



## **Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA)**

### **Understanding the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments**

Minnesota has a comprehensive testing system termed generally as the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA). There are a number of different tests that a child will take during their school years under this system. These tests are used for a variety of purposes: to measure a child's achievement and abilities, to determine areas where increased instructional support is needed, to gauge the effectiveness of teaching and alignment to learning standards, and to determine the progress schools are making in helping students become proficient in all subjects.

The Title I Assessments of the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA) are state tests designed to fulfill the requirements of federal law that students are tested in Mathematics, Science and Reading and measure student's proficiency at meeting Minnesota's Academic Standards. These assessments are developed based on the learning strands set forth in the Minnesota Academic Standards, which serves as a framework for teaching and learning. The strands represent the content required to have a complete understanding of each subject matter.

Students in grades 3-8 and 10 take the Reading Assessment. Students in grades 3-8 and 11 take the Mathematics Assessment. And students in grades 5 and 8 and once in high school take the Science Assessment.

There are also Graduation-Required Assessments for Diploma (GRAD) which fulfill graduation requirements for students in Minnesota. These assessments are given in Reading, Writing and Mathematics. These tests can be retaken if a student requires the opportunity to do so. All the assessments given in Minnesota provide for accommodations for students with disabilities or an Alternate Assessment if so determined by a student's Individual Education Plan.

For the Graduation-Required Assessments for Diploma (GRAD), the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) in Reading in grade 10 and Mathematics in grade 11 serves as the required test. Only the Written Composition GRAD is a stand-alone assessment first given to students in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. There is only one prompt that a student writes an essay about and scorers give the writing a holistic score, using a rubric, based on the overall impression of the essay.

### **Format of the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments**

For students in grades 3-8, the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA) in Reading, Mathematics and Science is a paper-and-pencil based assessment that is administered in the Spring. The GRAD Writing Assessment and the MCA's for Reading and Mathematics in grades 10 and 11 are also given in the Spring.

For the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA) of Reading in grade 10 and Mathematics in grade 11 the tests are given on the computer, unless an accommodation requires another format (braille, large print). Both the assessments have 40 multiple-choice questions.

The questions on the test are aligned to the standards and learning objectives of the Minnesota Academic Standards. The expectations of learning for students in the subject of reading are that students are being able to comprehend and interpret texts and literature as well as to use a variety of strategies for vocabulary development.

In Mathematics, the topics that are covered throughout a student's education are numbers and operations, algebra, geometry & measurement, and data analysis & probability. In Science, the assessments are aligned to the strands of learning in the Academic Standards which are: the history and nature of science, physical science, earth and space science, and life science.

### **Taking the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments**

For students taking the Reading and Mathematics GRAD's, out of 40 multiple-choice questions on each, students must score at least a 50% or higher to pass. The Written Composition GRAD is scored by trained scorers who use a holistic rubric. The rubric is based on a scale of 1-6 and students must get a 3 or above to have passed. Passing these tests is a requirement of graduation. Retake opportunities and remedial instruction are offered to students who require it.

For students in grades 3-8, the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA) are paper-based and online, schools will determine what they can use and there will be some students who require a paper-and-pencil version. Students are given a raw score and that score is converted to a scaled score. The scaled score for students at this grade level show not just the comparative measure of achievement but also the pattern of correct and incorrect responses. This is a current change in scoring techniques for children in these grades. This data will aid in tailoring objectives for learners.

Scores are reported in a couple different ways. The raw score a student gets is converted to a scaled score. The scaled score is a comparative measure. This can also help to show areas where there is an increased need for instruction. These scores are also aligned to the achievement levels reported. They are Exceeds the Standards (E), Meets the Standards (M), Partially Meets the Standards (P) and Does Not Meet the Standards (D). A cut score is the level at which one Standard moves to the next. The numerical scores vary based on the assessment given.