

Recommendations

Testing Reduction Advisory Group

Governor Dayton tasked Commissioner Cassellius with convening a Testing Reduction Advisory Group to provide a foundation for discussion and make recommendations to reduce testing. The group looked at streamlining the assessment system while still maintaining high standards for Minnesota students.

The advisory group met three times and discussed a number of topics related to assessments and accountability.

Recommendations

1. **Recommendation:** Administer the MCAs in grades 3-8.

The advisory group favors annual testing for reading and math in grades 3-8 and science in grade 5 and grade 8. Having benchmarks as a student progresses to high school is important for educators in determining proper interventions to ensure a student is on track for academic success. The group would be open to reexamination of this recommendation if the federal government provides flexibility in elementary assessments. (For example, if tests were required every other year in grades 3-8 they would like to weigh the benefits and research the data.)

2. **Recommendation:** Administer a college entrance exam (including writing component) to all students in either grade 11 or grade 12.

The group advised the state to continue offering a college entrance exam to all students; however, the group recommends that each district should be able to determine when the test would be administered, in either grade 11 or grade 12. Under the current contract with ACT, there is one statewide administration date and one makeup date. The group recognized that ACT does not have the same accessibility requirements as the state of Minnesota. There was discussion of ACT augmentation to ensure alignment with the Minnesota academic standards. The ACT already takes a significant portion of the school day and it would likely require an augmented test on an additional day.

3. **Recommendation:** Administer the Grade 10 Reading MCA and Grade 11 Math MCA.

High school assessments were a focus of debate among the group. While consensus was achieved around assessments for grades 3-8, there was significant discussion on reduction in High School assessments. Some members of the group advocated to eliminate MCAs in High School and only use a college entrance exam as a state test. Their rationale centered on the importance of growth measurements in grades 3-8 and options to use other local assessments to measure if students were on track in high school. Others advocated to continue to administer the MCAs in high school and augment a college entrance exam.

Ultimately, the group did reach a compromise that continues the administration of the grade 10 reading MCA and the grade 11 math MCA. The group weighed the importance of the Minnesota academic standards as well as having tests specifically built and aligned to the standards. As with the previous recommendation, the group was interested in revisiting the recommendation if the federal government provided flexibility on administration of assessments. The group also emphasized the importance of further analysis of MCA and college entrance data as well as working with higher education institutions to establish a cut score on MCA that could be accepted for enrollment at postsecondary. The group also wanted to include using the college entrance exam as a substitute for state exams as part of the analysis with higher education.

4. **Recommendation:** Administer one career interest survey to all students in grade 8 and grade 10.

The group agreed that a career interest survey was in the best interest of all students. They urge the state to have one survey that can be used by all students in grade 8 and grade 10. This benefits students that move to different districts, ensures common professional development for counselors, and could help lower costs. Further, the group advises the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to seek input from district personnel to establish clear goals and information that should be part of a survey in order to develop a request for proposals (RFP). If RFP submissions do not meet the specific goals, MDE should partner with the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MNSCU), and the Office of Higher Education (OHE) in developing a career interest survey.

5. **Recommendation:** Stop administration of the Grade 8 and Grade 10 Career and College Assessments, College Placement Diagnostic Exam, and High School Science MCA.

The group praised the reporting data that is currently associated with the Explore and Plan indicating that the information was very helpful to students, teachers and parents. However, the group was also apprised that the Explore and Plan would no longer be offered by ACT after next school year (2015-2016).

After reviewing reports from the product that will replace the Explore and Plan the group recommended that Grade 8 and Grade 10 Career and College Assessments should no longer be offered, and the reporting of the MCAs should be augmented to provide better information and data to students, parents and teachers. Further, the group recommends that the MCAs continue to be constructed to predict performance on a college entrance exam.

The group also recommended elimination of the College Placement Diagnostic Exam (currently Compass) indicating that enhanced reporting data from the MCAs should be available to provide educators with information on academic interventions. The group also recommended that the High School Science MCA should no longer be a mandate, and that the college entrance exam could suffice. This change would require a waiver from the federal government. As part of the recommendation for enhanced reporting for

the MCAs, the group also encourages districts to reevaluate local optional assessments that are offered to students.

For all recommendations it is important to ensure that all students are allowed to participate. Therefore, the group clarifies that Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams should have flexibility to determine how to best meet each student's assessment needs, including accommodations, alternative testing and exemptions.