

Amplifying Student Strengths to Maximize Growth:

A Case Study in Ability, Achievement, and Equity

Executive Summary

Newton County Schools—a district of nearly 20,000 students located less than an hour from downtown Atlanta, Georgia—wanted a comprehensive view of student learning potential and academic development across their diversifying district.

Using the *Riverside Academic Insights Bundle* to **measure both student ability and achievement**, Newton County was able to transform their traditional classroom instruction with focused professional development investments in specific domains and grades, significantly improve their program placement process, and create a more equitable educational environment for English-Language-Learners (ELL) students.

Key Challenges

Newton County needed a comprehensive system to help them equitably assess each student's learning potential and performance so they could track students' cognitive development and academic growth across the district.

Ultimately, Newton County needed a dynamic solution to measure each student's ability and achievement so teachers could:

- 1 Identify learning gaps more quickly to guide personalized instruction interventions;
- 2 Inform teaching strategies and focus areas based on overarching grade-level and classroom trends; and
- 3 Facilitate equity in the program placement process by removing language barriers for ELL students.

Quick Facts



19,750 students across 24 campuses



56% Black students

30% White students

9% Hispanic students

4% Multiracial students

1% Asian students



~ 1,500 teachers and ~ 700 faculty



14 elementary schools



5 middle schools



3 high schools



2 program schools

Overview of Solutions:

A Toolkit for Student Insights

The Newton County School System implemented the *Academic Insights Bundle*, including the *Cognitive Abilities Test™ (CogAT®)*, *Iowa Assessments™*, and *Logramos™*, to assess student's ability and achievement across the district.

Thanks to the flexibility of these bundled solutions, district administrators, building principals, and teachers across Newton County Schools can:

- Develop a comprehensive view of student learning potential and progress
- Create personalized learning plans for each student
- Predict college and career readiness of students as early as middle school
- Quickly identify students who need the support of specialized programs

Ultimately, this unique bundle of assessment solutions gives Newton County Schools a centralized view of the district's progress and multi-faceted insights to better serve students, teachers, and administrators. The combination of student ability and achievement data equips educational leaders with the information necessary to accurately assess student and staff needs in order to support the challenges unique to each campus, grade level, classroom, and child.



Using Bundled Assessment Insights to Close the Gap Between Ability and Achievement

Located 42 miles east of Atlanta, the Newton County School System is a growing rural district with demographic patterns that reflect the evolution of the metro area.

As the district began to diversify, Dr. Allison Jordan, the Director of Testing, Research, & Evaluation for Newton County, sought to measure student ability (a student's potential for learning), and achievement (what students have already learned) while prioritizing equity and supporting an increasingly diverse student population.

Already familiar with both *CogAT* and the *Iowa Assessments*, Dr. Jordan selected the *Academic Insights Bundle* because of the comprehensiveness of the insights and their flexible, real-world applications.



"After 8 years in this role, I look at assessments in a different way than I did before. To truly help our students, we need to look beyond achievement scores and assess where each student really is and what they are actually capable of achieving."

– Dr. Jordan, Director of Testing, Research, & Evaluation, Newton County Schools

The Complete Solution includes:

CogAT®



The industry-leading cognitive abilities assessment that measures student potential for learning

 Iowa Assessments™



An evidence-based achievement battery, administered to K-12 students to measure program effectiveness and student growth and achievement

 Logramos®
TERCERA EDICION



The Spanish-language version of the *Iowa Assessments*; used to assess bilingual learners in their native language

To get the most value out of the solution, Dr. Jordan decided to implement fall ability testing for all students in kindergarten, 2nd and 6th grades to ensure up-to-data *Ability Profile*™ Scores for all students as well as fall and spring achievement testing for K-12 students to measure learning progress and growth.

This testing cadence, along with detailed reporting capabilities, gives Newton County the most complete picture of individual student development.

Improved Program Placement: Early Identification & Early Intervention

With the tools to measure the ability and achievement levels of each student early in the school year, educators within the district can more equitably identify the program needs of their students—including those who may need the additional challenge of gifted programming as well as those who may need additional support and should be evaluated for access to Special Education resources.

By the end of 2nd grade, Newton County students have three years of fall and spring achievement data and an updated *CogAT Ability Profile* on record. With this extensive data, educators can compare overall student ability and achievement, focus on the students whose profiles indicate clear discrepancies (especially in sub-group populations), and determine the resource and instructional needs of each child.

