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Assessment and Accountability

It is essential to enact fundamental change that will ensure Minnesota's system of education prepares our students for success in an increasingly competitive world.

Despite a decade of testing in Minnesota, assessment results do not indicate the kind of progress Minnesota expects in order to have all students adequately prepared for the future they will face. Minnesota continues to have one of the biggest achievement gaps in the nation. Higher education systems continue to have substantial remedial costs to assure students are ready to take college level courses. In addition there is evidence of a narrowing of curricular offerings both at the elementary, middle and high school levels.

The Governor is interested in seeking solutions to our assessment system that provides better testing for instruction and accountability. To this end, he would also like to see "less" testing, especially at elementary if at all possible.

Commissioner of Education, seeking to develop an assessment system in Minnesota she will provide better and more meaningful results for students, convened an Assessment and Accountability Working Group to assist her in finding meaningful changes. The Work Group was charged with reviewing our current assessment requirements to make recommendations related to the following:

The GRAD and high school assessments.

- Look at other states and what they use for graduation requirements
 - Look at college ready assessments that are aligned to Minnesota's higher education system (MnScu)
 - Determine if our measures are redundant or misaligned.
 - Specifically review high school graduation requirements.
- Should the old system of course taking, Carnegie units, and exit exams be replaced
 - What would be more meaningful for students and parents.
 - Should students be prepared for and provided a wider array of options after graduation
 - What is role of career and technical options?
- Explore state and federal laws for accountability for alignment
 - Does our current system meet local needs?
 - Are districts forced to add tests in order to inform instruction?
- Consider the impact of assessment on instructional time, financial costs, curriculum offerings
- Consider the impact such as costs, time to develop, transition to new system, and feasibility of new assessments to give us what we need to measure accurately school and student performance.
- Consider how any "newly" proposed system will impact other things such as teacher and principal accountability and Minnesota's new accountability under the waiver.

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The Work Group was to make recommendations for better testing in the following areas:

1. Kindergarten assessment
2. Elementary assessments
3. 8-12 Secondary assessments aligned to high education admission requirements
4. Cost recommendations
5. Policy change recommendations (Carnegie units, course taking, exit, etc.)

Background:

Membership on the Working Group consisted of parents, school officials, teachers, business and public members and was determined by the Commissioner.

The Working Group held seven working meetings beginning on June 25, 2012. The final working meeting took place on November 27, 2012 at which time recommendations were adopted.

MDE staff provided information to the committee on current state standards, the state accountability system, current testing requirements and ESEA requirements. This was followed by presentations by ACT and the College Board, the two most prominent national assessment organizations used by colleges to help determine admissions. The group also heard from a representative from General Mills who shared the type of review the company does as they interview prospective employees and the types of skills and knowledge it is seeking.

Sub Committees:

After being grounded in this information the full committee divided into three sub committees to more thoroughly study the issues and develop recommendations.

These three sub committees were as follows:

Group 1: Elementary and Middle Level issues

Group 2: High school transitions

Group 3: The GRAD requirements

Each of these three sub committees then developed recommendations for the full committee to consider. The individual sub committee's reports can be found beginning on page 3 of this report. The recommendations were derived from full committee action based on the work and recommendations from the three sub committees. These recommendations will be forwarded to the Commissioner for her consideration and action.

Membership, meeting schedules and meeting documents from both the 2011 Work Group and the 2012 Work Group may be found at the following link.

<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Welcome/AdvBCT/AssessAccountWorkGroup/index.html>

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Assessment & Accountability Recommendations:

The following is a compilation and integration of the recommendations from the three sub-groups. These recommendations have been adopted by the Work Group to be forwarded to the Commissioner.

Recommendation 1:

The assessment system should be transparent, easy for teachers, students, parents and the public to understand; allow for multiple measures; provide timely results to support instructional and curricular changes.

Recommendation 2:

Assessments should be aligned from elementary through high school and consistent with Minnesota's academic standards and with Minnesota college entrance requirements.

Recommendation 3:

The Minnesota GRAD tests should be eliminated and replaced with comprehensive tests beginning in Grade 8 that includes math, reading, writing and/or science; aligned to college and career standards; with reporting options that can predict student success in post-secondary (career, two-year, four-year) programming.

These comprehensive tests should provide districts results to inform counseling and early intervention and should be sufficiently robust to satisfy admissions requirements for state colleges and universities.

