
Chapter 1: Background

With the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2001, Minnesota accountability and statewide assessment requirements were dramatically increased. Under NCLB Title I, the State must generate academic content standards in the core academic areas, measure those standards, and define student proficiency levels—minimum scores that students must obtain on a state assessment in order to be considered academically proficient—in the core subjects. According to NCLB, by 2005–06, all students must take annual reading and mathematics tests in grades 3–8 and once during high school. By 2007–08, students must be tested in science at least once in each of the following grade spans: grades 3–5, 6–9, and 10–12. The overall goal of NCLB is to have all students proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014.

Under NCLB Title III, the State must generate and assess English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards for all Limited English Proficient (LEP) identified students. Title III accountability assessments include a state responsibility to establish Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAO) for LEP students. This adds another layer of required accountability tests for LEP students.

Minnesota Assessment System History

Prior to NCLB, a Minnesota accountability system had been developed. The standards movement began in Minnesota in the late 1980s and evolved into a comprehensive assessment system with the development of test specifications and formal content standards during the 1990s. State and federal legislation have guided this process.

Brief History of Program

From 1993 to 1995, the Minnesota legislature enacted into law (Minn. Stat. 120B.30 Subd. 7c) a commitment “to establishing a rigorous, results-oriented graduation rule for Minnesota’s public school students. . . . starting with students beginning ninth grade in the 1996–97 school year.” A set of test specifications was written to measure the minimal skills needed to be successful in the workforce; this was the basis for the Minnesota Basic Skills Test (BST), the first statewide diploma test. To meet the requests for higher academic standards statewide, teachers, parents, and community members from across Minnesota collaborated to develop the Profile of Learning (PofL), Minnesota’s first academic standards; performance assessments to be administered in the classroom were developed to measure these standards. The goal of the assessment program in Minnesota was to measure student progress toward achieving academic excellence as measured by the BST and performance assessments for PofL.

The 1997 legislature mandated a system of statewide testing and accountability for students enrolled in grades 3, 5, and 7 (Minn. Stat. 120B.30.). Beginning in 1998, all Minnesota students in those grades were to be tested annually with a single statewide test for the purpose of statewide system accountability. The Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA) were developed to fulfill the mandates of the law. The statewide testing law also required that high school students be tested on selected standards within the required learning areas beginning in the 1999–2000 school year. (See Appendix A for complete text of the statute.) Special education students were required to participate in

testing according to the recommendations of their individualized education plan (IEP) or 504 plan. Students with limited English proficiency (LEP) who were in the United States for less than three years were exempted from the BST.

Since 1998, all Minnesota grade 3 and 5 students have been tested annually with a single, statewide test for the purpose of statewide system accountability. In 2000–01, the MDE Special Education division developed Alternate Assessments (AA)—checklists for mathematics, reading, writing and functional skills—to be used in place of the MCA or BST for students whose IEP and 504 plan teams determined it was appropriate. Beginning in 2004, grade 10 students were administered the MCA Reading and grade 11 students were tested in MCA Mathematics. Also in this same year, grade 7 students were first given the operational forms of the MCA Reading and Mathematics.

In 2005–06 as a response to NCLB legislation, the Minnesota Assessment system was expanded. Students in grades 3–8, as well as in grades 10 and 11, were assessed with the first Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments—Series II, (MCA-II), in mathematics and reading. The information from these tests is used to determine proficiency levels in each school and district for the purpose of determining Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and to evaluate student, school, and district success in Minnesota’s standards-based education system for NCLB. This assessment system will be expanded in future years to meet further requirements under NCLB.

The timeline in table 1.1 on the following page highlights the years in which landmark administrations of the various Minnesota assessments have occurred or will occur in the future.

Table 1.1. Minnesota Assessment System Chronology

1995–96	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First administration of Minnesota Basic Skills Test Mathematics and Reading in grade 8 • First administration of Minnesota Basic Skills Test Written Composition in grade 10
1997–98	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First administration of Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments at grades 3 and 5
1998–99	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of High School Test Specifications for MCA in grades 10–11 • Field test of Test of Emerging Academic English (TEAE)
2000–01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First administration MCA/BST Test of Written Composition • Field test of MCA Reading in grade 10 and Mathematics in grade 11
2001–02	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second field test of MCA Reading in grade 10 and Mathematics in grade 11
2002–03	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First administration of MCA Reading in grade 10 and Mathematics in grade 11 • Field test of MCA grade 7 Reading and Mathematics • Revision of grade 11 Mathematics Test Specifications
2003–04	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First field test of MCA Reading and Mathematics in grades 4, 6, and 8 • First operational administration (reported) of MCA Mathematics and Reading in grade 7, Reading in grade 10, and Mathematics in grade 11
2004–05	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second field test of MCA Reading and Mathematics in grades 4, 6, and 8
2005–06	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First operational administration of MCA-II Reading and Mathematics in grades 3–8, 10, and 11
2006–07	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First administration of GRAD Writing test in grade 9 • Last year of BST Writing in grade 10 as census test • Field test of MTELL and MTAS • First operational administration of MTAS Mathematics and Reading • First operational administration of MTELL
2007–08	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field test of MTAS • First administration of MCA-II Science in grades 5, 8, and high school • First administration of GRAD Reading test • First operational administration of MTAS Science
2008–09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First operational administration of GRAD Mathematics test