



## **Montana Comprehensive Assessment System (MontCAS)**

### **Understanding the Montana Comprehensive Assessment System (MontCAS)**

The Montana Comprehensive Assessment System (MontCAS) uses a program of Criterion-Referenced Tests (CRTs) to assess student progress in reading, mathematics and science. A criterion-referenced test is one in which the assessment is directly aligned to the curricular standards developed for students to be taught by.

The curriculum provides a framework for organizing the subject matters, it lays out the specific skills and knowledge students will need to gain in order to be proficient in a subject. The Montana Content Standards address the areas in which students need to gain knowledge in order to be prepared for college and career pursuits.

The statewide assessments given in reading, mathematics and science are required by state and federal law. They provide a vast array of information to educators, administrators, students and families. Assessment results can reveal areas in which students need more instruction. The results help teachers understand which skill and knowledge areas may require more focus.

The assessments also factor into the measurement of adequate yearly progress (AYP) at each school. This is a measure of how well schools are doing at educating all their students to proficiency levels in the core subjects. One requirement of the federal No Child Left Behind Act is that 100% of students be performing at proficiency levels in reading and mathematics by the year 2014.

Students begin taking the Criterion-Referenced Tests (CRTs) in grade 3. Testing in Reading and Mathematics will occur yearly through grade 8. Students will also be assessed in Science in grades 4 and 8. In grade 10, students will take the Criterion-Referenced Tests (CRTs) in Reading, Mathematics and Science.

### **Format of the Montana Comprehensive Assessment System (MontCAS)**

The Criterion-Referenced Tests in Reading asks questions in a multiple-choice and constructed-response format. Students will be asked to read literary and informational passages and answer questions based on them. There are a total of 78 questions but only 52 count towards the students score.

The Criterion-Referenced Tests in Mathematics ask questions in a multiple-choice, short-answer and constructed-response formats. Students are provided with reference sheets with formulas, rulers or protractors depending on the test. There are 73 total questions and students will be scored on 60 of them.

The Criterion-Referenced Tests in Science ask questions in a multiple-choice and constructed-response format. There are 78 questions of which students will be scored on 53.

Some of the questions on the assessments are in the process of field testing and do not count towards a student's score. The students will not know which questions these are.

Each assessment has three sessions and is administered in the Spring. Testing accommodations are offered to students who require them per an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

### **Taking the Montana Comprehensive Assessment System (MontCAS)**

When students take the MontCAS Criterion-Referenced Tests in Reading, Mathematics and Science, the tests are in complete alignment to the Montana Curricular Standards. The specific content knowledge and skills in which students will be tested are laid out as follows:

In Reading – students will be assessed on their ability to construct meaning as they comprehend, interpret and respond to reading; students will apply a range of strategies to reading; students will read and respond to print and non-print material; and students will gather, analyze, synthesize and evaluate information from a variety of sources and communicate their findings appropriately.

In Mathematics – students need to become proficient in the following areas: problem solving, numbers and operations, algebraic concepts, geometry, measurement, data analysis, statistics, and probability, and patterns, relations and functions.

In Science - students will be tested on scientific investigation processes, physical science, life science, earth and space science, the impact of science, and the historical development of science.

These are the topics that organize these content areas. Questions are asked on a strictly grade-level appropriate basis, but all these areas are touched upon within the course of a year in each subject.

The results students receive on these assessments will provide a proficiency level in each subject area. On the MontCAS Criterion-Referenced Tests there are three proficiency levels: Advanced, Proficient and Novice. For students scoring in the Novice range, the results will help determine the areas in which a student's needs more instruction.

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