

An Introduction to CLAS

Educators know that a variety of external factors can affect student achievement. They also know that each child is a unique individual with a unique learning style. Until now, however, statistical methodology has limited our means of evaluating student performance and school and educator effectiveness. In North Carolina, student testing and evaluation methods have focused on school progress instead of the charting of individual student progress. This is changing.

Wake County Public Schools is developing and implementing an improved way of evaluating school and teacher effects on student achievement. The new approach is called the Classroom-Level Assessment System, or CLAS. The CLAS approach focuses on a method called value-added, because it concentrates on the "value" added to each student's achievement by teachers from one year to the next. In the CLAS system, an individual student's past testing record will be considered when school and classroom achievement are evaluated for effectiveness. In addition to a student's achievement being compared to that of other students, as we have done in the past, the academic gains of each WCPSS student will be compared with his/her earlier progress. Additionally, CLAS will provide more information for teacher and principal use.

By carefully tracking individual student progress over time and using improved statistical methods, the new CLAS value-added approach will measure academic performance and school and teacher/team effectiveness more accurately and more fairly than earlier measures.

Of course, new ideas can mean new ways of working. For the new value-added approach, it means new ways of gathering data. It also means that data will be collected for at least three years before comparisons begin. Data collection in grades 3-8 reading and math began in May 1999, when the WCPSS Evaluation and Research Department began the first phase of this new way of looking at student achievement and school and teacher/team effectiveness.

An advisory committee has been formed to work on the new CLAS project. Committee members include parent, community, administrator, teacher, and central office representatives. If you have questions, please contact

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*Each child is a unique individual
with a unique learning style.*



Individual student progress will be charted and compared with previous performance.



School and teacher effectiveness can be measured more accurately and fairly.



Assessments will be based on three to five years of data providing more information for teacher use.

CLAS Advisory Committee

Richard Bostic, NCGA Financial Analyst
Parent Representative

Maurice Boswell, Asst. Superintendent
Human Resources, WCPSS

Yvette Britton, Teacher
Weatherstone Elementary School

Jennifer Bryant, Teacher
Centennial Campus Middle School

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Math, WCPSS

Ed Gainor, Principal
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Campbell University

Tony Habit, President
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North Garner Middle School

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Title I, WCPSS

Julie Nau, President
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Produced By
Evaluation and Research Department
Wake County Public School System
March 2001 E&R 01.17

Classroom- Level Assessment System

**A New
Way of
Looking at
Achievement
at the
Classroom
Level**



Wake County Public School System

Frequently Asked Questions

What is CLAS?

CLAS is an acronym for the Classroom-Level Assessment System. CLAS is a new way of looking at student achievement which focuses on the individual student. It is designed to assist WCPSS teachers and principals in charting student academic growth over time and to provide more information about the effectiveness of teaching methods and strategies.

When did WCPSS start using CLAS?

Data collection for CLAS began in the spring of 1999. For CLAS to reach its full usefulness, three to five years of data must be collected. Meanwhile, an advisory committee composed of educator and parent representatives is guiding the direction and development of CLAS.

Does any other school system use CLAS?

No. Some similar methods are in use around the country. For instance, Prince George's and Montgomery Counties in Maryland, a few school systems in Florida and Texas, and all Tennessee schools are currently using or developing similar processes.

How is CLAS different from the current testing and evaluation methods we use?

In CLAS, a student acts as his/her own control. This means that students are compared with their own previous performance over time. Additionally, CLAS provides an estimate of the effects of educators on the academic growth of students. Current methods use only two consecutive years of data and compare schools with other schools.

What are the advantages of using CLAS?

CLAS enables educators to measure the achievement of individual students based on their entire past performance. This means that external factors, such as socioeconomic status, will not effect growth calculations in the CLAS model, since the measurement of a student's academic progress is based on that student's previous performance.

Because both classroom- and student-level data will be generated, CLAS has the potential to enable teachers to individualize and adjust teaching methods to complement student learning styles. It will help teachers/teams assess which instructional methods work best for each student.

How can CLAS be used with the other student achievement evaluation tools already in use by WCPSS?

Currently, WCPSS and all other systems in North Carolina use the ABCs program which establishes growth standards for all participating schools. The ABCs measurement system reports student academic growth county-by-county and school-by-school throughout North Carolina. It does not, however, report student- or classroom-level growth data.

WCPSS also uses the Effectiveness Index, a tool specific to Wake County. The Effectiveness Index reports growth by school in WCPSS over a two-year period.

The CLAS method moves beyond the ABCs measures and the Effectiveness Index. One major difference is that CLAS measures student growth over a minimal 3-5 year period. Also, CLAS concentrates on both student-level and classroom-level data, unlike the earlier two methods. Using all three of these methods can give educators a fairer and more valid means of looking at student growth and teacher/team effectiveness.

