

MCA II and AYP FAQs

What are the MCA-II Tests?

The MCA-II is an assessment taken by Minnesota students, which gives parents, educators, administrators, and state education officials an indication as to how students are performing in math and reading. This allows us all an accurate assessment of how our students are performing and gives us the opportunity to take the steps necessary to improve student achievement.

The launch of the new MCA-II assessment program came in response to the state's more rigorous academic standards. The development of 14 new tests required standard setting, new achievement level descriptors, new cut scores, new scale scores, quality control procedures, and review of alignment to the new academic standards. The MCA-II tests are fully aligned to the new academic standards adopted in 2003. The standards were created by committees made up of a diverse group of Minnesotans, including parents, educators and representatives from business and higher education. The new standards were approved by the legislature. Because they are new tests aligned to new standards, the MCA-II tests cannot be compared to previous years' tests.

How was the MCA-II developed?

The creation of the tests was a product of a collaborative effort:

- MN teachers developed the test specifications of the new standards.
- MN teachers reviewed all items placed on the tests.
- MN students performed according to their abilities on the items on the test.
- MN teachers determined "how much is good enough" when setting achievement levels. Representatives from MN principal and superintendent associations also participated in these conversations.

Can this year's results be compared to previous year's results?

Because the standards on which the tests were based were aligned to the new, more rigorous academic standards, you cannot compare this year's results to previous years' results. To do so would be the same as comparing the ACT to the SAT.

Who took the MCA II?

Last spring, the MCA-II math assessment was taken by students in grades 3 – 8, and 11. The MCA-II reading assessment was taken by students in grades 3-8, and 10.

What is Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)?

Under No Child Left Behind, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) represents a certain level of student achievement on statewide tests. Every year, the

achievement level for making AYP is raised. Even under the higher standards for 2005, more Minnesota schools are making AYP.

Schools meet AYP requirements in one of two ways: meeting targets for the number of their students performing above state standards on state-developed tests, or reducing by 10 percent the number of students who score in lower performance levels. AYP is calculated separately by subgroup, by all students in a school, each ethnic group, students in special education, English language learners and students receiving free and reduced-price meals. Results for the group of “all students” and each subgroup must meet AYP requirements in order for a school or district to make AYP.

In order to provide Minnesota schools with some of the familiar elements of Adequate Yearly Progress that help with appropriate data interpretation, a ranking was used to look back to student performance in previous years. It did not compare the content in the tests across years: it only compared the number of students in the achievement levels for this year and looked back to see how that performance would rank in previous years. This was done solely to take advantage of NCLB allowances such as “multi-year averaging” and “safe harbor.”

What is the STAR Rating System?

School Report Cards include star rankings comparing school performance on statewide tests and in areas including school climate and academic opportunities. For academic achievement in reading and math, schools receive three stars for making AYP and may receive additional stars, up to five, for performance above NCLB requirements. Schools receive only two stars for the first year of not making AYP in a given subject area. Schools that do not make AYP for two or more years receive only one star.

How does the GRAD Test relate to the MCA-II?

The 2005 Legislature enacted a provision that eliminated the Basic Skills Test (BST) and implemented the GRAD Test. This year’s 9th graders are subject to this new graduation requirement. The GRAD Test is embedded into the MCA-II tests in 9th grade (writing), 10th grade (language arts) and 11th grade (math). A student must answer a percentage of questions on the GRAD test items correctly in order to graduate. This was done to increase the rigor of graduation requirements, eliminate duplicative test administrations and to provide for student accountability for the high school MCA-II assessments.

The GRAD Test is currently not in full implementation. The Department has included field-test questions on the MCA-II tests in order to prepare for full implementation of the GRAD Test. There will be two separate cut scores for the GRAD Test and the MCA-II Tests in high school once the GRAD Test is fully operational.

When the GRAD Test is fully operational, students will have opportunities to re-take the GRAD test if the students do not pass the necessary number of GRAD

Test questions correctly. Students that need to re-take the GRAD Test will not have to re-take the MCA-II assessments. Students will only re-test on items related to the GRAD Test.

The GRAD Test is a state requirement, not a federal requirement under *No Child Left Behind*.

Why are there more schools not making AYP this year?

Because the new test was administered at more grade levels, there was an increase in the number of schools not making AYP. It is important to note that many districts did not meet the requirements for only a single subgroup.

Why was the release of test data delayed?

The one-time variation in the release of test, AYP and school designation data was necessary due to several changes to the MCA-II that includes:

- The launch of the MCA-II assessment program is a new program in response to the state's more rigorous academic standards. The 14 new tests required standard setting, new achievement level descriptors, new cut scores, new scale scores, quality control procedures, and an alignment review to the new academic standards. The MCA-II tests are fully aligned to the new academic standards adopted in 2003 and 2004. The MCA-II tests cannot be compared to previous years' tests.
- Schools and districts must collect and report to the state alternative assessment information for special education students.
- The 2005 Legislature passed a requirement and funding for the state to implement a value-added component to the MCA-II tests. Since this is the first year of tests in grades 3-8 for reading and math, it was necessary to vertically integrate the tests in order to establish a baseline. In future years, the state will be able to show student growth on the MCA-II rather than just comparing cohort-to-cohort.
- The 2005 Legislature passed legislation that required the use of the MCA-II high school tests in language arts and math as graduation requirements starting with the Class of 2010. It was necessary to begin the development and field test necessary test items in order to become fully operational in 2008 for Language Arts and 2009 for Math. The Basic Skills Test (BST) given in 8th grade will be phased out. This was part of the Governor's *Get Ready, Get Credit* proposal adopted in 2005.

In March 2006, the Department of Education requested a timeline variation from the U.S. Department of Education regarding late release of test and AYP performance data. It was granted in June 2006. During the 2006 session, a nearly unanimous Legislature passed a session law to allow school districts to appeal their performance data for this year only. If a school or district files an appeal, the department will not release its performance data until November 15.