For example, if a student who appears unmotivated in the classroom and scores low on achievement but high on ability, it may be an indication that the student needs greater challenge and would be better served in an advanced academic program.

Alternatively, if a high-achieving student has a lower-than-anticipated ability score, they may be operating at the limits of their learning potential and get discouraged, rather than thrive, in an accelerated learning environment. While this high-performing student may be attentive in the classroom and sustain above-average achievement, their performance may be the result of extra exposure or access to resources like tutoring. After examining this student's ability and achievement profile together, an educator might reasonably conclude that this child is currently best served in the general education context.

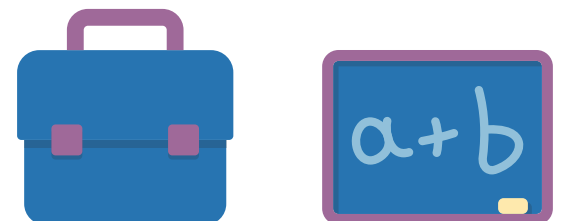


"When it comes to equitable resources and opportunities, it's so important for us to understand how each child's brain processes information and what their strengths are—knowing that their cognitive abilities will evolve and grow over time."

"When we couple the CogAT with the Iowa Assessments, it empowers us, as educators. Combining these tools allows us to understand each child so we can tap into the unique ways they learn and process information. It's incredible."

— Dr. Allison Jordan
Newton County School District

Identifying these nuances in elementary school and connecting students with the appropriate resources at an earlier age makes a significant difference for both students and teachers. In addition to aiding in program placement, Newton County's testing data also helps district administrators accurately assess staffing needs for general education, gifted and talented, and special education.



Prioritizing Equity: Removing the Language Barrier for English Learners

Over the past decade, Newton County's Spanish-speaking population has grown steadily, rendering the district's English-only assessments inadequate to measure English Learners' achievement.

When language is a complicating factor, it is difficult to accurately measure student ability and achievement, but with the *Academic Insights Bundle*, Newton County can do both.

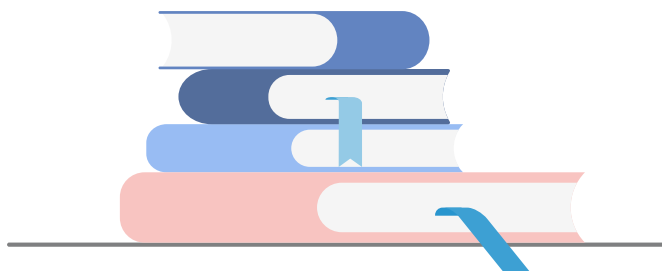
With *CogAT*'s instructions offered in multiple languages and the introduction of *Logramos*, the Spanish-language version of the *Iowa Assessments*, Spanish-speaking students do not have to contend with a language barrier to demonstrate their learning potential and levels of achievement.

Here's how Dr. Jordan, Newton County's Director of Testing, Research, & Evaluation, describes it:



“We are extremely excited to utilize *Logramos*. As our district continues to grow, our Hispanic and Latino population is increasing. To better understand where these students are and how to help them as they enter our district, we plan to administer *Logramos* to incoming Spanish-speaking students with limited English proficiency.

We've already seen the effectiveness of this method. There's one student in our district who moved here from a Spanish-speaking country and came to us with very limited English. This student was identified as a 4th grader in his home country but in the United States, he was placed in middle school because of his age. When he started school in our district, we administered *Logramos* and he scored incredibly high in terms of NPR. In the past, English-language tests failed to capture his exceptional learning potential, academic comprehension, and performance. We were able to place him appropriately because we had a Spanish achievement assessment.”



Maximum Flexibility: How Teachers Use Predictive Data to Personalize Classroom Instruction

One of the core benefits of the *Academic Insights Bundle* is the flexibility it provides. With access to a variety of assessments and data analysis tools, educators can pick and choose the assessment content that best serves their students and informs personalized learning plans based on each student's unique ability-achievement profile.

For Newton County, two reporting features have changed the game for teachers: the Class Item Analysis Report and the End-of-year Prediction Report.

