

This document provides some basic information to help parents/guardians make informed decisions that benefit their child and their school and community.

### **Why statewide testing?**

Minnesota values its educational system and the professionalism of its educators. Minnesota educators created the academic standards which are rigorous and prepare our students for career and college.

The statewide assessments are how we as a state measure that the academic standards are being aligned to curriculum and daily instruction in our schools, ensuring all students are being provided an equitable education. Statewide assessment results are another tool to monitor that we are providing our children with the education that will ensure a strong workforce and knowledgeable citizens.

## **Academic Standards and Assessments**

### **What are academic standards?**

The Minnesota K–12 Academic Standards are the statewide expectations for student achievement. They identify the knowledge and skills that all students must achieve in a content area by the end of a grade. School districts determine how students will meet the standards by developing courses and curriculum.

### **What is the relationship between academic statewide assessments and the academic standards?**

The statewide assessments in mathematics, reading, and science are used to measure whether students, and their school and district, are meeting the academic standards. Statewide assessments are one measure of how well students are doing on the content that is part of their daily instruction. It is also a measure of how well schools and districts are doing in aligning their curriculum and teaching the standards.

#### **Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) and Minnesota Test of Academic Skills (MTAS)**

- Based on the Minnesota Academic Standards
- Given annually in grades 3–8 and in high school in reading and mathematics; given annually in grades 5, 8, and in high school for science
- Majority of students take the MCA
- MTAS is an option for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities

#### **ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS for English Learners**

- Based on the WIDA English Language Development Standards
- Given annually to English learners in grades K–12 in reading, writing, listening, and speaking
- Majority of English learners take ACCESS for ELLs
- Alternate ACCESS for ELLs is an option for English learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities

## How much time is spent on statewide testing?

Statewide assessments are taken one time each year; the majority of students test online. On average, the amount of time spent taking statewide assessments is **less than one percent of instructional time** in a school year. The assessments are not timed and students can continue working as long as they need.

## When do students take the assessments?

Each school sets their testing schedule within the state testing window. Contact your student's school for information on specific testing days.

- The MCA and MTAS testing window begins in March and ends in May.
- The ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS for ELLs testing window begins at the end of January and ends in March.

## Why are these assessments effective?

Minnesota believes that in order to effectively measure what students are learning, testing needs to be more than answering multiple choice questions.

- To answer questions, students may need to type in answers, drag and drop images and words, or manipulate a graph or information.
- The Reading and Mathematics MCA are adaptive, which means the answers a student provides determine the next questions the student will answer.
- The Science MCA incorporates simulations, which require students to perform experiments in order to answer questions.

All of these provide students the opportunity to apply critical thinking needed for success in college and careers and show what they know and can do.

Because test content represents the standards as completely as possible, preparing for and taking the assessments uses the very same knowledge, processes, and strategies that are used in the best classrooms.

## When do I receive my student's results?

Each summer, Individual Student Reports are sent to school districts and are provided to families no later than fall conferences. The reports can be used to see your child's progress and help guide future instruction.

## What if I choose not to have my student participate?

Minnesota Statutes require MDE to publish a form for parents/guardians to complete if they refuse to have their student participate in state-required standardized assessments. The form to meet this legislative requirement is available on the MDE website at the link below. Your student's district may require additional information.

## Why does participation matter?

A statewide assessment is just one measure of your student's achievement, but your student's participation is important to understand how effectively the education at your student's school is aligned to the academic standards.

- Educators and policy makers use information from assessments to make decisions about resources and support provided.
- Parents and the general public use assessment information to compare schools and make decisions about where to purchase a home or to enroll their children.

A school's accountability calculations will be negatively impacted if fewer than 95% of the students participate.

*The strong connection to the standards means that "teaching to the test" is really a focus on the academic standards that are already part of daily instruction.*

## Where do I get more information?

Find detailed information on statewide testing for students and families on the [Statewide Testing page of MDE's website](http://education.state.mn.us) (education.state.mn.us > Students and Families > Statewide Testing).