



2020–21 Minnesota Assessments Guidance during COVID-19

This document is meant to provide guidance for District Assessment Coordinators (DACs) related to the administration of the Minnesota Assessments (ACCESS for ELLs, Alternate ACCESS for ELLs, MCA, and MTAS) during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is intended to be flexible so it can adapt to the changing situation, and it will be updated as required. It is also meant to supplement the policy and procedure requirements outlined in the [2020–21 Procedures Manual for Minnesota Assessments](#) (PearsonAccess Next > Resources & Training > Policies and Procedures); in general terms, the information in the manual should be followed unless revised guidance is included here. Note: Guidance for the administration of college entrance exams (ACT and SAT) is provided separately by MDE in the [2020-21 Planning Guidance for Minnesota Public Schools](#).

[UPDATED 3/9/21]: This version reflects updated information for assessments based on the [U.S. Department of Education \(ED\) letter](#) regarding assessment, accountability, and reporting requirements for school year 2020–21.

MDE’s priority is to protect the health and safety of students and staff throughout the test administration. Districts and charter schools should also consult the [2020-2021 Planning Guide for Schools: Health Considerations for Navigating COVID-19](#) and the [CDC Strategies for Protecting K-12 School Staff from COVID-19](#) for health-related guidance. In addition, some information in this document comes from the WIDA [Assessment Best Practices during COVID-19](#).

The content of this documentation reflects MDE’s current administration best practices and guidance. It is not medical advice, and it does not replace or amend any guidance provided by Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) or your district or charter school’s Safe Learning Plan.

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Overview and Purpose of Statewide Assessments

The Minnesota Assessments (ACCESS/Alternate ACCESS and MCA/MTAS) are required by both federal and state statute, and the results from these assessments are used to evaluate how successfully districts and schools are implementing the WIDA English Language Development Standards and Minnesota Academic Standards.

[UPDATED 3/9/2021]: As explained in the [Feb. 22 letter to all states](#), the U.S. Department of Education (ED) requires that statewide assessments are administered this year; there are no waivers. Refer to the following section, *Minnesota's Response to Federal Guidance*, for more information. The guidance and information in this document is provided to show how these requirements may be addressed while balancing health and safety needs of students and staff.

Minnesota's Response to Federal Guidance

[UPDATED 3/9/2021]: This is a new section to address information on Minnesota's response to the Feb. 22 letter from ED.

Accountability

Minnesota Assessment results are used as part of Minnesota's North Star accountability system. The letter by ED offered flexibility for accountability. MDE is awaiting further details from ED on these flexibilities and will provide more information as it becomes available. As of early March 2021, MDE is exploring either a state plan addendum (which would reduce the weight placed on 2021 academic achievement and academic progress when identifying schools for support) or an accountability waiver (which would eliminate 2021 academic achievement and academic progress results when identify schools for support). Detailed guidance related to accountability is not provided in this document and will be communicated by the MDE Division of Equity and Opportunity. Contact mde.essa@state.mn.us with questions.

Assessment

For test administration, the letter from ED emphasized flexibility. After discussion with stakeholders, MDE is offering the following flexibilities:

- Longer testing windows. The MCA and MTAS testing windows will be extended through Friday, May 21. This extension allows for more flexibility in scheduling testing, while balancing the need to receive results prior to the start of the next school year. The testing window for ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS has already been extended to April 16.
- More flexibility in the requirement for administering make-up tests. If a student is unable to participate or finish testing when originally scheduled, districts and schools will determine the level of effort they will make to reschedule a make-up time. As appropriate for the situation, this may be zero attempts for make-up testing, one attempt, or multiple attempts.

In addition, flexibility for administration is already described in this document in regards to scheduling (e.g., larger groups, multiple subjects/domains/grades testing together, allowing students who are not testing to

be present), and staffing (e.g., larger ratio of students to Test Monitors/Test Administrators allowed). Refer to *Scheduling* and *Staffing* later in this document for information.

