

Academic Progress

In its accountability system under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Minnesota is using a transition matrix that is based on students' progress through achievement levels on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs) and Minnesota Test of Academic Skills (MTAS).

What is Academic Progress?

In a general sense, academic progress is an increase in students' learning. More specifically, for the purposes of ESSA accountability, academic progress refers to students increasing their learning relative to grade-level standards. This is measured using statewide tests in math and reading, and those subjects are used as a sample of students' progress overall.

Why Does Academic Progress Matter?

Measuring academic progress provides key information about students' mastery of standards and system-level effects beyond that which can be learned by looking at proficiency levels alone. It is important to not only understand whether students are proficient, but also to know the improvement of each student from year to year. One of the many indicators of successful schools is being able to support students in making progress on the academic standards over time.

For example, even if most of the students at two schools are not yet meeting standards on state tests, the school where many students are struggling to move from the "Does Not Meet Standards" level to the "Partially Meets Standards" level is likely in greater need of support than a school where more students are advancing to the "Partially Meets Standards" level.

What Can Schools and Districts Do to Improve Academic Progress?

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) has made a variety of resources available to help educators connect statewide assessments with Minnesota's academic standards. These can be found on the [Statewide Testing](#) page of the MDE website. One resource that is particularly relevant to understanding academic progress is the collection of [Achievement Level Descriptors \(ALDs\)](#). These present a clearer picture of grade-level student performance at achievement levels by sub-strand. If an educator or parent would like to know the knowledge, skills, and abilities a student demonstrated on the MCAs, they can refer to the ALDs. The ALDs can be used alongside the Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards to help educators make informed decisions on curriculum and the scope and sequence of lessons. An [Academic Progress and Achievement Level Descriptors video](#) is available which describes the use of the progress indicator.

Please note that the importance of *all* students being taught and satisfactorily completing *all* academic standards cannot be over-emphasized. While the ESSA accountability system considers math and reading, progress in all areas can be measured using classroom assessments.

For assistance with these resources, contact mde.testing@state.mn.us.

How Will Academic Progress be Calculated in Minnesota’s ESSA Accountability System?

A student’s score on statewide assessments is placed in one of four achievement levels, ranging from “Does Not Meet Standards” to “Exceeds Standards.” The transition matrix used to award points to students based on the change in their achievement levels is below.

This Year → Previous Year ↓	Does Not Meet Standards	Partially Meets Standards	Meets Standards	Exceeds Standards
Exceeds Standards	0	0	0	3
Meets Standards	0	0	2	5
Partially Meets Standards	0	2	6	9
Does Not Meet Standards	0	8	12	15

All students with two scores – one from the current year and one from a previous year – will be included in the calculation. For each subject, the average number of points will be calculated for each student group at the school, and the average of the student groups will be the overall score for the school.

This matrix is meant to help identify schools in need of support, and as such is primarily intended to help differentiate between schools with low academic achievement. When discussing academic progress in general, it may be more useful for school and district personnel to discuss the percentage of students who increased their achievement level, the percentage who remained at the same level as the previous year, and the percentage who decreased their achievement level. This can also be done for specific student groups.

Under ESSA, schools will also be recognized for improvement, with particular attention to the school’s context and the way in which improvement was achieved. This should provide additional ways for schools and districts to find similar schools and districts that have improved academic progress.

If you have questions about the use of the academic progress indicator in the ESSA accountability system, contact mde.essa@state.mn.us.