Minnesota Department of Education

Questions and Answers About the MCA in Mathematics, Reading and Science Spring 2013

What are the MCAs?

The Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs) are state tests in mathematics, reading and science that meet the requirements of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). They are given every year to measure student performance against the Minnesota Academic Standards that specify what students in a particular grade should know and do.

Why do we give these tests?

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

The State of Minnesota and ESEA requires that all students in public schools participate in the statewide assessment program. Mathematics and reading tests are 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 or Biology 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. (See School Support > Test Administration > Minnesota Tests.)

How can students prepare for the tests?

The "Test Preparation Suggestions for Parents and Teachers" handout is available on the MDE website with tips on content preparation, general test-taking strategies and using a calculator. (See Just for Parents > Testing Information.)

Item samplers help students become familiar with the format of the test and provide examples of the types of questions that are on the test. You can find item samplers for each grade and subject on the Minnesota Assessments portal. (Go to www.mnstateassessments.org > Item Samplers.)

What does it take to pass the tests?

Students do not pass or fail the reading and mathematics tests given in grades 3–8 or the science tests given in grades 5, 8, and high school. 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.

The grade 10 Reading MCA and the grade 11 Mathematics MCA are used to meet graduation requirements. If students achieve Meets or Exceeds the Standards, they have met their graduation assessment requirement for that subject. In addition the grade 11 Mathematics MCA has an embedded Graduation-Required Assessment for Diploma (GRAD) component. Students who pass the GRAD component (score of 50 or higher) have met their graduation assessment requirement for mathematics. For further information on graduation requirements, view the GRAD Parent Fact Sheet on the MDE website. (See Just for Parents > Testing Information.)

How are tests administered?

All grades of the Science MCA are administered online only. All grades of the Reading MCA are administered online or on paper, as determined by each school. The grade 11 Mathematics MCA is administered on paper.

The Mathematics MCAs in grades 3–8 are online, adaptive tests, which means that every time a student answers a question, his or her response helps determine the next question the student will answer. MDE also continues to offer a paper version of the grades 3–8 Mathematics MCA and grades 3–8 and 10 Reading MCA for schools who choose to administer the test on paper.

What skills are assessed by the MCA?

The MCAs measure student performance on the Minnesota Academic Standards, which are available on the MDE website. (See Educator Excellence > Standards, Curriculum and Instruction > K-12 Academic Standards.)

- The Reading MCA is aligned to the 2010 academic standards.
- The grades 3–8 Mathematics MCA are aligned to the 2007 academic standards.

- The grade 11 Mathematics MCA continues to be aligned to the 2003 academic standards. In 2014, the grade 11 Mathematics MCA will be 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 district will receive an individual student report for each child who takes the MCA and will provide this information to parents and guardians. This report shows your child's overall score in each subject, as well as scores for specific skill areas within each subject. It also 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 Data Center on the MDE website. (See Data Center > Data for Parents and Educators.)

For more information, contact:

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