The following options for additional flexibility (included in the letter from ED and/or proposed by districts and stakeholders) cannot be implemented for the following reasons:

- Eliminate certain subjects or sample students/grades across districts. All required assessments in all grades must be administered to all eligible students this year. ED did not approve flexibility in this area.
- Shorten tests and remove field test items.
 - The Reading and Mathematics MCAs are adaptive, which shortened the assessments when they were transitioned from fixed forms to adaptive. Although not adaptive, the Science MCA has been constructed so that only the necessary number of items are included in order to meet the test specification requirements.
 - Removing field test items after test session set up has begun introduces significant risk that could lead to test administration issues. While field test items may not provide the full scope of data needed to make decisions on future content, it still provides some information to guide future development, especially for Science MCA-IV. Similarly, for MTAS, test materials have already been sent to districts and score entry requirements have been set; removing items would introduce risk for misadministrations and scoring procedures.
 - Note: It is proposed in legislation to shorten the length of the assessment by removing the off-grade requirement for Reading and Mathematics MCA. If passed, the items would not be able to be removed this year.
- Offer a remote administration. A remote option for MCA was previously evaluated and it was determined that this is not feasible as it could not be a secure administration (i.e., could not be monitored remotely). Because a remote administration would not be secure, results from remote and in-person administrations could not be combined and therefore requirements outlined in the letter from ED could not be met.
- The flexibility to have families who have chosen distance learning to “opt-in” to participating in statewide assessments, and if no response, allow EXC to be indicated. ED did not approve flexibility in this area. For families who have chosen distance learning, the following policy is still in place.
 - Students are expected to participate unless the student or family indicates they will not be testing. Choosing distance learning as a learning model is not the same as indicating that the student will not participate in testing.
 - If there is no communication from the family, the absent (ABS) test code must be indicated.
 - If the family communicates about health and safety concerns, then the EXC test code is indicated. If the family is refusing testing based on the test itself, then the parent/guardian refusal (REF-P) test code (or student refusal, REF-S, if more appropriate) is indicated.

- Extend the testing window into the summer or fall. MDE has determined that in order to best utilize information from statewide assessments, it is important that results are received and be used by districts and charter schools prior to the start of the 2021–22 school year. It is also important that assessments are administered in similar timeframes so results can be compared consistently year to year.
- Remove district requirement to provide Individual Student Reports (ISRs) to families. ISRs are still required to be provided to families. ED did not approve flexibility in this area.

A [questions and answers document](#) for DACs to use when talking with staff and stakeholders about this year’s assessments.

Assessment Reporting

The guidance from ED requires that all state and district assessment reporting requirements must be maintained, including the requirements to disaggregate data by student subgroup. For Minnesota, this means that data must be reported to the public in our MDE Report Card and districts will be provided assessment results as in past years through Assessment Secure Reports (District and School Student Results (DSR and SSR) and Test Results Summary), and on the MDE website under Data Reports and Analytics. In addition, transparency on how opportunity to learn measures, such as chronic absenteeism and access to key resources like technology, must be reported publicly in order to inform decisions about student supports for the 2021–22 school year and beyond. MDE must also publicly report students who did not participate in the assessment.

Administration Modes

All Minnesota Assessments must be administered in person this spring: Kindergarten ACCESS, grades 1–12 ACCESS, Alternate ACCESS, MCA (online and paper accommodations), and MTAS. There will NOT be a remote administration option for the online Reading, Mathematics, and Science MCAs. As noted in the previous section, a remote option for MCA was evaluated and it was determined that this is not feasible as it could not be a secure administration (i.e., could not be monitored remotely).

Testing Windows

MDE has extended the ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS testing window to allow schools as much flexibility in administering the test as possible. The testing window is now January 25–April 16, 2021. MDE recommended that districts wait until the week of Feb. 8 to start testing, if district testing schedules allowed.

