



Dear GEMS Families,

As I mentioned in my previous letter, here is the second installment on the topic of Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) MAP testing. For your information, we will be administering the test **three** times this year instead of two, which will provide good data points at the midway point of the school year and also close to the end of the year. Here are some of the things we've done to improve the test experience of our students.

First, we compressed the test schedule so that all testing would be completed in five school days rather than over multiple weeks. Compressing the test window will give us a tighter set of data because there is less of a discrepancy in terms of days of instruction between those scheduled to take the test at the beginning of the testing period and those scheduled at the end. In addition, with the compressed schedule, we were able to devote the week entirely to testing; we didn't permit Field Studies during the testing week, which meant there were fewer distractions and disruptions.

Second, we purchased 50 Chromebook computers which, coupled with our Mac laptop carts, allowed us to set up four classroom testing centers in the building. Students left their classrooms to go to a specific testing site. Not only did this feel like a more serious testing situation, it also was a more consistent one.

Third, we worked with our faculty to provide an improved proctoring experience. We laid out guidelines and expectations for proctors, read scripted instructions to students and ensured that students had a quiet test environment free from interruptions. We also encouraged proctors to take notes on individual students to provide important context for how a student was approaching the exercise.

Finally, we scheduled all students to take the tests before lunch, which is a demonstrably better time during the day to complete these kinds of assessments.

I would like to make one additional related point. We've committed to teach math, reading and writing EVERY school day to our young learners, unless, of course, they are out of the building on a Field Studies trip. This will help our students master skills and appropriate grade-level content, which will allow our students to be better prepared to take these tests in the future.

We'll be sending NWEA scores home with Lower School students on Tuesday, Oct. 9. Our faculty have taken a first look at the higher level data and will be taking a deeper dive in the coming weeks. Again, our intention is to use these scores not as a measure of achievement, but as a tool that will help to inform and guide our instruction of grade levels and of individual students, which is how NWEA intended the test to be used by schools.

It's hard to believe we are already in October! I hope you and your families have a wonderful Columbus Day weekend.

—Tom Cangiano

GEMS HIGHLIGHTS



Chemistry lab activity at Plant Chicago

Our sixth-graders recently visited Plant Chicago, a collection of food businesses committed to sustainable production and consumption practices. Students participated in a chemistry lab in which they measured levels of pH, ammonia and other materials in samples of water to determine whether the water was suitable for aquaponics — systems in which aquatic animals and plants coexist in symbiotic relationships. A great example of how we use the city as our classroom! More pictures from this Field Study can be seen in the Facebook gallery [here](#).



New security team at GEMS

As mentioned in an earlier newsletter, we have brought aboard a new security company and team here at GEMS. Securitas, the new company, is a locally focused, nationally established security firm. As an industry leading security provider, Securitas focuses on ways to continuously improve our operational structure, the knowledge of our employees and the processes surrounding service delivery. We are delighted to welcome Securitas to our community. Feel free to say hello to our new guards, Terrance and Paul, as well as Clarence and Clinton, who will continue to work at GEMS as part of the Securitas team.



A look at how the Supreme Court works

Thank you to Ms. Weinstein, an attorney, who took the time to visit with our eighth-graders to talk about the Supreme Court, its history and the process by which justices are appointed. Her talk was timely because of recent news about the court, and it fit with the students' inquiry into American identity.



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