Questions and Answers about the MCA in Reading, Mathematics, and Science

What is the MCA?

The Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA) are state tests in reading, mathematics, and science that are used to meet federal and state legislative requirements. The tests are administered every year to measure student performance relative to the Minnesota Academic Standards that specify what students in a particular grade should know and be able to do.

Why do we give these tests?

We use the MCA to find out how well schools have aligned curriculum to and instructed students in the Minnesota Academic Standards in reading, mathematics, and science. The reading and mathematics assessments are also used in federal and state accountability measurements.

Schools use the information to improve classroom teaching and learning. Teachers and principals look for areas where students do well so they can reinforce the ways they teach these skills. They also look for areas that need improvement so they can increase instructional time or modify their instruction.

Who must take these tests?

All students in public schools are required to participate in the statewide assessment program. Reading and mathematics tests are administered in grades 3–8 and high school (students in grade 10 take the Reading MCA, and students in grade 11 take the Mathematics MCA). The Science MCA is administered to students in grades 5 and 8 and in the high school grade when students take a life science or biology course. With very few exceptions, all public school students in the above grades take the MCA.

Students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan may be eligible for accommodations. Some students with significant cognitive disabilities may be eligible to take the Minnesota Test of Academic Skills (MTAS) instead of the MCA. The MTAS is an alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards in reading, mathematics, and science. For more information, see the *MTAS Eligibility Requirements* on the MDE website (Go to Districts, Schools and Educators > Statewide Testing > Minnesota Tests).

How are tests administered?

All grades of the Reading, Mathematics, and Science MCA are administered online only. Paper accommodations are available for eligible students, including large print and braille.

The online Reading and Mathematics MCA are adaptive tests, which means that the test adjusts to each student's responses.

- For reading, the test adjusts at a passage level, so a student's responses to a set of items for a passage determine the next group of passages and items a student will receive.
- For mathematics, every time a student answers a question, his or her response helps determine the next question the student will answer.

How can students prepare for the tests?

The *Test Preparation Suggestions for Parents and Teachers* handout on the MDE website (Go to Students and Families > Statewide Testing) is available on the MDE website with tips on content preparation and general test-taking strategies.

Item samplers help students become familiar with the format of the test and the types of questions that are on the test. Student tutorials for online tests provide information on using the online tools and describe navigation and item types. Go to the Item Samplers page on the MDE website (Go to Districts, Schools and Educators > Statewide Testing > Item Samplers) for information on accessing the item samplers and student tutorials.

What does it take to pass the tests?

Students do not pass or fail the reading, mathematics, or science tests. Since the tests measure student performance relative to the Minnesota Academic Standards, 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.

What skills are assessed by the MCA?

The MCA measures student performance on the Minnesota Academic Standards (Go to Districts, Schools and Educators > Academic Standards K-12).

- The Reading MCA is aligned to the 2010 academic standards.
- The Mathematics MCA is aligned to the 2007 academic standards.
- The Science MCA is aligned to the 2009 academic standards.

How can I see the MCA results for my child, school, and district?

Your school will receive an individual student report for your child and will provide this information to you. This report shows your child's overall score in each subject, as well as scores for specific skill areas within each subject. It includes information about achievement level, comparisons to various groups, and comparisons to the student's performance in past years, when applicable.

School and district results are available in the Minnesota Report Card on the MDE website (MDE website > Data Center > Minnesota Report Card).

For more information, contact Statewide Testing at:

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