- With the extension of the ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS testing window, the dates to order additional test materials and the deadline to return materials have been updated:
 - Order additional paper test materials in WIDA AMS: Jan. 15–April 9
 - Deadline to ship paper test materials to DRC: April 23
- The accountability window for the English language proficiency accountability assessments (ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS) remains Feb. 1–12. Students who are indicated as EL in MARSS and are

enrolled in your district at any point during the accountability window will be considered if/when determining accountability calculations, as long as they meet the other accountability enrollment requirements for inclusion (refer to [North Star Business Rules – Support](#) for more information). However, the student does not need to take the test during the accountability window; testing can occur at any time during the testing window, as scheduled by the district. In addition, if a student enrolled during the accountability window moves out of the district prior to testing, the Not Enrolled (NE) test code is available to indicate during Posttest Editing as needed. More information is available on page 121 of the *Procedures Manual*.

[UPDATED]: The MCA and MTAS testing windows have been extended to May 21 for all tests and subjects to allow for the most flexibility for district and charter school test administrations.

- With the extension of the MCA and MTAS testing windows, the dates to order additional test materials and the deadline to return materials have been updated:
 - Order additional paper test materials in PearsonAccess Next: By noon on May 19
 - Deadline to ship paper test materials to Pearson: May 24
- The accountability window for the MCA and MTAS will remain April 12–23. Consistent with the decision for ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS, students who are enrolled in your district at any point during the accountability window will be considered if/when determining accountability calculations, as long as they meet the other accountability enrollment requirements for inclusion (refer to [North Star Business Rules – Support](#) for more information). However, the student does not need to take the test during the accountability window; testing can occur at any time during the testing window, as scheduled by the district. In addition, if a student enrolled during the accountability window moves out of the district prior to testing, the Not Enrolled (NE) test code is available to indicate during Posttest Editing as needed. More information is available on page 121 of the *Procedures Manual*.

In regards to accountability, as of early March 2021, MDE is exploring either a state plan addendum (which would reduce the weight placed on 2021 academic achievement and academic progress when identifying schools for support) or an accountability waiver (which would eliminate 2021 academic achievement and academic progress results when identify schools for support).

Test Codes

Due to the unique circumstances districts and schools are facing, the EXC-N (extenuating circumstances – not attempted) and EXC-A (extenuating circumstances – attempted) test codes used last spring will be available again this year during Posttest Editing in Test WES for the following reasons:

- Using the EXC test codes provides consistency with data/indications from 2019–20, and also differentiates the situation from a decision by parent/guardian or student to refuse participation in statewide assessments.
- Using these test codes again this year provides additional flexibility for not including those students in accountability determinations. This possible flexibility is not available for other test codes, like

parent/guardian refusal (where the current accountability implications would still apply) and these test codes may be used when looking at three-year averages for accountability. However, keep in mind this flexibility for EXC test codes is pending based on state and federal conversations and decisions. Information related to accountability will be communicated by the MDE Division of Equity and Opportunity.

- The EXC test codes are indicated by domain/subject and are available for ACCESS, Alternate ACCESS, MCA, and MTAS. Different test codes may apply by domain/subject and may be different by test (i.e., one test code may apply for ACCESS and a different test code may apply for MCA.)

Detailed instructions for how to indicate EXC test codes will be available in the [Posttest Editing User Guide](#) (MDE website > Districts, Schools and Educators > Business and Finance > Data Submissions > Test WES), which is typically available in May.

EXC-A and EXC-N Test Codes

Applying the EXC test code is a district or charter school decision that is made at a student-by-student basis; districts and charters do not request approval from MDE to use the codes. MDE expects that districts and schools will be making the best decisions at the time of testing based on their professional judgement for the health and safety of their staff, students, and families.

- In general terms, if the pandemic is the reason that the student or family is unable to take an assessment, then the EXC-N test code may apply.
 - EXC-N may most applicable for students who have chosen distance learning all year and have health and safety concerns about coming in to school to test. However, students are expected to participate unless the student or family indicates they will not be testing. Choosing distance learning as a learning model is not the same as indicating that the student will not participate in testing.
 - EXC-N generally will not apply for students attending school in person. Schools should follow their health and safety plans to ensure that students are able to complete testing. However, EXC-A or EXC-N may apply for a student is required to quarantine at the time of the scheduled test administration and cannot come in to make up the test before the end of the applicable testing window. Contact mde.testing@state.mn.us if you have other specific situations where EXC-N may be needed.
 - Kindergarten is the only grade where EXC-A could apply for ACCESS if a student starts testing but cannot finish for a reason related to the pandemic. This is because the domains are not separated for Kindergarten ACCESS like they are for grade 1–12 ACCESS domains. Note: EXC-A is not available for ACCESS domains because started domains are scored; this helps to ensure that a composite score is available (if scores are available in all domains).
- Similarly, if a district or school has made all reasonable efforts to plan for and provide the administration of an assessment but is unable, then the EXC-N (or EXC-A for started tests unable to be finished) may apply.
 - It is more likely that EXC test codes would apply for individual school(s) within a district or for a charter school and not an entire district. This may include situations such as:

