

# Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs)

## Questions and Answers about the Mathematics, Reading and Science MCAs



### What are the MCAs?

The Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs) are state tests in mathematics, reading and science that meet the requirements of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). They are given every spring to measure student performance against the Minnesota Academic Standards, which specify what students in a particular grade should know and do.

### Why do we give these tests?

We use the MCAs to find out how well students have learned the Minnesota Academic Standards in mathematics, reading and science. The mathematics and reading assessments are also used to determine whether schools and districts have made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) toward the ESEA goal of all students being proficient.

Schools use the information to improve classroom teaching and learning. Teachers and principals look for areas where students do well so they can reinforce the ways they teach these skills. They also look for areas that need improvement so they can increase instructional time or modify their instruction.

### Who must take these tests?

Minnesota's rules for testing and the federal ESEA require that mathematics and reading tests be given in grades 3–8, and high school (students in grade 10 take the Reading MCA and students in grade 11 take the Mathematics MCA). With very few exceptions, all public school students in the above grades take the Mathematics and Reading MCAs.

The Science MCA is given to students in grades 5 and 8 and in the high school grade when they take a life science course.

Students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan may be eligible for accommodations. Some students may be eligible to take the MCA-Modified, an alternate assessment based on modified achievement standards in mathematics and reading. Other students with significant cognitive disabilities may be eligible to take the Minnesota Test of Academic Skills (MTAS), an alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards in mathematics, reading and science. [See the Alternate Assessment Eligibility Requirements on the MDE website for more information](http://education.state.mn.us/AccountabilityPrograms/AssessmentandTesting/Assessments/AlternateAssessments/) (<http://education.state.mn.us> > Accountability Programs > Assessment and Testing > Assessments > Alternate Assessments).

### How can students prepare for the tests?

A handout is available with tips on content preparation, general test-taking strategies and using a calculator. [See “Test Preparation Suggestions for Teachers and Parents”](http://education.state.mn.us/AccountabilityPrograms/AssessmentandTesting/Assessments/TestPreparationSuggestionsforTeachersandParents/) on the MDE website. (<http://education.state.mn.us> > Accountability Programs > Assessment and Testing > Assessments)

### What does it take to pass the tests?

Students do not pass or fail the tests given in grades 3–8. Each student receives a score that falls in one of four achievement levels—Does Not Meet the Standards, Partially Meets the Standards, Meets the Standards and Exceeds the Standards.

MCA tests administered at grades 10 (reading) and 11 (mathematics) have an embedded GRAD assessment. Students who are proficient on the MCA (score falls in the Meets Standards or Exceeds Standards achievement level) or pass the GRAD component (score of 50 or higher) have met their diploma assessment requirement for mathematics or reading, and are considered to have passed the test. For further information, view, the [GRAD Parent Brochure](#) on the MDE website (<http://education.state.mn.us> > Accountability Programs > Assessment and Testing > Assessments > GRAD > GRAD Parent Info).

### **How are tests administered?**

The Reading MCAs in grades 3–8 and high school are multiple-choice tests in the paper administration mode. The Mathematics MCAs in grades 3–8 are online assessments. For the present, MDE will continue to offer a paper version of the grades 3–8 Mathematics MCA for schools unable to use the online tests. The Mathematics MCA in high school is a multiple-choice test in the paper administration mode.

The Science MCAs are only administered online.

### **What skills are assessed by the MCA?**

In 2011, the reading and science assessments will be aligned to the 2003 academic standards. The mathematics assessments for grades 3–8 will be aligned to the 2007 version of the mathematics standards. The mathematics assessment for grade 11 continues to be aligned to the 2003 academic standards. [View Minnesota Academic Standards](#) on the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) Website (<http://education.state.mn.us> > Academic Excellence > Academic Standards).

### **How can I see the MCA results for my child, school and district?**

At the end of summer, all tests results are sent to the school district. The district, in turn, will send the parent/guardian a student report that explains individual results. It has information about achievement level, subtest scores, comparisons to various groups, and comparisons to their student's performance in past years, when applicable. [View school and district results](#) at the MDE website (<http://education.state.mn.us> > Academic Excellence > School Report Cards)

### **Where can I find more information about the MCAs?**

[View further on the MCAs](#) at the MDE website. (<http://education.state.mn.us> > Accountability Programs > Assessment and Testing > Assessments > MCA).

### **For more information, contact:**

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