Using side-by-side fall and spring testing data from the *Iowa Assessments* and *Logramos*, the Class Item Analysis Report allows teachers to compare their students' beginning-of-the-year performance (achievement prior to instruction) and end-of-the-year performance (achievement after instruction) to measure individual and collective student growth. Measuring this growth down to the item level empowers educators to continuously improve their instructional strategies.



"The Class Item Analysis Report is so powerful for teachers. Having that level of detailed data for students on an assessment that has proven—year after year—to be quality, valid, and reliable is incredibly valuable. Newton County teachers use data from CogAT and the Iowa Assessments to inform and drive instruction."

— Dr. Allison Jordan, Title
Newton County School District

Teachers across the district use this analysis to identify trends across their classrooms so they can address prevalent knowledge gaps and maintain grade-level achievement standards.

If a student's fall and spring test results are similar, teachers troubleshoot why the student is not achieving at a higher level after receiving classroom instruction. When students' spring test results exceed their fall test results, teachers can evaluate which of their instructional methods were most impactful for student growth.



The End-of-year Prediction Report helps benchmark the most likely outcome for students at the end of the school year for both the individual and classroom level given their current learning trajectories. This equips teachers with the insights necessary to modify classroom instruction to help students fill learning gaps throughout the year.

By the end of the year, teachers can compare predicted scores to actual scores, celebrate successes, identify instructional improvement opportunities, refine their teaching methods, and adapt their approach to accommodate the specific needs of individual students.

While this particular tool has many useful applications, it is immensely helpful for teachers who want to support college-bound students through additional instruction and/or targeted ACT and SAT prep.

Real world application:

“We use the End-of-Year prediction report to better support students who have expressed an interest in pursuing a college degree. With this tool, we can assess predictive data at the middle school level and develop customized learning plans to help our students chart individual paths that take them where they want to go long-term.”

– Dr. Jordan, Newton County Schools



Pro-tip

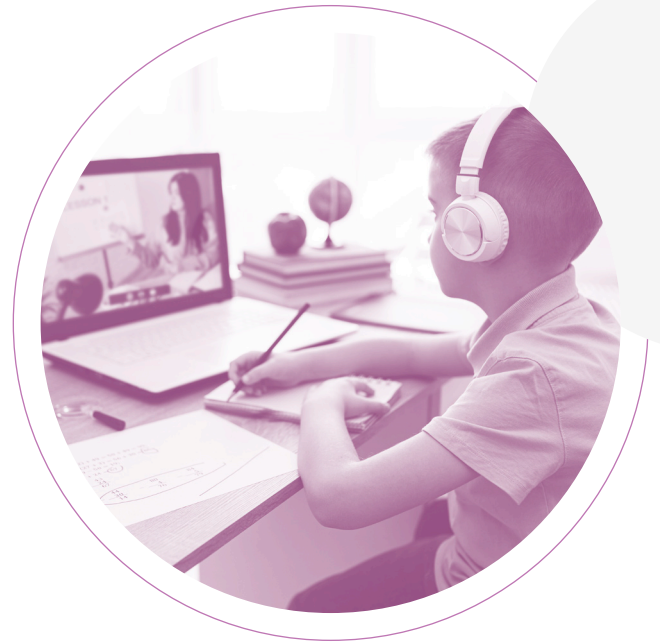
Use the Class Item Analysis to identify your classroom's baseline. Then, tailor your instruction to meet those baseline needs. If there are students who register far above or below your classroom baseline, analyze their individual data more closely before considering program placement. If they are English learners, consider whether an English-language assessment may have negatively impacted their results.



Summary

By strategically combining different tools within Riverside's *Academic Insights Bundle*, Newton County successfully pioneered a strengths-based approach to student development across the district and instituted a flexible instructional model that significantly benefits both teachers and students for more equitable outcomes.

Today, Newton County educators use *Academic Insights Bundle* data to inform and drive instruction, identify ability-achievement gaps and implement program interventions for individual students, and integrate more equitable educational practices.



Assessment Bundles Offer Greater Value

Riverside Insights' Academic Insights Bundle includes the *Iowa Assessments*, and *CogAT* for grades K-12 and *Logramos* and *IowaFlex™*, Riverside Insights' newest adaptive Reading and Math benchmark assessment, for grades K-8 - all for a single price per student.



Learn more about our assessment bundles at

riversideinsights.com