

Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs)



Questions and Answers about the Mathematics, Reading and Science MCAs

What are the MCAs?

The Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs) are the state tests in reading, mathematics and science that meet the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. These tests are given every year to measure student performance on the Minnesota Academic Standards, which define what our students should know and do in a particular grade. The Reading and Mathematics MCA-IIs began in 2006 and the Science MCA-II began in 2008.

Why do we give these tests?

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

After your child takes one of these tests, your school district sends you an individual student report that explains your child's results. This report gives you information on your child's reading, mathematics and science skills and shows your child's performance compared to that of other students in the state.

Schools use the information from these tests 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 topics that need improvement so they can increase instructional time or modify instruction.

Who must take these tests?

Minnesota's rules for testing and the federal NCLB Act require that mathematics and reading tests be given in grades 3–8. In addition, 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 grades 3–8 take the Reading and Mathematics MCAs. In some cases, English Language Learners (ELL) will take the Mathematics Test for English Language Learners (MTELL). Students with severe cognitive disabilities can take the Minnesota Test of Academic Skills (MTAS).

The Science MCA is given to students in grades 5 and 8 and once in high school, depending on when students complete their life science curriculum.

What does it take to pass the tests?

Students do not pass or fail these tests. 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.

What is the format of each test?

The Mathematics and Reading MCAs are paper and pencil tests that are divided into four segments. Each segment has multiple-choice questions

and mathematics has one or two short answer, or constructed-response, questions. Students must attempt at least four multiple-choice questions in each of the four segments in order to receive a score. There is no penalty for guessing.

The Science MCA has multiple-choice and short-answer, or constructed-response questions, as well as figural-response questions. Students respond to figural-response questions by manipulating graphic elements of an item, selecting a point on a graphic or completing a graph or diagram.

What skills are assessed on the MCA?

All questions are based on the Minnesota Academic Standards. Currently, assessments are aligned to the 2003 academic standards. In 2011, mathematics assessments for grades 3–8 will be aligned to the 2007 revision to the standards. [View Minnesota Standards on the Minnesota Department of Education \(MDE\) Website.](http://education.state.mn.us) (http://education.state.mn.us – Select Academic Excellence > Academic Standards)

What are the guidelines for using a calculator on the Mathematics or Science MCA-II?

Students can use a four-function or scientific calculator on the tests. The calculator can belong to either the student or the school. Students cannot share calculators with other students during the test or use any calculator manuals.

On the Mathematics MCA-II, Grades 3 and 4 have two segments that do not allow the use of a calculator and two segments that do. Grades 5–8 have one segment that does not allow the use of a calculator and three that do. A calculator may be used on all four segments of the Grade 11 Mathematics MCA-II. On the Science MCA, a calculator can be used on all segments of the test.

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

All test results are sent to the school district. The district will deliver your child's results to you. [You can see the results for all schools and districts at the MDE Website.](http://education.state.mn.us) (http://education.state.mn.us – Select Academic Excellence > School Report Cards)

How can students prepare for the tests?

A handout is available with tips on content preparation, general test-taking and calculator use. [See “Test Preparation Suggestions for Teachers and Parents” on the MDE Website.](http://education.state.mn.us) (http://education.state.mn.us – Select Accountability Programs > Assessment and Testing > Assessments)

Where can I find more information about the MCAs?

[For more information on the MCAs, go to the MCA section of the MDE Website.](http://education.state.mn.us) (http://education.state.mn.us – Select Accountability Programs > Assessment and Testing > Assessments > MCA)

For more information, contact:

Minnesota Department of Education
Research and Assessment
mde.testing@state.mn.us

1500 Highway 36 West
Roseville, MN 55113-4266
(651) 582-8200