

Parents Deserve CLEAR INFORMATION

About Student Growth in Schools



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Student academic growth is an important data point that describes change in learning over time using annual test scores. In most states growth data is reported on school report cards—the online reports that show how your child’s school is supporting students.

When viewed side by side with data that is based on an annual test score, school-level growth data offers parents a more complete picture of school quality and improvement, and individual-level growth data provides them with an understanding of their child’s progress. Measuring growth acknowledges that a student’s starting point is as important as their ending point. But parents need to know that there are different ways to measure growth and that each method provides unique insights into school quality.

Do you know what student growth data is telling you about the quality of teaching and learning at your child’s school? This brief provides an introduction to the different ways states are using annual test scores to measure student academic success over time and steps you can take to understand growth at your child’s school.



How Do States Use **ANNUAL TEST SCORES** to Measure School Quality?



Public schools have a responsibility to deliver a quality education to all students. State leaders set goals for a quality education, and every year they check whether schools are meeting these expectations by looking at a variety of data about the schools. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)—the federal law that governs K–12 education—requires states to administer annual state assessments in reading and math in grades 3–8 and once in high school. The state must also administer a science assessment once in grades 3–5, once in grades 6–9, and once in grades 10–12.

- ▶ State leaders, superintendents, and school principals use these measures to hold schools responsible for helping students learn. Holding schools responsible is called school accountability, and it is required by ESSA.
- ▶ Accountability shows state and district leaders how all schools are performing and which schools need more support to help students learn.
- ▶ States must publish a public report card with information about how schools are serving students so that everyone, including parents and families, can understand school quality.

Two measures of academic success that state leaders look at to see whether schools are helping students learn are “proficiency” and “growth.” Both of these measures are based on annual reading and math test scores.

Proficiency rates help leaders understand how many students met a *specific target in a given year*, while **growth data** helps leaders understand *student change in performance over time*. These measures are most helpful to look at side by side.

✔ PROFICIENCY

Proficiency rates provide information about whether students are mastering academic skills. For example, do students in this school understand fractions and other math concepts the way third graders should?

- A proficiency rate tells you what percentage of students in a school have achieved “proficiency.” Achieving proficiency means students have met or exceeded a target score on the annual reading or math test that year. The proficiency target score is decided by your state.
- Every state is required to measure proficiency rates in reading and math for accountability under ESSA. You can find this proficiency data on your state report card.

✔ STUDENT GROWTH

Student growth data describes change in learning over time. For example, did the students in this grade learn more, less, or the same about math this year?

- All growth data is based on two or more annual test scores (for example, Joey’s score on the annual test this year and his score last year).
- While not required, nearly every state uses student growth for accountability—but each state has its own way of calculating this data.
- It is important to remember that student growth data provides different insights into school quality depending on how it is calculated. (See “Quick Guide to Student Growth Data” on p. 4 for more on those different approaches.)



Why use school-level growth measures?

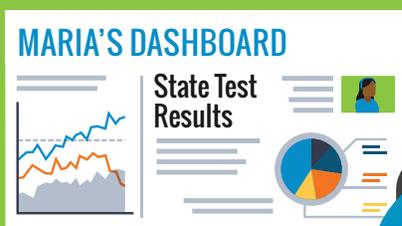
Growth measures give state and local leaders a more complete picture of school quality and help shine a light on schools that are typically overlooked by proficiency rates alone. For example, imagine a superintendent sees that 20 schools in her district have low proficiency rates in English language arts, which means that most students at these schools are not reading and writing on grade level. This data tells her these schools are in need of additional support. But it doesn't give her much information to act on.

She can also see the growth data for each school in her district. She can compare the data and see that one of those schools has high growth compared to the others. This information tells her that this school is doing a good job helping students improve, even though they are still performing below grade level.

She and her team might reach out to the principal to learn more about what teaching strategies the school is using. She can share those best practices with other principals. Without this growth measure, a state might overlook schools that are using promising practices because they have low proficiency rates. Growth measures provide a richer picture and show there is more to a school's story.

Which growth measure is your state using?

States have selected different ways to measure growth to show a more complete picture of student achievement. Some are using more than one method, which is helpful for understanding different aspects of students' academic progress. Every state has its own way of calculating this data, which is why it is important to know your state's unique approach to measuring student growth.



To learn more, check out DQC's resource: [Growth Data: It Matters, and It's Complicated.](#)

Quick Guide to STUDENT GROWTH DATA

There are different ways to measure growth,
which give different insights into student success.

Below are the five most common ways states are calculating growth data for accountability, including the technical term that may be used to describe the measure on a school report card.



VALUE ADDED

Of the five growth measures, value-added measures use the most sophisticated methods to calculate growth. Value-added measures use information about a student's past performance to make a personalized prediction for how they will perform on the annual test. Then, these measures compare the student's actual score to their predicted score. The difference between these scores demonstrates how educators in a school affected student learning. **While value-added measures can be more difficult to understand compared to other measures, they are the only measures that demonstrate how educators affect student performance.**

Did teachers help students in this school do better than we expected them to perform, even if they didn't get to a grade-level target?



STUDENT GROWTH PERCENTILE (SGP)

SGP measures demonstrate how students in a school performed compared to a group of other students in the same grade across the state who performed similarly in the past. **These measures show differences in how schools are serving students at the same proficiency level.**

Did students in this school do better than their peers even if they didn't improve much?



VALUE TABLE

Value table measures create additional performance levels above and below proficiency, such as "advanced" and "below basic." **These measures demonstrate whether students have improved, even if they haven't reached the proficiency target.**

Did students in this school learn enough to move their test scores from below basic to basic, even if they didn't reach proficiency?



GAIN SCORE

Gain score measures track student improvement on annual state tests year to year. **These measures demonstrate how many students in a school achieved the state target for improving their score.**

Did students in this school improve their reading scores, even though they already achieved proficiency last year?



GROWTH TO PROFICIENCY

Growth to proficiency measures look at how much students have or have not improved on annual state tests in the past to predict when students will reach a set score that counts as proficient. **These measures help identify schools where more students will reach or maintain proficiency.**

Are students on track to reach proficiency within the next few years?

Each approach to measuring student growth gives a different insight into student achievement.
What is student growth data telling you about your child's school?

You Deserve CLEAR INFORMATION

About Student Growth on School Report Cards

With growth data, you can gain a more complete picture of students' academic success in your child's school. But you shouldn't have to be a detective to find and understand this data.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- ✓ Do I know where to find the public report card for my child's school?
- ✓ Can I easily find data about student growth or progress on the report card?
- ✓ Do I know what this data is telling me?
- ✓ What questions do I have about this data?

Take the following steps to gain a clearer understanding:

Ask your child's principal or teacher questions such as the following:

- ✓ How is growth measured at this school? Does it offer information about student progress toward a learning goal? Does it measure how adults are helping students?
- ✓ What does this growth data reveal about student achievement and progress?
- ✓ How does this growth compare to other schools in the district?
- ✓ How do you and the school use this information to improve student success?
- ✓ Where can I access information about my child's progress?
- ✓ How do you protect my child's privacy?

Call on your state leaders to ensure that

- ✓ school-level growth data is easy to find and understand; and
- ✓ parents and educators have access to individual students' growth data.

When you have the information you need about student growth at your child's school, you can be a stronger advocate for your child.

