

Resources for Making Sense of Minnesota State Summative Assessment Results

The Role of Minnesota State Summative Assessment Data

Minnesota state summative data play an important role in helping educational leaders across the system to understand how well district- and school-level curriculum and instructional programs are supporting all students to meet the learning expectations defined in the state standards. Specifically, the results provide a window into equitable opportunities for students to demonstrate learning of the Minnesota K–12 Academic Standards (Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment, or MCA, and Minnesota Test of Academic Skills, or MTAS), and progress towards meeting the WIDA English Language Development Standards (ACCESS for ELLs and Alternate ACCESS for ELLs).

MCA and MTAS results represent a snapshot of student learning of grade-level content standards. When administered appropriately, the results should represent a valid measurement about the extent students have shown learning of the academic standards during that school year. However, these results alone do not illustrate the whole picture of what a student has learned that year. Statewide assessment results should always be used with additional evidence of student learning, including other assessment data and information about student learning, such as classroom data. In Module 3 of this series, we focused on the role of state summative assessment data in a balanced, comprehensive, and equitable assessment system. If you would like more details on this topic, consider reviewing that module before you proceed.

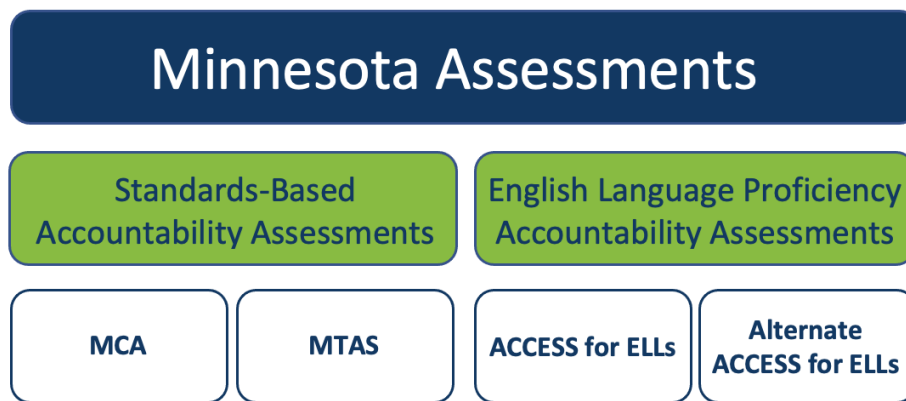
Summative assessments are created through a rigorous development and review process to ensure they are of high technical quality, providing valid, reliable, fair, and comparable results across the state. While the test administration process ensures results are comparable, it is important to note this does not mean the conditions, supports, and resources are comparable across districts and schools, which greatly influence student learning. Although standardized assessments work to ensure testing conditions are fair, they do not mean each student received equal opportunities and supports to learn the same content standards. This is where it is critical to use additional data sources. These results can be used to provide a retrospective look at a period of learning (usually a school year) in order to surface patterns for further inquiry, to

guide curriculum decisions that are larger in scope, and to monitor longer-term trends. Decisions about day-to-day instruction and within a unit are best guided by classroom formative and summative assessment aligned to the standards.

What are the Summative Assessments Administered in the Minnesota State System of Assessments?

State summative assessments are required by federal and state law in specific subject areas and grade levels. Figure 1 shows the assessments that are used for standards-based accountability and English language proficiency requirements.

Figure 1. Minnesota State Summative Assessments



Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs) are offered annually in reading, mathematics, and science. The specific assessments and grade levels are described in Table 1, which identifies the standards currently being measured by each assessment and a timeline for transition to revised standards. These assessments measure students' progress towards the Minnesota K–12 Academic Standards.

Table 1. Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs)

Subject	Grade Level(s) Assessed	Standards Assessed on MCA-III	Standards Assessed on MCA-IV
Reading	3-8 and 10	Minnesota K–12 Academic Standards in English Language Arts (ELA) (2010). Last test will be administered in Spring 2025.	Minnesota K–12 Academic Standards in ELA (2020) . Test will be administered beginning in Spring 2026.
Math	3-8 and 11	Minnesota K–12 Academic Standards in Mathematics (2007) .	TBD
Science	5, 8, and high school (after completing a life science course)	Minnesota K–12 Academic Standards in Science (2009). Last test will be administered in Spring 2024.	Minnesota K–12 Academic Standards in Science (2019) . Test will be administered beginning in Spring 2025.