- A school is unable to provide transportation.
 - There are not enough staff available to monitor testing for a school.
 - An online school is unable to secure sites for students to safely test at.
 - If a school is in an in-person learning model, it is expected that students attending in person will complete testing unless other situations arise (e.g., a student or classroom is required to quarantine).
 - Similarly, for schools in a hybrid learning model, it is expected that students will complete testing when they are at school. If some students are unable to finish testing, then the EXC-N or EXC-A code will be indicated as needed; however, this would be a student-by-student decision, not a decision made ahead of time.
 - Note that a school changing a learning model (i.e., moving from in-person instruction to distance learning) does not mean that EXC is automatically applied for the entire school. The school must still make all reasonable efforts for test administration.
 - In addition, concerns for the amount of time and loss of instruction time are not reasons why the EXC-N test code may be indicated.
- Due to changing conditions that may affect learning models or logistics, decisions to apply the EXC test codes should be made at or near the time of testing.

Districts and schools need to consider their specific local situations and the following when applying EXC test codes, especially in regards to parent/guardian refusals:

- If the district or charter school receives or has already received parent/guardian refusal documentation from parents/guardians, they may consider applying the EXC-N code if the refusal is related to the pandemic (i.e., refusing testing because of health and safety reasons). This may require additional communication with the family to verify their intent.
- The district or school may need to clarify for parents/guardians what will appear on for student results based on the code indicated. While an Individual Student Report (ISR) may not be provided if EXC-N is indicated, any student results shared with families (e.g., through a parent portal or provided in another format by the district) will indicate that the student did not participate due to extenuating circumstances, rather than a parent/guardian refusal.
- The type of communication or documentation required for these situations may depend on individual families and district or school policies and procedures.

Districts and schools are not required to keep documentation regarding why an EXC test code is applied for each student. In addition, districts and charter schools are not required to collect a specific form or other form of documentation from students or families. However, if it is helpful to document for specific circumstances for a specific student and/or a school-level decision, the *Test Administration Report (TAR)* or another district-developed process may be used.

Keep in mind that test codes may be requested as part of public data requests, which means that districts and schools should be prepared to provide information about the decision-making process utilized in regards to test codes.

EXC-N and High School Science

Specifically for High School Science MCA or MTAS, action must be taken during the testing window in order to be able to indicate the EXC-N test code, since a blank assessment record cannot be added in Posttest Editing for high school science.

- Students who would have taken the High School Science MCA (based on their enrollment in a life science or biology course) but are unable, as determined by the district or school, must be added to a test session in PearsonAccess Next and marked complete. Further instructions will be provided in the [MCA Online Testing User Guide](#) (PearsonAccess Next > Resources & Training > User Guides).
- Similarly, for any students who would have taken the High School Science MTAS, a blank assessment must be submitted in order to create an assessment record for Posttest Editing; these details will be included in the [MTAS Data Entry User Guide](#) (PearsonAccess Next > Resources & Training > User Guides).

Note: If a district or school was not able to indicate the EXC-N test code for high school science in 2019–20 and now wishes to make these indications (in order to reflect that students would have already had their opportunity for testing based on coursework completion), the applicable students may be added to test sessions this year in order to indicate the code. If the district or school chooses to indicate codes for students who would have tested last year, they should be prepared to explain the increase in test codes indicated this year.

