

What is a Grade Equivalent Score?

A grade equivalent (GE) score is described as both a growth score and a status score both. As is common with scores that can be used in both major categories GE do not do a very good job in either category. However, what GE does is indicate where a student's test score falls along a continuum. The GE is expressed as a decimal number (4.8). The digit(s) to the left of the decimal represent the grade. The digit(s) to the right of the decimal represent the month. We assume 10 months per school year. The GE of a given raw score on any test indicates the grade level at which the typical student earns this raw score. For example, if a seventh grade student earned a GE of 8.4 her raw score is like the raw score the typical student would likely earn on the same test at the end of the fourth month of the eighth grade.

The median raw score of students tested in the spring of each grade is assigned a GE of .8. Thus, for seventh graders a GE of 7.8 represents the median raw score of a student tested in the spring, while the average spring score for an eighth grade student would be 8.8, and so forth. We can expect the average student to grow by 1.0 units. High achieving student may grow more and low achieving student may grow less, or vice versa.

It is important to realize that GE scores outside a particular student's grade are common and should be interpreted cautiously. For example, a fourth grader could receive a GE of 6.3. This does not mean that this student can perform sixth grade work, or be immediately placed in the sixth grade. The fourth grade test does not contain any sixth grade content, nor has the student been exposed to any sixth grade content. To clarify no 6th grade content, but there would be some 5th grade content, and possibly some 3rd grade content. This score simply means that on this day this student performed much better than the average student performed on the test.

Grade equivalent scores have their limitations. GE scores tend to "top-out" and "bottom-out." This becomes evident when we compare GE to scaled scores and percentile ranks scores. Another limitation is that identical GE scores on tests in different subjects do not necessarily represent identical performance. Thus, it may be misleading to use GE to determine areas of relative strength and weaknesses, especially when students or groups of students score at both ends of the continuum. It is for this reason that another status score, such as percentile ranks and another growth score such as standard scores are recommended in place of GE scores.

Remember that grade and age equivalent scores are ordinal scores. Because there are unequal intervals between scores, as with all ordinal scores, we cannot add, subtract, multiply or divide them. Another limitation of GE is that they assume equal growth between grades. Use the chart below to compare NSS, NPR and GE scores based on the ITBS/ITED.