Minnesota Test of Academic Skills (MTAS), like the MCA, is a standards-based accountability assessment aligned to the Minnesota academic standards, however the MTAS is specifically designed for, and limited to, students with the most significant cognitive disabilities with a participation cap of 1%.

ACCESS for ELLs (ACCESS) is an annual assessment administered to multilingual learners in grades K–12 developed by the multistate consortia, WIDA, and is designed to measure students’ progress towards the WIDA English Language Development (ELD) Standards.

Alternate ACCESS for ELLs (Alternate ACCESS), like the ACCESS, is designed provide an annual measure of progress toward the WIDA English Language Development standards. However, like the MTAS, the Alternate ACCESS is designed specifically for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

What Do Scores Actually Mean?

The MCA and MTAS provide three different types of scores:

- **Overall Scale Score:** Scale scores are created to support fair and accurate comparisons within a grade level. Scale scores are calculated by translating student results (based on a raw score for Science MCA and all subjects of MTAS, or a pattern of responses and

difficulty levels of questions, for Reading and Mathematics MCA) onto a standardized scale. Each year, the test is equated for difficulty with the previous year's test so that the scale score can be compared year to year for the same grade and subject, since the academic standards being assessed remain unchanged until the year identified in Table 1. Note that **scale scores cannot be compared across grade levels**, because the scales for each MCA and MTAS are based on different grade-level standards for each content area, thus different scales are developed independently for each grade-level test. For example, comparing scores for a single student across grade levels by subtracting their 5th grade math score from their 4th grade score, or any other calculation between two scale scores, is inaccurate. Instead, achievement levels (or performance levels), described below can support comparison for a single student across grades.

- **Achievement Level Descriptor:** Achievement level descriptors (ALDs) are intended to provide a description of grade-level student performance on the MCA. Students are assigned an achievement level based on their scale score. The four achievement levels are: "Exceeds the Standards (proficient)," "Meets the Standards (proficient)," "Partially Meets the Standards (not proficient)," and "Does Not Meet the Standards (not proficient)." ALDs provide descriptive information of what typical students at each achievement level are expected to know of the Minnesota K–12 Academic Standards. On individual score reports, these descriptors are called performance level descriptors. Additional information about ALDs, including ALD maps for Mathematics, Reading, and Science, are available on [Testing 1, 2, 3](#) in the expandable section, "Achievement Level Descriptors."
- **Subscores:**
 - The Subscore Report provides an easy way for the public to access school-, district-, and state-level subscore data, also known as strand/substrand performance levels, on the MCA.
 - The strand performance level is determined by comparing the school or district performance to the state expectation at the "Meets" achievement level for each strand or substrand of the academic standards assessed. The strand performance levels are reported as *Below Expectations*, *At or Near Expectations*, and *Above Expectations*. For each grade and subject in which the MCA is administered, this report includes the percentage of students in each strand performance level for each strand calculated by aggregating the individual student strand performance levels at the school, district, and state levels.

ACCESS for ELLs also provides three different types of scores.

- **Scale Scores:** Like the MCA and MTAS, the ACCESS assessments provide scale scores. While scale scores can show progress in language proficiency over time, they do not have any inherent meaning; scale scores require proficiency levels (described below) to provide that meaning. Because the same scale is used for each domain across all

grades, the scale scores can be used to track how much a student's proficiency within a domain increases over time. Scale scores can be compared across grades, within each domain and with more granularity than when looking only at proficiency levels.

- **Proficiency Levels:** Proficiency levels on the ACCESS are interpretive scores that describe the student's performance in terms of the six WIDA English language proficiency levels.
 - The proficiency level score is reported as a whole number followed by a decimal. The whole number reflects the student's proficiency level, and the number after the decimal reflects how far the student has progressed within that level. For example, a student with a score of 3.4 is at proficiency level 3, and is not quite halfway toward achieving proficiency level 4.
- **Composite Scores:** In addition to proficiency level and scale scores for each domain, students receive a proficiency level score and a scale score for different combinations of the language domains. These composite scores are Oral Language, Literacy, Comprehension, and Overall.
 - In the state of Minnesota, an English learner (EL) is considered proficient in English if their ACCESS Overall composite proficiency level is 4.5 or higher and their proficiency levels for at least three of the four domains are 3.5 or higher. Students must demonstrate English language proficiency on ACCESS in order to be exited from English learner programming. For more information on how the ACCESS is used for reclassification of English learners, refer to the [English Learner Education](#) page.