Recommendation 4:

A career interest inventory should be administered in the eighth and ninth grades with an option for the inventory being available in grades 10 through 12 at the request of a student or a parent. This should be aligned at the middle and high school levels to encourage and emphasize post-secondary and career guidance and to provide optional components to measure technical and soft skills.

Recommendation 5:

Pre-school and kindergarten reading readiness or reading placement assessments be made available for school districts to use as part of its literacy development.

Recommendation 6:

Elementary assessments in reading and mathematics should be administered in at least two grade levels and at one grade level in science, one for baseline and one for accountability. Minnesota should continue to participate in NAEP as a means to measure achievement with other states.

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Recommendation 7:

Assessments should be aligned to Minnesota academic standards but multiple measures should be used to determine curriculum mastery.

Recommendation 8:

Minnesota should consider adopting the common core so that we are aligned with other states and prepared for the variety of national assessments (ACT, SAT, etc.) that may be developed around these standards.

Recommendation 9:

Minnesota should strive for the following:

1. Having on-line assessments for instant results;
2. Diagnostic, on-demand assessments be available to districts to support interventions;
3. That assessments have the psychometric quality that provides every student with precise scores that are reliable for both very low and very high achieving students.

Recommendation 10:

MDE should collaborate with the Office of Higher Education (OHE) and State-Wide Longitudinal Educational Data System (SLEDS) to provide transparency for parents and educators and to produce relevant reports for policy makers and the legislature to provide the following data:

1. The level of success on the achievement of success on achievement of state content standards,
2. Graduation, and college readiness,
3. Students' post-secondary enrollment and attainment.

For Committee Discussion

Recommendation 11:

Assessments results should support requirements contained in Minnesota's principal and teacher evaluation statutes related to student achievement outcomes.

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Sub Committee Reports:

The following are the reports from each of the sub-groups to the full committee.

Elementary/ Middle Level

The following is the report with recommendations from the Elementary and Middle Level Sub Committee.

1. Assessments should fulfill the following purposes:
2. Provide information on system accountability to determine the level of success on the achievement of state content standards;
3. Allow timely results to be used to support instructional and curricular alignment and changes; (formative and diagnostic assessments)
4. Allow for multiple measures;
5. Assessment system should be transparent, easy for teachers, students, parents and the public to understand;
6. Encourage all schools to move towards on-line assessment for instant results;
7. Pre-school and kindergarten- second grade reading readiness or reading placement assessment need to be included as part of literacy development; (third grade is too late)
8. Assessments should be aligned from elementary through high school and consistent with MN standards;
9. Use a comprehensive test beginning in grade 8 that includes math, reading, writing and/or science; aligned to college and career standards; with reporting options that can predict students success in post-secondary (career, two-year, four-year) programming;
10. The Minnesota Assessment System should support teacher evaluation and development as required by Minnesota Statutes, 122A.40;
11. The Minnesota Assessment System should continue improving the psychometric quality of existing tests so that every student receives a precise score. In other words strive to make scores more reliable for very low and very high achieving students.

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High School Transitions

The following is the report with recommendations from the High School Transitions to Post-Secondary Education Sub Committee

1. Begin with the end in mind- if our collective goal is college and career readiness for all students, mandate the use of a widely accepted, nationally normed college entrance exam system for all Minnesota students to be assessed in, aligned to state standards, in place of our current MCA exams beginning in 8th grade. The college entrance exam system adopted should have assessments of a predictive nature and be aligned to the college entrance exam beginning in 8th grade, continuing into 10th grade, with the college entrance exam to be taken in 11th or 12th grade.
2. Mandate for students beginning in grade 10, who are not on track with the nationally normed benchmark scores for college and career readiness from the system adopted college entrance system suite of assessments
 - a. To take a nationally normed diagnostic college entrance exam which can identify an individual student's skill deficits in foundational areas (reading, writing and math) and provide valuable information to teachers on areas to focus on and provide targeted interventions to address these needs while the student is still in high school.
 - b. To retake during the spring of grade 12 the same nationally normed diagnostic college entrance exam to identify whether skill deficits in foundational areas persist.
3. To have the greatest effect of this data on individual students' post-secondary intentions and plans leading to their entrance and growth of Minnesota's skilled work-force,
 - a. All middle and high schools should be encouraged to emphasize post-secondary and career guidance,
 - b. MDE should survey all middle and high schools on the post-secondary and career guidance they offer all students whether through counselors, career centers, advisories, courses or other means of engaging students and parents in post-secondary and career guidance,
 - c. MDE should assemble a working group to review the survey results and consider formulating post-secondary and career guidance standards for grades 6-12.
4. For transparency, accountability and decision making at the individual, school, school district and state levels, MDE should incorporate State-Wide Longitudinal Educational Data System (SLEDS) college readiness and post-secondary enrollment and attainment data on its Data Center web page for parents and educators and produce with the Office of Higher Education (OHE) relevant reports for policy makers and the legislature.
5. As with all assessment tools, it is also important to have a holistic view of a student's individual attributes. Thus, the group recommends that students have the opportunity to

