



GUIDE
TO THE EDUCATION SYSTEM
IN THE UNITED STATES

BY

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STUDENTS' ASSESSMENT AND TESTING

Standardized Assessment Tests

Both the U.S. Federal Government and the State of Minnesota mandate schools in Minnesota to administer certain standardized assessment tests. These tests help schools meet federal education requirements and measure student progress toward Minnesota's academic standards. Detailed information about each of Minnesota's statewide assessment tests is available by going to the Minnesota Department of Education Assessment and Testing [website](#). A brief definition for each of Minnesota's regularly administered assessment tests is listed below.

- **Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs)** are federally mandated tests. The Reading and Mathematics MCAs are used to determine whether schools and districts have made adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward all students being proficient in reading and math. Science is also required, but is not included in AYP calculations at this time. Reading and mathematics tests are given in grades 3 through 8, 10 and 11. Science tests are given in grades 5, 8 and once in high school, depending on when students complete their life sciences curriculum. Please keep in mind that: the Roman number after the MCA acronym (i.e.: MCA-II or MCA-III) refers to the newest version of the test.
- **English Language Learner (ELL)** test is also a federally mandated test. The ELL test is used to determine whether students whose native language is not English need specialized ESL instruction.
- **Minnesota Test of Academic Skills (MTAS)** is Minnesota's alternate assessment for mathematics, reading and science designed for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The MTAS in reading and mathematics was administered for the first time in spring 2007 and science in spring 2008.
- **Graduation-Required Assessments for Diploma (GRAD)** are the tests that are mandated by the State of Minnesota and fulfill Minnesota's high school graduation requirement for students who first entered grade 8 in 2005-06 or later. These tests measure student performance on essential skills in writing, reading and mathematics. If a student does not satisfy the graduation requirement for an assessment during the first administration, there will be retest opportunities available. The GRAD is first administered as follows: Writing: Grade 9; Reading: Grade 10; Mathematics: Grade 11.
- **EPAS (Educational Planning and Assessment System)** is a set of tests (ACT, PLAN, EXPLORE) available to districts (NOT MANDATED) under a short-term grant from the state of Minnesota. These tests measure students' preparation for college-level work. The EXPLORE test is generally administered in Grade 8; the PLAN test is generally administered in Grade 10.

- **National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)** is the federal program that annually assesses the academic achievement of samples of students in all states. Schools are randomly selected on a yearly basis to administer the NAEP test.

To find free samplers of the assessment tests listed above, you can visit the Assessment division of the Minnesota Department of Education [website](#). The Assessment division provides: information to parents on the various tests; parent guides and brochures that include suggestions to help students prepare for testing; and an overview plus answers to frequently asked questions for each test; test item samplers students can use to familiarize themselves with the tests. Materials are provided in English plus the other nine languages most commonly spoken by Minnesota students.

In addition to these tests, each school district may select to administer additional tests. For example, the Edina school district administers the CogAT test.

- **Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT)** is widely used through the U.S. as a screening test for gifted program entry. It is frequently used in conjunction with the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) to provide an indication as to whether or not children are working up to their ability level and to assist teachers in tailoring instruction to benefit all students. The CogAT assesses reasoning and problem solving abilities in three areas: verbal, non-verbal and quantitative. Follow the link below for more information about the contents of these test batteries for children being tested using Levels A-H of the [CogAT](#) (grades 3-12). The primary edition of the CogAT (levels K, 1 and 2) has a different format.

Regarding Parental Review of GRAD and/or MCA Tests

To ensure parents' access to their child's test results while maintaining the security of the state-developed assessments, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) has established the following procedure.

Parental Request for Review

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) provides parental access for review of Graduation-Required Assessments for Diploma (GRAD), Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments – Series II (MCA-IIIs), and similar statewide tests.

Parent/Guardians wishing to see their child's responses to a statewide test must make the request in writing to the child's district. The parent/guardian must provide a copy of their child's student report with the written request.

The child's district must then complete the Request to Review Student Responses form which is sent to the MDE. MDE will send a computer-generated copy of the student's responses and a test book to the District Assessment Coordinator. The responses and test book are secure materials and all security procedures will apply, including signing by all relevant persons of the non-disclosure agreement provided on the MDE Website prior to reviewing materials.

The District Assessment Coordinator or designee will meet with the parent/guardians and child. Review of materials cannot begin until the parent/guardian and child has signed the non-disclosure agreement. The parent/guardian is not allowed to make copies or take notes or examples out of the room. At the end of the review the District Assessment Coordinator or designee must collect all materials that the parent/guardian and child may have generated (e.g., notes, solutions to problems) for return to MDE.

The student responses, test book and other materials generated from the review must be returned to MDE Research and Assessment within ten days of receiving the materials.

Parent Request for Re-Scoring of a Test

Parents may also request that their child's test be re-scored. The cost to the parent for this service is \$125. To initiate a request, the parent must complete the required form and mail it with a check for the \$125 fee directly to the test vendor. Parents who are interested in this service should contact the Edina Research and Evaluation Director at 952-848-4944 to obtain a copy of the request form.