How Leaders Can Use Minnesota State Summative Data?

Leaders can use **MCA and MTAS data** alongside additional data to surface trends that can help identify inequities in students' opportunities to learn, inform decisions about system improvement, identify professional development needs, and contribute to program evaluation efforts. MCA and MTAS results are not intended to guide daily instructional decisions for individual students or to be used as gatekeepers for course enrollment, remediation, or retention/promotion decisions. Table 2 summarizes the [Appropriate and Inappropriate Uses of Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment \(MCA\) Results Infographic](#) available from the Testing 1, 2, 3 website.

Table 2. Appropriate and Inappropriate Uses of Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) Results

Appropriate Uses	Inappropriate Uses
<p>Look at overall proficiency for a grade, school, and/or district</p> <p>Why: To evaluate equitable opportunities for all students to learn the Minnesota K–12 Academic Standards</p>	<p>Use as a mandatory indicator for program placement</p> <p>For example: Making decisions about gifted and talented programming</p>
<p>Compare results across student groups (e.g., race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English learner status, special education, etc.)</p> <p>Why: To help identify where there may be underlying inequities and highlight promising instructional practices</p>	<p>Focus only on individual student scores for planning and instruction</p> <p>For example: Making a decision based on an individual student’s results and not the group as a whole</p>
<p>Look at changes in achievement level results over time</p> <p>Why: To support the evaluation of curriculum and district/classroom assessment that reflect the rigor of the standards</p>	<p>Use scale scores to calculate individual student growth</p> <p>For example: Subtracting scale scores and interpreting the differences as a measure of progress</p>
<p>Use as one of multiple data points for school and district decision-making</p> <p>Why: To strengthen the connection between the district’s comprehensive assessment system and evidence-based decision making</p>	<p>Use results, in isolation, to prioritize which students receive instructional support</p> <p>For example: Using results as the only criteria for decisions like intervention programming</p>
	<p>Use in isolation to evaluate teacher effectiveness</p> <p>For example: Only using MCA scores and no local considerations or data</p>

ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS are designed to yield data that support the same kind of analysis of group-level trends described above, but about progress toward the English language development standards. Unlike the MCA and MTAS, the ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS are also designed to provide student-level data that can inform student-level decisions, particularly related to reclassification of multilingual learners. Table 3 summarizes the [Appropriate and Inappropriate Uses of ACCESS for ELLs Results Infographic](#) available from Testing 1, 2, 3.

Table 3. Appropriate and Inappropriate Uses of ACCESS Results

Appropriate Uses	Inappropriate Uses
<p>Use individual student results to guide English Language Development (ELD) instruction</p> <p>Why: To support ELs in developing the English language skills needed to fully participate in the classroom</p>	<p>Use Reading ACCESS scores in place of Reading MCA scores</p> <p>For example: Using Reading ACCESS scores to look at mastery of ELA standards</p>
<p>Compare results across student groups</p> <p>Why: To help determine where there may be underlying inequities and highlight promising instructional practices</p>	<p>Use as a mandatory indicator for program placement</p> <p>For example: Making decisions about gifted and talented programming or rigorous course taking</p>
<p>Monitor individual student progress</p> <p>Why: To inform EL reclassification and exiting decisions</p>	<p>Compare scale scores across domains</p> <p>For example: Comparing a 350 in Speaking to a 350 in Writing when they are not equivalent</p>
<p>Use domain-specific or composite scale scores to calculate individual student growth</p> <p>Why: To look at individual progress over time since the domain and composite scores use the same scale across grade levels</p>	<p>Compare percent of students proficient over time or across schools</p> <p>For example: Expecting proficiency rates to rise, even though proficient ELs are exited</p>
<p>Look at proficiency levels for a grade, school, and/or district</p> <p>Why: To monitor progress in learning academic English, as described by the WIDA ELD Standards</p>	<p>Use in isolation to evaluate teacher effectiveness</p> <p>For example: Only using ACCESS scores and no local considerations or data</p>
<p>Look at proficiency levels over time for student groups, grades, schools, and/or the district</p> <p>Why: To support the evaluation of ELD instruction and general content instruction</p>	
<p>Use as one of multiple data points for school and district decision-making</p> <p>Why: To strengthen the decision-making process by using multiple pieces of evidence</p>	

What Reports Are Available and How Can They Be Used?