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be assessed for career aspirations, technical skills and soft skills to help provide valuable information to students, their families, their teachers and their counselors for guidance into post-secondary education and career pathways

In order to make use of the diagnostic tools being developed based on the common core, the committee expresses interest in opening a conversation as soon as possible to determine whether Minnesota should reconsider its stance on the common core for mathematics.

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GRAD Subcommittee Recommendations

The following is the report with recommendations from the GRAD Subcommittee:

The GRAD subcommittee was specifically charged with considering the future of the GRAD requirement with the impending implementation of the MCA-III. Beginning in 2013 for Reading and 2014 for Mathematics, students will no longer have an opportunity to pass an embedded GRAD as part of the MCA-III administration. Students who achieve proficiency will satisfy the GRAD requirement under current rule. Those not proficient or high must then re-take the GRAD until passing all three. Under existing law, the Class of 2015 is the first cohort of students required to pass the Mathematics GRAD in addition to the Reading and Writing GRAD.

It is in this context that the GRAD subcommittee recommends the following for consideration by the Assessment and Accountability Work Group:

Recommendation 1: Eliminate the GRAD and its corresponding rules entirely and immediately.

Implications: Upon passage, students no longer must pass any GRAD test as a requirement for earning a diploma. All other state graduation requirements would remain.

Rationale: Minnesota cannot afford to continue an assessment misaligned with existing and future standards. While the research on the potential impact of high stakes graduation testing is not settled, a number of studies indicate that they have an overall negative impact, disproportionately borne by low income students, students of color, and English Learners. The GRAD re-orient high schools and a significant portion of students on the wrong outcome – passage of a state test. The GRAD requires an annual investment by the state for ongoing administration and imposes significant direct costs on districts and schools for administration and remediation. The GRAD also has significant opportunity costs associated with it for both students and schools

Recommendation 2: Refocus Minnesota's high school assessments on post-secondary readiness. Offer an assessment in the Grade 9-10 band providing a measure on high school readiness in Reading and Mathematics as well as the trajectory toward postsecondary readiness benchmarks.

- Also provide an interest inventory to inform choices about pathways.
- Diagnostic, on-demand assessments must be available to districts to support interventions with students off trajectory.
- Students may be re-assessed multiple times throughout the 9-10 band.
- A developmental writing assessment could be offered in 9 depending upon availability of resources offer a suite of assessments in Grades 11-12 designed to measure postsecondary readiness, with multiple benchmarks established for various pathways upon graduation.
- Assessments offered in Reading, Mathematics, and Writing. State can offer a much more rigorous writing assessment – potentially through innovative approaches, with the goal of substantive external feedback on writing exercises.

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- Assessments would also have diagnostic components to assist students in changing trajectories with multiple opportunities to access.
- Additional interest inventories provided with alignment to identified pathways upon graduation.
- Assessments should be sufficiently robust to satisfy state colleges and universities for admissions purposes.

Implications: Reframing the high school assessments required of Minnesota students with college and career readiness as the benchmark allows for the development of a coherent assessment system charged with providing students, families, educators, and the public with actionable information regarding the aspirations for all students.

Rationale: [To be determined, as this overlaps significantly with the recommendations of the other subcommittee]

Recommendation 3: Place primary accountability metrics at the school, district, and system level. Individual accountability is tied to completing requirements, not passing certain thresholds.

Implications: Individual student accountability no longer tied to specific scores on state assessments; individual student accountability tied to fulfillment of requirements, which could be enhanced, such as requiring participation in readiness assessments. System accountability tied to % of senior cohort reaching various readiness benchmarks within the traditional 4 years allotted to high school, with additional measures tied to the ultimate percentage of students reaching the threshold without consideration of time.

Rationale: State monitors and supports the system, not individuals, so system is the appropriate level for state accountability. It also supports the primary purpose of the assessment system to provide important, actionable information about student progress, in this case regarding postsecondary readiness. Reinforces the reality that high school graduation is not terminal, but a marker of a significant transition to further preparation.