



## Academic Achievement

In its accountability system under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Minnesota is using an achievement rate that is based on students reaching the Meets Standards or Exceeds Standards achievement levels on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs) and Minnesota Test of Academic Skills (MTAS).

### What is Academic Achievement?

In a general sense, academic achievement is the current level of a student’s learning. More specifically, for the purposes of ESSA accountability, academic achievement refers to the percentage of students at a school whose learning currently meets or exceeds their grade-level standards. This achievement is measured using statewide tests in math and reading. Achievement is also measured using state assessments in science, but the science assessments will not be used for accountability under ESSA.

### Why Does Academic Achievement Matter?

A standards-based education system promotes equity by establishing a baseline of knowledge and skills that all students, regardless of their background, should master as part of their education. Measuring academic achievement provides key information about students’ mastery of standards. Identifying schools where many students are struggling to achieve proficiency on state tests provides a reasonable starting point when searching for schools that would most benefit from support. Looking at academic achievement data in combination with other information helps to prioritize schools for support.

More broadly, academic achievement for all students is one of the key goals of the public school system, and mastery of state standards provides students with useful skills for a fulfilling and productive life. While not all aspects of achievement can be efficiently measured and compared statewide, it is important to include some measurement of academic achievement when evaluating and prioritizing support for schools.

The tests used to measure academic achievement are meant to provide system-level data about how schools, districts, and the state are functioning. An individual student’s scores should not be used to determine, for example, which courses they can or cannot take during their K-12 years. Schools should look at multiple sources of student-level data when planning instruction and support for individual students.

### What Can Schools and Districts Do to Improve Academic Achievement?

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 resources are on the [Statewide](#)

[Testing](#) page of the MDE website. One resource that is relevant to understanding academic achievement is the collection of [Achievement Level Descriptors \(ALDs\)](#). These descriptors present a clearer picture of grade-level student performance at achievement levels by substrand. 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.

Please note it is important that *all* students be taught and satisfactorily complete *all* academic standards. While the ESSA accountability system considers math and reading, achievement in all areas can be measured using classroom assessments.

For assistance with these resources, contact [mde.testing@state.mn.us](mailto:mde.testing@state.mn.us).

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

A student’s score on statewide assessments is placed in one of four achievement levels:

- Exceeds Standards
- Meets Standards
- Partially Meets Standards
- Does Not Meet Standards

Participation in statewide assessments is required; however, some students do not participate in the tests for a variety of reasons, including parental opt out or student refusal. Students who do not participate in the assessment will be counted the same as students who are “Not Proficient” in the achievement indicator of the accountability system.

When determining the achievement rate for a given student group (for example, students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch), the accountability system will use the following calculation:

$$\frac{\text{Number of Students who Exceed or Meet Standards}}{\text{All Students who Exceed, Meet, Partially Meet, or Do Not Meet Standards, or who Do Not Participate}}$$

The school’s overall achievement rate will be the average of all student groups with at least 20 students. Achievement rates will be calculated separately for math and reading.

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

For questions about the use of the academic achievement indicator in the ESSA accountability system, contact [mde.essa@state.mn.us](mailto:mde.essa@state.mn.us).