Existing Test Codes

All of the existing test codes should be applied consistent with the definitions in Chapter 9 of the *Procedures Manual*. While there may be some additional circumstances where the test codes would apply for this year, the general information provided in the manual is relevant. For example:

- Medical excuse (ME) may be applied for students with COVID-19 if all of the specific criteria in Chapter 9 apply. Because the criteria for medical excuse is specific and requires a significant medical emergency, the use of the ME test code for COVID-19 will likely be rare.
- In terms of refusals, the REF-P (refusal by parent/guardian) and REF-S (refusal by student) should only be used if it is the assessment itself that is being refused.
 - If the district or school has received a refusal that they determine is more related to a refusal to come to the building for in-person services of any kind, EXC-N may be more appropriate.
 - However, if a student is receiving in-person instruction and the family does not want the student to test, EXC-N would not apply; this would be a parent refusal.
 - The district or charter school will make these determinations, in communication with families, as needed. Refer to the previous section for more information.
- If the district arranges logistics to bring a distance learning student in for testing and the student does not show up, the absent (ABS) test code may be most appropriate if there is no communication about health and safety (where EXC-N may apply) or the test itself (where REF-P or REF-S may apply).

Note: For test code documentation, like parent/guardian refusals, MDE understands that districts and schools may not be able to collect documentation “in writing” in the same ways as past years. Each district or school determines how they will document required information, and collecting refusals electronically (e.g., via email)

is an option if the district or school chooses. More flexibility is also allowed this year (e.g., creating documentation based on a phone call as students may not be in school to return forms). If the district or school is gathering this documentation in a different way, they must ensure that families understand or provide all parts of the required documentation (e.g., talking through all parts of the [Parent/Guardian Refusal for Student Participation in Statewide Assessments](#) form).

Consistent with the information in Chapter 9 of the *Procedures Manual*, for students whose parents/guardians refused testing, the school is not required to provide alternative educational opportunities on demand while other students are testing.

Test Security

Test Security Requirements

Test security requirements outlined in the *Procedures Manual* and required *Test Security Training* must be followed as written for all administrations of ACCESS, Alternate ACCESS, MCA, and MTAS.

DACs are expected to investigate and report potential test security violations to MDE through the *Test Security Notification* (TSN) process in Test WES as outlined in the *Procedures Manual*.

Monitoring and Audit Changes

Although MDE takes test security seriously, the impact of the pandemic and the need to ensure that districts and charter schools have the time and resources to focus on the unique circumstances for statewide testing this year have necessitated the following changes related to test security requirements that are monitored or audited by MDE:

- District and charter school test security procedures: MDE will not request or review test security procedures from selected districts or schools. Districts and schools are still required to have a test security procedure on file that addresses all of the requirements outlined in Appendix B of the *Procedures Manual*. Note: The logistics for this year's test administrations may require some changes in procedures; while districts and schools may choose to document these changes, MDE does not require that the test security procedure is updated to reflect them.
- Testing calendars: For this year, MDE recommends that posted district or charter school testing calendars reflect larger estimates or windows for when testing days will occur for each grade and subject. These scheduling logistics will be understandably fluid this year, and MDE does not require that the planned testing dates be as specific as typically required.
- ACCESS/MCA monitoring and MTAS audits: MDE will not be completing ACCESS or MCA monitoring visits or MTAS audits this year due to health and safety concerns of having non-school staff present in schools and the more flexible scheduling needs of districts and schools. DACs may monitor testing within their schools, if possible, but this is not required; districts and schools should follow their policies and procedures in terms of whether additional staff members are allowed in classrooms.

Training Requirements

All of the training requirements outlined in Chapter 7 of the *Procedures Manual* apply. Since the decision has been made not to have a remote administration option for MCA, the course for Test Monitors administering the remote MCA has been removed. Note: While the *Test Security Training* mentions the possibility of a remote administration, the content of the training itself was unchanged, so no updates are needed based on the remote administration decision. In addition, with the TMS enhancement this year, the *Test Security Training* will appear as complete across all courses and trainings in TMS after completed once so the removal of the course does not affect any *Test Security Training* completions.