The state of Minnesota makes summative assessment results available in a variety of different formats, including both publicly available reports and secure reports only available to specific roles. Table 4 includes a description of the group-level reports and how they can support leaders to understand and respond to trends in student learning. As you read about each of these reports, make notes about how you might use this report, who in your system might find this report format especially useful, and questions you have about each report type.

Table 4. Reports

Report	Description	What Can School and District Leaders do with this data?	Notes: How can this report support your work? Who might benefit from this report?
<p><u>Minnesota Report Card</u></p>	<p>This is a publicly available interactive tool.</p> <p>An interactive tool that allows users to access district and school level test results, demographic information, graduation rates, proficiency trends across the last five years, and more. Assessment data are available for MCA/MTAS and ACCESS/Alternate ACCESS assessments. The report card provides both result by achievement level and proficiency data used in accountability.</p> <p>Format: Interactive, mobile-friendly website that can be used to display charts and tables which can be saved as image files.</p>	<p>Leaders can use this tool to easily compare data across schools or grade levels by viewing side by side charts and tables. The scope can be further narrowed by selecting from a variety of criteria to filter the data, such as gender or race/ethnicity.</p>	

Report	Description	What Can School and District Leaders do with this data?	Notes: How can this report support your work? Who might benefit from this report?
<p><u>Assessment Files</u></p>	<p>This is a publicly available report.</p> <p>These spreadsheets provide percent proficient, average scores, and achievement or proficiency levels by student group and/or grade level.</p> <p>The data are summarized at the school, district, county, and state levels.</p> <p>Format: Downloadable Excel files</p>	<p>These reports can provide leaders summarized results at the district or school level that are organized by grade level, student group, and/or subject tested (MCA/MTAS, ACCESS/Alternate ACCESS).</p>	
<p><u>North Star Files</u></p>	<p>This is a publicly available report.</p> <p>These files publicly report the data Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) uses in the accountability system to identify schools and districts for support. The data is organized by five indicators:</p> <p>Academic achievement (MCA and MTAS)</p> <p>Progress toward English language proficiency (ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS)</p> <p>Academic progress (change in student achievement level between years on MCA/MTAS)</p> <p>Graduation rates (four and seven-year rates)</p>	<p>These reports can support leaders who want to compare data for each indicator used in the accountability system by student group (major racial and ethnic groups, ELs, students in special education, and students eligible for free or reduced-price meals). They can also help put annual assessment data (indicators 1 and 2) in the context of other data about student learning, including growth, graduation, and attendance.</p> <p>Note: This file combines all grade levels within each student group.</p>	

Report	Description	What Can School and District Leaders do with this data?	Notes: How can this report support your work? Who might benefit from this report?
	<p>Consistent attendance (percentage of students attending more than 90% of the days they are enrolled in school)</p> <p>Format: Downloadable Excel files.</p>		
<p><u>Counting All Students Report</u></p>	<p>This is a publicly available report.</p> <p>These reports reflect the data collected under Minnesota’s “Counting All Students” legislation, which tasks MDE with collecting detailed racial and ethnic data on Minnesota’s students. The reporting of this data aims to illuminate the educational progress and outcomes of Minnesota’s diverse student population and to uncover educational gaps that are not seen in traditional ways of reporting.</p> <p>Format: These are interactive reports displayed within the browser as bar charts and can be downloaded into a spreadsheet.</p>	<p>Leaders can use these data to reflect on efforts in pursuing educational equity in Minnesota schools.</p> <p>These data have some limitations at this time, as not all districts have adopted technology to support collection of these data. The data currently include only MCA assessment and enrollment data (not MTAS). The data cannot yet be reported at the district or school level. However, MDE is investing in improvements to data quality, comprehensiveness, and disaggregation features so that this can become a more robust resource for monitoring and responding to inequitable outcomes produced by educational systems across the state.</p>	
<p><u>American Indian Student Achievement Report</u></p>	<p>This is a publicly available report.</p> <p>These files contain data for students identified</p>	<p>Leaders can use the American Indian report to make data-driven decisions and support</p>	

