

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

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 be able to do.

Why do we give these tests?

We use the MCAs to find out how well schools have aligned curriculum to 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). 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. With very few exceptions, all public school students in the above grades take the MCAs.

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 mathematics, reading and science. [See the MTAS Eligibility Requirements on the MDE website for more information.](#) (Go to School Support > Test Administration > 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.

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.

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 and general test-taking strategies. [View the Test Preparation handout on the MDE website](#). (Go to 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 PearsonAccess website (www.pearsonaccess.com/mn). [View the item samplers on the PearsonAccess website](#). (Go to PearsonAccess > Item Samplers.)

Student tutorials show students how to navigate in the online test, use online test tools, and answer different types of test questions. [View online student tutorials on the PearsonAccess website](#). (Go to PearsonAccess > Resources > Student Resources.)

What does it take to pass the tests?

Students do not pass or fail the reading, mathematics, or science tests. 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 MCAs measure student performance on the Minnesota Academic Standards. [View the Minnesota Academic Standards on the MDE website](#). (Go to Educator Excellence > Standards, Curriculum and Instruction > K-12 Academic Standards.)

- 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 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 Minnesota Report Card section of the Data Center on the MDE website. [Go to the Minnesota Report Card section of the MDE website.](#) (Go to Data Center > Minnesota Report Card.)

For more information, contact:

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