MCA Linguistic Supports and Accommodations

Districts and schools must consult Chapter 4 of the *Procedures Manual* for detailed information about available linguistic supports and accommodations. With the decision not to offer a remote administration, the table provided in the original guidance is no longer needed.

Student Preparation for Testing

As communicated in the *Procedures Manual*, districts need to ensure that students are familiar with the test that they will be taking, and which resources will need to be used may vary by grade or student. The [Student Resources](#) section (MDE website > Districts, Schools and Educators > Teaching and Learning > Statewide Testing > Student Resources) has information on available student resources. Districts should consider the following:

- With limited testing last year, additional students may need to review resources in order to prepare for testing this year than in past years (e.g., both grades 3 and 4 students for MCA).
- The way student resources are typically provided may need to be adjusted (e.g., students may complete online resources independently or teachers may demonstrate functionality for students).
- If students are using different devices for testing than in the past, ensure students are familiar with how to take a test on the device they will be using.

General Health Protocol Requirements

For the administration of assessments, districts and charter schools must follow the health and safety protocols in their Safe Learning Plans if the district or school is implementing in-person or hybrid learning. For schools that are in distance learning, all hybrid health and safety protocols outlined in MDH's [2020-21 Planning Guide for Schools](#) must be followed. This protocol needs to be available on the district or charter school website and made available to every test participant. Districts and charter schools may also work with their COVID-19 Coordinators for any questions about specific health and safety protocols.

Communication with Students and Families

MDE has prepared frequently asked questions documents that districts and charter schools can provide to families for more information as part of their communication with families about ACCESS/Alternate ACCESS and MCA/MTAS testing on the [Student Instruction COVID-19 Resources](#) page (MDE website > COVID-19 > Student Instruction COVID-19 Resources; find information under Assessing Learning). Translated materials are available to share with families. **[UPDATED 3/9/2021]**: In addition, MDE has also created a [sample letter](#) for communicating with families. However, as each district or charter school's situation is different in regards to communicating with families, use of these resources is not required.

[UPDATED 3/9/2021]: Districts are required to communicate with families who have chosen distance learning about statewide testing. Similarly, if there are schools in distance learning or hybrid models, districts will need to communicate with families so they are aware of how tests will be administered. For schools in in-person learning models, districts can choose what communication, outside of typical communications the district may send, is needed. However, for any learning model, making information available about school health and safety procedures (in line with the *General Health Protocol Requirements* above) is required.

The following guidelines and considerations may be helpful as you prepare your communications:

- What is the district or school's plan for ensuring students and families understand the following about participating in statewide testing?
 - Concern for health and safety. MDE recommends districts inform students and families of the options they have not to participate in testing based on concerns about student health and safety because of the circumstances related to COVID-19.
 - Potential impact, if any, if students do not participate in testing.
 - For ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS, the test results are used for individual student English learner programming and reclassification decisions, and students cannot be considered for exiting without a valid ACCESS score.
 - For all Minnesota Assessments, not participating affects the data available to schools and districts for their evaluation of instruction in the applicable standards and inform curriculum planning.
 - The purpose of the test and use of results by the district or charter school is to evaluate instruction in the applicable standards and inform curriculum planning. Refer to *Results and Reporting* below for additional information.
- What does communicating in a manner that provides students' families with meaningful access to information look like in your district or school?
 - Consideration for translated materials or oral communication in the family's home language, following your district or school procedures for this kind of communication with families.

- Use the most appropriate communication methods (e.g., phone, text, email, parent portal, website, audio recording of information in multiple languages). Work with trusted community partners to communicate information as applicable.
- What timing is best for sending this communication to families (e.g., earlier to inform planning, later when logistics are determined)?
- For students participating in testing, what is the plan for communication about the following?
 - Health and safety protocols that will be followed.
 - Logistics for test administration (e.g., day and time of testing, transportation, materials needed by students like headphones).
- What is the district or school’s plan for communication if there are changes (e.g., transportation, flexibility around rescheduling)?

