
Students in Minnesota public schools¹ take standardized state assessments in reading, math, and science known as the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs). Students may also take locally adopted assessments and nationally recognized assessments.

Standardized Assessment Requirements

Minnesota law requires students to take MCAs aligned to state academic standards. Students take math and reading MCAs in grades 3 through 8 and one time in high school, and science MCAs in grades 5 and 8, and one time in high school. The MCAs also fulfill federal accountability requirements under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).² The MCAs are computer-based online assessments; for grades 3 through 8, they are “computer-adaptive,” meaning the difficulty of the questions changes based on the student’s responses.

Some students with disabilities take the Minnesota Test of Academic Skills (MTAS) instead of the MCAs. ESSA allows only the students with the most significant cognitive disabilities to take this alternate assessment, and caps participation at 1 percent of all students tested in any subject.

English Learner Assessment Requirements

ESSA requires English learners to take state assessments but allows states to choose how to include recently arrived English learners in the state’s accountability system.³ In Minnesota, these students take the MCAs during their first year of enrollment but the results are not included in accountability calculations. Their scores are only used to calculate academic progress until their third year of enrollment, when scores are used to calculate both academic progress and achievement. ESSA also requires states to “make every effort” to make assessments available for all languages other than English that are present “to a significant extent” in the state. In Minnesota, pop-up translations and translated word lists are available for select words on the math and science MCAs in Spanish, Somali, and Hmong, the three most widely spoken languages in Minnesota, other than English. Word lists are also available in Amharic, Arabic, Chinese, Karen, Khmer, Laotian, Oromo, Russian, and Vietnamese.

English learners also take the ACCESS, an assessment used to measure progress toward English language proficiency. The Alternate ACCESS assessment is available for English language learners who receive special education services and meet eligibility requirements.

¹ This publication addresses requirements for students in Minnesota public schools only, including charter schools. It does not address assessments administered to students in nonpublic schools.

² ESSA is the most recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Under ESSA, states adopt plans that satisfy accountability requirements, and the plans must be approved by the U.S. Department of Education. Minnesota’s ESSA plan is available at: <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/ESSA/mnstp/>

³ ESSA defines “recently arrived English learners” as English learners who have been enrolled in schools in the United States for less than 12 months.

Reading Proficiency

School districts and charter schools must use a locally selected test to assess whether students in kindergarten through second grade are reading at grade level. These assessments must identify and evaluate students' areas of academic need related to literacy.

Opting Out of Assessments

Students may opt out of standardized assessments. The education commissioner must create and publish a form that parents can use to opt a student out of the state assessments. The form must identify the consequences, if any, of opting out, and ask the parent the reason for opting out.

ESSA requires states to annually measure the achievement of at least 95 percent of all public school students, and 95 percent of all students in each subgroup; however, ESSA also states that it does not preempt state law on parental choice to have a student not participate. States must factor participation into the state's accountability system. In Minnesota, a student who opts out of an assessment is counted as "not proficient." The percentage of students in a school who are counted as "not proficient" is one of several factors used to identify schools for support.

Other Assessments

To graduate from high school, students must answer 50 questions from the U.S. naturalization test, and correctly answer 30 questions. Students who answer fewer questions correctly still receive a diploma.

In addition, districts and charter schools may require students to take locally adopted assessments each school year. State law limits the number of hours students may spend taking locally adopted tests each year. For grades 1 through 6, the limit is ten hours, and for grades 7 through 12, the limit is 11 hours.

Other assessments students may take include the following:

- **NAEP:** The National Assessment of Educational Progress, known as "The Nation's Report Card," is administered to a representative sample of students in every state.
- **PSAT, SAT, ACT:** These assessments are administered by the College Board. State law encourages high school students to participate in the ACT or SAT, and the legislature annually appropriates money to reimburse districts for the cost of the exam fees of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals based on family income.
- **CLEP:** The College Level Examination Program is administered by the College Board. Students who earn a passing score on a CLEP exam may earn college credit.
- **AP and IB:** Students enrolled in Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate programs may take AP or IB exams, and earn college credit based on their performance.
- **Language proficiency exams:** Students may demonstrate proficiency in a world language through an assessment and earn a diploma seal or certificate.



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