



February 17, 2011

Notes about N.W.E.A. Testing

Dear Parents,

St. Paul Lutheran School does not administer the I.S.T.E.P. achievement test. Public schools administer the I.S.T.E.P. test once per year in selected classrooms. Our school offers the N.W.E.A. assessment (Northwest Evaluation Association) three times each year. We choose the N.W.E.A. over I.S.T.E.P. for the following reasons...

- I.S.T.E.P. is administered only once per year. N.W.E.A. offers three testing windows each year (two times each year in kindergarten). Additional testing windows offer greater opportunities to assess student progress throughout the year.
- I.S.T.E.P. is administered as a PASS/FAIL assessment. N.W.E.A. is a growth-oriented instrument measuring progress over time.
- I.S.T.E.P. is a one-size-fits-all test (every student takes the same test with the same questions, during the same allotted time). N.W.E.A. is a computer-access, web-based, adaptive assessment that adjusts to a student's true ability level.
- I.S.T.E.P. assesses only grade level material (and material that is a little above grade level and a little below grade level). N.W.E.A. adapts to ANY ability level (if a student continues to answer questions correctly, the test builds increasingly complex questions). Additionally, no student takes exactly the same test (limiting the possibility of cheating on the test).
- I.S.T.E.P. sets time limits on every test. There are no time limits on N.W.E.A. Do you think we will ever find two students that possess the exact same ability level and can complete the test in exactly the same time frame?
- I.S.T.E.P. is only given in selected grade levels. N.W.E.A. is given at EVERY grade level.
- I.S.T.E.P. is more expensive to administer than the N.W.E.A.
- I.S.T.E.P. takes months to return the results of the assessment. N.W.E.A. returns the results of the assessment instantaneously.

One wonders why the public schools still continue to administer the I.S.T.E.P. when the benefits of N.W.E.A. far outweigh the benefits of I.S.T.E.P.!

And even though our school does not administer I.S.T.E.P., we can still correlate our N.W.E.A. scores to I.S.T.E.P. passing scores. We KNOW the percentage of our students that would pass the I.S.T.E.P. (currently, our student have an 87%-89% passing rate).

In kindergarten, our students are getting their first experience with N.W.E.A. testing. The test is taken on the computers in our own computer lab. The test adapts to the ability level of each student. The results of the test are given as a "RIT" score (registering between 100 and 300). The RIT score can be compared to national averages and compared to class averages. N.W.E.A. also relates scores as "percentiles" (comparing our students to the millions of students who have taken the test). Classroom teachers or the school principal can help you interpret your child's test scores.

One important note: Kindergarten RIT scores form the baseline for future growth assessments. RIT scores for kindergarten students can sometimes be unreliable for a number of reasons. The first and foremost reason for unreliable kindergarten RIT scores is that this is the first time kindergarten students have participated in N.W.E.A. testing. The new experience can be daunting to a kindergarten student. The second reason is the maturity level of the kindergarten student. Less maturity often reveals a less reliable score. The third reason for potentially unreliable kindergarten RIT scores is the confidence level and concentration level of kindergarten students. Often, kindergarten students do not grasp the importance of performing well on a standardized test.

The bottom line is this: Don't be overly concerned about your kindergarten student's N.W.E.A. scores just yet. Your student needs to get several "testing windows" under their belt before true progress can be assessed. Don't panic if you see RIT scores that do not match kindergarten level. Maturity is important. Growth is important. Scores will become more reliable as students gain more confidence taking the tests.

Any questions about the tests, procedures, or scores can be directed to your child's classroom teacher, or the principal in the school office. We enjoy the process of teaching our parents about our assessment program.

Blessings, R. Allen Boone
Principal – St. Paul Lutheran School