Considerations for Students in School-Age Child Care for Children of Essential Workers

For students who attend the school-age care provided within the district while the district is in distance learning, districts and charter schools may train staff members working in the school-age care setting to administer the tests if they choose. All test administration and test security requirements must be followed. Schools may also choose to handle test administration separately (i.e., make other arrangements for student testing).

Preparing for In-Person Administrations

The following information applies to any in-person administrations of ACCESS, Alternate ACCESS, online or paper MCAs, and MTAS. Health and safety guidelines specific to each test administration are described in the sections below when necessary.

In-Person Testing Locations

For all in-person testing, it is important that test administration procedures are coordinated as necessary with school and district administrative staff, staff involved in test administration, building security staff, and janitorial service staff.

If the school is in a distance learning model at the time of testing, consider the following:

- Transportation arrangements and options will need to be established by the district or charter school and communicated for planned testing days; schools determine if they will provide transportation and/or if students may be dropped off. **[UPDATED 3/9/2021]**: Districts and charter schools need to make all reasonable efforts to explore transportation options for families. All health procedures related to transportation must be followed, including:

- Establishing safe procedures for busing, consistent with MDH guidelines.
- Establishing procedures for student drop off (e.g., where are students dropped off and picked up; where do students and/or family members wait before and after testing; are family members allowed to enter the building or only students).
- A portion of the general education revenue that all public school students generate is intended to be available for student transportation; this revenue is not dependent on the learning model. Additional funding for transportation costs specifically related to administering statewide assessments is not currently being proposed.
- Depending on the amount of time staff and students may be in the building on testing days, schools may need to provide meals on site consistent with MDH guidelines.
 - School nutrition programs are able to serve and claim meals for students who are attending school for statewide assessments. MDE recognizes there may be overlap in the meals a student receives and encourages schools to do the best that is logistically possible not to duplicate meals. For distance learners who receive a multi-day meal pack, schools might consider options such as a special “assessment week meal pack/delivery” that would account for the meals the students receive at school. Districts should also communicate to families that students will be receiving meals at school on statewide assessments days. DACs should direct meal service questions to their district food service director. This information has also been communicated to district food service directors.
- Districts may set up specific schools or sites for testing, rather than preparing all schools for test administrations, to help with some of the logistics related to bringing students into buildings.
- Staff may need to be granted access to buildings and classrooms, especially if the school has been in distance learning since the start of the school year.

Consider logistics if students or staff become sick or begin to experience COVID-related symptoms during testing, and follow plans and health processes that have been developed. In addition, references to applicable health guidance are provided at the beginning of this document to assist with this planning as needed.

Scheduling

Consider the following when developing the testing schedule:

- How many students can be tested safely at once? Are more sessions needed due to social distancing requirements?
- Are there certain factors that can help ensure testing will be completed within the applicable testing window?
 - Will the schedule prioritize groups of students, grade levels, or subjects earlier in the testing window rather than later?
 - Note: Districts and charter schools are required to assess all students indicated as English learners, but may consider prioritizing English learners who are close to being proficient so that they have an opportunity to demonstrate their proficiency and have an ACCESS composite score that can be used for reclassification.

