state's content standards. Additionally, all NSCAS Growth items have been reviewed and approved by Nebraska educators before they appear on the test.

NSCAS Growth for Instructional Use

1. What reports will be available through NSCAS Growth?

There are a wide range of reports available for each administration of NSCAS Growth. A full description of the reports for NSCAS Growth can be found [here](#). These reports can be disaggregated from the State level down to the individual student level. As examples, the Dynamic Student Report describes student performance overall via the NSCAS Growth scale score and at the item level. The report also provides an overall RIT score from MAP Growth. The Student Growth Report shows individual student progress throughout the year. Student Group Score Reports allow teachers to view and understand the individual and group performance of students in their class. School and District Reports provide summary information on student achievement by grade and content area.

The reporting system provides navigation features such as page breadcrumbs, sortable columns, dropdown filters, and search boxes within report views. For example, the system allows the user to filter by one or more student demographic groups to view available data for those groups. We are currently investigating even more flexibility for selecting dynamic views of data that will assist educators with analyses.

The system allows export of data as CSV or PDF depending on the report type. Final reporting artifacts such as Student Score Data File CSV and Individual Student Report PDFs are also available for download from the system.

2. When will stakeholders receive NSCAS Growth reports or data?

Educators will start seeing results in the system within 72 hours after a student completes an assessment with the final aggregations completed within the next 3 weeks after the assessment window closes. When there is a standard setting, such as will occur in summer of 2023, the final aggregations will be provided after the standard setting activities and analyses have concluded.

3. How should NSCAS Growth be used by educators to make school improvement, instructional, and program decisions?

As with any assessment, NSCAS Growth is one tool in a larger toolbox that educators can use to make instructional and intervention decisions. Beyond providing educators with results within 72 hours, there are additional features that will be available for educators to use in their instructional decision making including having growth and proficiency from one test, item level information to help teachers understand how students are performing on state standards, and connecting student performance and instructional planning to the Achievement Level Explorer tool to ensure all students have the opportunity to learn at the highest level of expectation.

4. What detail about student performance will we have access to inform instruction?

In addition to NSCAS Growth scores and estimated MAP Growth RIT scores, the Online Reporting Suite includes reports with item-level data for individual students. This information identifies how the student performed on specific content standards, which supports teachers as they make instructional decisions informed by student strengths and areas of improvement. Direct links to the Achievement Level Explorer connects student performance to expectations aligned with Nebraska state standards. Results from each administration can be used to develop plans for students throughout the year, including setting learning targets to move students to higher achievement levels.

5. How can educators integrate NSCAS Growth into decision-making rules for student enrichment and interventions?

NSCAS Growth data and information can complement educator expertise, in-class observations and assessments, curricular and instructional materials, and support educator decision making about individual student enrichment and intervention. One particularly helpful aspect with the NSCAS Growth reports is the progression of expectations described by the NSCAS Growth-specific achievement levels, available in the Achievement Level Explorer (ALE) tool. The ALE is directly accessible from the student reports and can be leveraged to evaluate where students may need intervention or enrichment, and to provide all students with an opportunity to receive instruction at the highest levels of achievement and expectation. As with any assessment, educators should leverage NSCAS Growth information as part of a comprehensive set of multiple measures when making decisions about student needs, particularly when it comes to decisions about what supports and programs a student most needs.

NSCAS Growth vs. MAP Growth

1. What are the differences between MAP Growth and NSCAS Growth?

NSCAS Growth has been designed to retain the core value that Nebraska districts appreciate in MAP Growth, but it is a different assessment than MAP Growth. MAP Growth is aligned to state standards but adapts across grade levels. It is not designed to measure grade-level performance

or produce summative proficiency scores. NSCAS Growth also adapts on and off grade and is aligned to state standards, however it is designed to further provide a defensible grade-level achievement or proficiency score. This unique NSCAS Growth test design yields grade level and normative growth performance throughout the school year, as well as grade-level proficiency at year's end as required by federal accountability.

2. How much time is required to take the three administrations of NSCAS Growth compared to MAP Growth and the previous statewide summative assessment?

Without the NSCAS Growth, students taking MAP Growth plus a Summative assessment could have taken as many as 11 tests each year in English language arts and mathematics. With the NSCAS Growth through year approach, where Summative assessments are no longer separate but integrated into the Spring administration, the total number of assessments is reduced to 6 per year, not including Science.

A recent study examined the total testing time of the same students who took both MAP Growth and NSCAS Growth and found that students taking NSCAS Growth spent, on average an additional 8 minutes to complete NSCAS Growth compared to MAP Growth. Although, it's 8 minutes more in comparing the two in one setting, by not having to take a separate summative assessment, the time savings is far greater, as much as an hour or more (according to the [2019 NSCAS Growth Technical Report](#)), not including the administrative and logistical setup and time away from classroom instruction.

3. Does NSCAS Growth provide nationally normed data like MAP Growth?

Yes. NSCAS Growth provides an estimated MAP Growth RIT score, NWEA's nationally normed scale from MAP Growth. Further, new report features within NSCAS Growth will expand access to MAP Growth reports, beyond the NSCAS Growth reports provided today.

4. How reliable (standard error of measurement) are NSCAS Growth scores compared to MAP Growth scores?

Standard error of measurement (SEM) is calculated based on a test's reliability and standard deviation and is most comparable when on the theta scale. This scale typically ranges from -4 to +4 and is the scale that underlies resulting scale scores. It is a scale that is always transformed by a given slope and/or constant to ensure scores are not negative. That is why scale scores are never negative and can be 3 digit (like RIT scores) or 4 digit (like NSCAS Growth scores). The magnitude of the SEM of one scale score can't be directly compared to another when in the scale score metric. In order to compare one scale to the other, we can look at the SEM of each test on the theta scale. MAP Growth targets SEMs of 0.35. NSCAS Growth average SEMs are on average also 0.35. Thus, NSCAS Growth and MAP Growth standard errors of measurement scores are indistinguishable when viewed through each scale's theta metric.

Future of NSCAS Growth

1. What trainings will educators receive on NSCAS Growth?

Certified facilitators receive training on multiple NSCAS Growth workshops including Intro to Reports and Instructional Planning this fall. Upcoming this winter are more workshops including: Sharing NSCAS Growth Data with Students and Families, NSCAS Growth Purpose and Value, How NSCAS Growth Works, Preparing Students for NSCAS Growth and Preparing Staff for NSCAS Growth. Districts can contact their Certified Facilitators for help with these offerings.

2. Will there be updates to NSCAS Growth in the coming years to continue to improve testing features and reports?

As NSCAS Growth continues to be implemented, NDE will continue to listen to stakeholders including educators and district leaders for areas of improvement to the testing features and reports. The following are some updates happening for the 2022 – 2023 academic year:

- The portions of the ELA assessment that provide on-grade learning expectations information will continue to adapt on a student's grade level.
- The portions of the mathematics assessment that provide on-grade learning expectations information can now adapt above or below a student's grade level.
- The portions of both the ELA and mathematics assessments that provide diagnostic information will be able to adapt on a student's grade level, below the student's grade level to the necessary grade level, or up to two grades above the student's grade level.