

What are the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs)?

These are tests Minnesota schools give every year to measure student performance on our state standards. These standards outline what our students should know and do in a particular grade.

Why Do We Give These tests?

We use the MCAs to find out how well students have learned the Minnesota Academic Standards in mathematics, reading and science. The mathematics and reading assessments are also used to determine whether schools and districts have made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) toward the ESEA goal of all students being proficient.

Schools use the information from these tests to improve teaching and learning. Teachers and principals look for areas where students do well. They can reinforce the ways they teach these skills. They also look for areas that need improvement. They may alter the ways they teach these areas, or they may increase the time they give to them.

The MCAs also follow Minnesota's rules for testing and the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

Who Must Take These Tests?

Minnesota's rules for testing and the federal ESEA require that mathematics and reading tests be given in grades 3–8, and high school (students in grade 10 take the Reading MCA and students in grade 11 take the Mathematics MCA). With very few exceptions, all public school students in the above grades take the Mathematics and Reading MCAs.

The Science MCA is given to students in grades 5 and 8 and in the high school grade when they take a life science course.

Students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan may be eligible for accommodations. Some students may be eligible to take the MCA-Modified, an alternate assessment based on modified achievement standards in mathematics and reading. Other students with significant cognitive disabilities may be eligible to take the Minnesota Test of Academic Skills (MTAS), an alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards in mathematics, reading and science. See the [Alternate Assessment Eligibility Requirements](#) on the MDE website for more information.

What Does it Take to Pass the Tests?

Students do not pass or fail the tests given in grades 3–8. Each student receives a score that falls in one of four achievement levels—Does Not Meet the Standards, Partially Meets the Standards, Meets the Standards and Exceeds the Standards.

MCA tests administered at grades 10 (reading) and 11 (mathematics) have an embedded GRAD assessment. Students who are proficient on the MCA (score falls in the Meets Standards or Exceeds Standards achievement level) or pass the GRAD component (score of 50 or higher)

have met their diploma assessment requirement for mathematics or reading, and are considered to have passed the test. For further information, view, the GRAD Parent Brochure on the MDE website.

What Skills are Assessed by the MCA?

In 2011, the reading and science assessments will be aligned to the 2003 academic standards. The mathematics assessments for grades 3–8 will be aligned to the 2007 version of the mathematics standards. The mathematics assessment for grade 11 continues to be aligned to the 2003 academic standards. View Minnesota Academic Standards on the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) Website (http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Academic_Excellence/Academic_Standards/index.html)

What is the format of the tests?

Students answer both multiple-choice and short answer questions for math and reading. There is no penalty for guessing. On the writing test, students write on a particular topic.

What is the difference between the MCAs and the national tests some students take?

The MCAs are specific to Minnesota. We use these tests to help us learn what Minnesota students know about Minnesota standards. Some schools and districts also use national tests such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills or NWEA to learn how their students' knowledge and skills compare to other students throughout the country.

How do I Find out About My Child's MCA Results?

At the end of summer, all tests results are sent to the school district. The district, in turn, will send the parent/guardian a student report that explains individual results. It has information about achievement level, subtest scores, comparisons to various groups, and comparisons to their student's performance in past years, when applicable. View school and district results at: <http://education.state.mn.us/ReportCard2005/index.do>

What is a passing score?

Students do not pass or fail the MCAs. Instead, parents and schools get information on how students perform in math and reading. You can use the information to review the progress of your child in school. Schools can use the information to guide decisions about teaching and learning.

How do I find MCA results for my school and district?

We send your school and district their results, and you may contact them directly. You may also find the results for any school or district at the Minnesota Department of Education website. Click on the School Report Card tab at the top of the page.

How can I help a child prepare for these tests?

- Encourage them to participate in practice sessions at school and home.
- Have them get a good night's sleep and a nutritious breakfast before taking a test.
- Encourage them to answer all test questions they know for sure. Have them put a small mark by those that give them trouble. The test is not timed, so they can go back to the questions they marked.
- Read to them and encourage them to read to you.
- Try crossword puzzles and news quizzes in your local newspaper.
- Discuss the events and stories you read about in the newspaper.
- Encourage them to use math every day. They can practice by creating a grocery budget, explaining charts and graphs from newspaper and magazine articles, dividing food portions, using rulers to measure objects, measuring a recipe, or adding prices on a shopping trip.
- Play games that involve numbers or computation.
- Write notes to students and encourage them to write notes and letters to others.
- Encourage students to keep a journal or diary.
- Encourage them to connect what they are learning in math class to their hobbies, other classes, and everyday life.

Familiarize them with the test directions and the format. You can download Item Samplers from the state website or contact your school for a copy.

What if I have further questions about the MCAs?

Your child's teacher or principal will have details about how the tests are given at your school. If you have further questions, contact the [Minnesota Department of Education](#).