Report	Description	What Can School and District Leaders do with this data?	Notes: How can this report support your work? Who might benefit from this report?
	<p>as American Indian under state law. This includes students from any tribe in North America, whether or not they also share heritage with other races or ethnicities.</p> <p>The data in these files includes attendance, graduation, and statewide assessments. These files also include information about characteristics—such as special education status—among Native American students. The information in these files can be used during the needs assessment process or to provide context when looking at outcomes across student groups in Minnesota.</p> <p>Format: Downloadable Excel files.</p>	<p>American Indian students within their school communities.</p> <p>This report is designed to help Tribal communities and partners support American Indian students and to provide the MDE with a more accurate accounting of how American Indian students in Minnesota are performing.</p>	
<p>District and School Student Results (DSR and SSR)</p>	<p>This is a secure report.</p> <p>MDE’s <u>District and School Student Results</u> (DSR and SSR) files contain all the final student-level data for the standards-based and English language proficiency accountability assessments, including demographic information, achievement level information, and test</p>	<p>These spreadsheets contain the most detailed information of all individual students and all tests for a school and district. These files can be imported into a school or district student information system (SIS) or in Excel to support local analysis, sorting, and customized report creation.</p>	

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	<p>scores for the current year only.</p> <p>Format: DSR and SSR are downloadable Excel files, secure access permissions are required.</p>		
<p>Individual Student Assessment History (across multiple years)</p>	<p>This is a secure report.</p> <p>MDE’s Student Assessment History Report allows authorized district staff to look up student testing history for students who are currently or newly enrolled in a district. Student testing history can be looked up on an individual basis or for multiple students at one time.</p> <p>Format: Available in the fall when districts submit Minnesota Automated Reporting Student System (MARSS) enrollment data for the new school year. Downloadable PDF and Excel files.</p>	<p>The information in this report may replicate information housed in the local SIS. However, it may provide data for newly enrolled students that is not currently in the local SIS.</p>	
<p>Aggregated Summary Results by Strand or Substrand</p>	<p>This is a publicly available report.</p> <p>The Subscore Report provides an easy way to access school, district, and state level subscore data, also known as strand/substrand performance levels,</p>	<p>Compare student performance across different strands or substrands within the grade level standards to determine strengths and weaknesses in curriculum alignment to standards or use for</p>	

Report	Description	What Can School and District Leaders do with this data?	Notes: How can this report support your work? Who might benefit from this report?
	<p>from the MCAs, provides an easy way to access school, district, and state level subscore data, also known as strand/substrand performance levels, from the MCAs.</p> <p>This report includes the percentage of students in each strand performance level for each strand or substrand of the academic standards tested.</p>	<p>scope and sequence planning.</p>	
<p>Aggregated Summary Results by Benchmark</p>	<p>This is a secure report.</p> <p><u>Benchmark Reports</u> (MCA only) are produced at the district and school level. Student results are aggregated by benchmark from the standards for each subject tested, to summarize student performance in relation to more specific topics within the grade-level standards.</p> <p>Format: Downloadable PDF, available in early fall.</p>	<p>The Benchmark Reports are a tool that can provide details about student performance on specific benchmarks or strands on that year's MCA.</p> <p>Leaders may want to look at this report with <u>ALDs and Benchmark ALDs</u> to gain more insight into which strands, substrands, and benchmarks in which students demonstrated proficiency or progress.</p>	
<p>Aggregated Summary Results</p>	<p>This is a secure report.</p> <p>MDE's <u>Test Results Summary</u> contains grade-level summary reports at the district or school level. Both reports contain detailed</p>	<p>The charts and graphs may be useful for school and district decision-making and planning in the summer during the embargo, before similar functionality is available publicly on the</p>	

Report	Description	What Can School and District Leaders do with this data?	Notes: How can this report support your work? Who might benefit from this report?
	<p>final summary data for the MCA and MTAS. MDE’s Test Results Summary also has detailed final summary English language proficiency accountability assessment results from ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS.</p> <p>Format: Both reports provide a graphical display of historical results for review and comparison at the student, school, district, and/or state level by year, achievement level, and student group. Downloadable PDF and Excel files.</p>	<p>Minnesota Report Card from the current year’s results.</p> <p>Since this is a secure report, there are no privacy protection rules based on the number of students, so summary results for student groups with small numbers are available, including by achievement level.</p>	