With the annual tests now required by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), as well as the tests many states and districts have, one problem with the implementation of standards and accountability is how to make all that assessment data useful. Typically, most teachers get test scores back long after the students have moved on and, in any case, teachers have little basis for determining what the scores mean.

To address this problem, four years ago a small group of former teachers, education consultants, and information technology specialists formed The Grow Network, working with states and districts to turn test results into customized tools that support instruction. A variety of services are offered for teachers, administrators, and parents through print reports and online. Here are a few of the most exciting tools for teachers.

**Easy to Read Test Results for Your Incoming Class**

You read it right: Assessment results can be delivered in the summer that tell you how your incoming class of students performed on the spring tests—both overall and broken out in various ways such as state standards or NCLB categories (depending on the needs of the state or district). Below are sample pages from a sixth grade teacher’s print report on mathematics (there are also online reports, which we’ll get to). Notice how you can quickly see which students need the most help. In addition, there’s a summary of the class’s strengths and weaknesses—a great tool for planning instruction for the coming year.

**Analysis of Each Student’s Strengths and Weaknesses**

The print report helps you get to know your incoming class as a whole, but as a teacher, you’ve got to deal with each individual’s strengths and weaknesses. Using the Grow Network’s Web site, you can examine each student’s skills in detail. The sample page on the far right shows how Anita Adams (the first student under “Far Below Standards” in the print report) did on each section of her fifth-grade mathematics assessment and how her performance compares to others in the school district. Anita’s score on “Number and Numeration” is much lower than the district average; obviously, she needs a lot of extra help in this topic if she’s going to catch up. With a click, Anita’s teacher can move from identifying Anita’s needs (in this case, in “number properties”) to a set of relevant online instructional materials. The sample page above shows the introduction to number properties. These materials are written by current and former teachers and are based on state and/or district standards.

For more information on the Grow Network, e-mail: inquiries@grow.net.

**Making Student Assessment Data Useful**

Standards and accountability are here—for better, for worse. Better, because student performance is now transparent, meaning that school systems can no longer ignore inadequate achievement—especially among our most vulnerable children and in our most distressed schools. Worse, because implementation is often crude and sometimes it even discourages good practice. In this space, we’ll take a regular look at what’s better, what’s worse—and what should be repaired—as a result of the movement toward standards and accountability.

**FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE**

Parents are important educators, but often—and especially as their children get older—they don’t know where their children need help or how to provide it. The Grow Network’s parent report provides test scores, explains what they mean, and uses the scores to suggest books and activities that will engage students in learning throughout the summer. In addition, teachers in New York City, Chicago, and California say these reports are great for parent-teacher conferences.