

SF 2067: Unintended consequences of replacing the MCA

THE ACT IS NOT ALIGNED TO STATE STANDARDS

The MCA is the only exam aligned to Minnesota state standards for education. The MCA is designed to measure how students are learning based on locally controlled and designed math, reading, and science standards, and their year-over-year progress. Both the ACT and SAT, on the other hand, are not aligned to our state standards; they are nationally created exams from private companies. Replacing the MCA with the ACT or SAT would make it difficult to compare proficiency data of future high school cohorts to previous ones. Introducing the ACT as Minnesota's accountability assessment would require teachers to teach to the ACT rather than to our state standards.

ACT PROFICIENCY AND PARTICIPATION RATES LAG BEHIND MCA

% of Minnesota High School Students Proficient (MCA) or Meeting Benchmark (ACT), 2024						
Race/Ethnicity	MCA Math	ACT Math	MCA Reading	ACT Reading	MCA Science	ACT Science
White	42%	47%	59%	54%	51%	47%
Black	15%	12%	35%	25%	20%	14%
American Indian	17%	11%	35%	18%	27%	12%
Asian	38%	37%	53%	40%	41%	35%
Hispanic/Latino	16%	19%	31%	29%	22%	21%
Statewide Proficiency:	35%	39%	52%	46%	44%	40%
Percent Tested:	73%	66%	84%	66%	76%	66%

THE ACT IS NOT PREDICTIVE OF COLLEGE SUCCESS

Research has consistently shown that ACT scores are not predictive of college success. One robust study found that only the English and mathematics subtest scores were related to success in college coursework. Reading and Science held no predictive power, yet they are considered equally in the composite score, the most critical number in college admissions.¹ Another report from Minnesota State found that the ACT was predictive in just one class – writing– where the MCA was predictive for success in college algebra, statistics, and reading-intensive courses.²

LOW-INCOME AND FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS ARE AT A DISADVANTAGE

It is no secret that many families pay for expensive ACT test preparation for their children. In the United States, test preparation is a multi-billion dollar industry.³ Test prep courses, from ACT itself or outside companies, can cost \$2,200 or more for online or in-person classes. Rather than measuring what students learn in school, ACT scores correlate with how much money students' families can afford to put into test preparation. One analysis estimates that characteristics like family income and parental education account for 40% of the variance in ACT and SAT scores.⁴ Another found that children from the wealthiest families are 13 times more likely to earn high scores than their lower-income peers.⁵

¹ Bettinger, Evans, and Pope, "Improving College Performance and Retention the Easy Way: Unpacking the ACT Exam." *American Economics Journal*, 2013.

² "Recommendations for College Readiness Benchmarks for Minnesota State Colleges and Universities." HumRRO, February 2017.

³ Becker, "During test-optional college admissions, exam-prep companies still thrived." *BBC*, April 2024.

⁴ Geiser, "Norm-Referenced Tests and Race-Blind Admissions." Goldman School of Public Policy, 2020.

⁵ Chetty, Deming, and Friedman, "Diversifying Society's Leaders? The Determinants and Causal Effects of Admission to Highly Selective Private Colleges." *National Bureau of Economic Research*, 2023.