- If prioritizing any groups, ensure all reasonable efforts are still taken to test the remaining groups. Prioritizing one group does not mean that other students are not planned for testing.
- Have all English learners been screened this year using a formal ELP screener or have students only been screened with provisional identification tools? See *EL Screening and ACCESS Participation* below for more information.
- Will students need to complete more than one domain or subject when present? Note: While MDE does not typically recommend that students take an entire test (e.g., all domains of ACCESS) or multiple tests (e.g., Reading and Mathematics MCA) in the same day, districts or charter schools may need to schedule this way this year. Districts should do their best to balance the logistics related to bringing students in with what is best for student test taking. Note: For ACCESS, tier placement for online Speaking and Writing is available immediately in WIDA AMS so students may continue testing as needed. For ACCESS, when an individual student is unable to complete the domain in the same day, the student may still finish on another day.
- Will students need to test at times that may fall outside of regular school hours? Note: To provide districts and schools the most flexibility for scheduling, DACs may request testing times outside of when service provider systems can be accessed for online testing or data entry (i.e., times other than weekdays from 6 a.m. to 5 p.m. for online testing or 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. for data entry). As noted in Chapter 8 of the *Procedures Manual*, the DAC emails mde.testing@state.mn.us at least two business days in advance and provides the rationale, along with the dates and times of the planned ACCESS or MCA test administrations. Keep in mind that service provider help desks have set customer service hours and may not be available for technical assistance or troubleshooting depending on the time of the test session.
- If students will be taking breaks during testing, how will breaks be coordinated to ensure the number of students in one location (e.g., hallways, restrooms) is minimized?
- What is the plan to maintain health and safety for students who typically would test in a different group than their classroom group or pod (e.g., students being administered an accommodation, students who need more time to complete their test beyond the testing session)? Ensure school health and safety procedures are followed to maintain safe groupings of students.
- Similarly, what is the plan for ending testing sessions to ensure students can leave or move to a new location while maintaining physical distance?
- Does the schedule allow enough time in between sessions to sanitize or replace materials and equipment?
- Will the schedule allow time for make-up testing? What is the plan if students miss their scheduled testing session(s)?
- Is there a backup plan if the building(s) planned for testing need to close?

There is additional flexibility this year to allow for students who are not testing to be in the room with students who are testing. While it still is a best practice that students who are not testing are not allowed to be in the testing room, MDE understands that this may not be possible due to staffing and other concerns specific to this year. Ensure Test Administrators and Test Monitors are able to actively monitor students and maintain test security throughout in-person testing. Note: The exception to this policy is for the ACCESS Speaking domain.

Only students who have already completed the Speaking domain may be in the room; since students could hear other students' responses, they are not allowed to be in the room if they still need to complete testing.

Students who are in the room but are not testing must follow the requirements for activities outlined in Chapter 8 of the *Procedures Manual*: Students may read a paper book, work on activities on paper that are not related to the domain or subject(s) being tested, or sit quietly. Note that students may read a paper book, even if reading is being tested, but textbooks for any subject(s) being tested are not allowed. If multiple subjects are being tested (e.g., during a make-up session), the materials students can use must be taken into consideration. Cell phones or other devices (including wearable technology) cannot be used at any time, even if the student has completed testing or is working on something unrelated.

Staffing

The requirements for who can be a Test Administrator or Test Monitor are the same as outlined in Chapter 7 of the *Procedures Manual*. However, districts and charter schools may need to consider training additional staff members to administer assessments due to the extra time needed for health and safety protocols and more, smaller test sessions. This may be especially important for grades 1–12 online ACCESS in order to ensure that EL instruction can continue to be provided. As communicated last year in [Guidance on English Learner Instruction during ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS for ELLs Testing](#), the administration of the grades 1–12 online ACCESS is similar to the administration of the online MCA and is not required to be administered by EL staff. Refer to the information in Chapter 7 for detailed information on who can be Test Administrators for ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS.

In addition, if the district or charter school has determined that student teachers may fill the role of substitute teachers (as outlined in an [FAQ from the Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board \[PELSB\]](#)), these student teachers may also be Test Monitors or Test Administrators, following the information in Chapter 7 of the *Procedures Manual* for substitute teachers.

All staff members who will be administering assessments must complete the applicable trainings required for their role(s) during test administration.

Ensure that sufficient staff are available to administer accommodations, especially for accommodations that require additional staff or a specific expertise, like sign language interpretation or translations. Additional planning may also be needed to ensure sufficient staffing for individual administrations of Kindergarten ACCESS, Alternate ACCESS, and MTAS as these administrations require familiarity with the student and specific training for scoring.

As outlined in Chapter 7 of the *Procedures Manual*, there should be at least one Test Administrator/Test Monitor for every 30 students for test administration. While this is considered best practice, it may not be possible to maintain this ratio this spring if there are not sufficient staff available, and districts and charter schools will be allowed greater flexibility in this area. Ensure Test Administrators and Test Monitors are able to actively monitor students and maintain test security throughout testing.

Technology Considerations

Even for in-person online testing, where technology requirements may be similar to previous years, the circumstances for this year may require additional planning in conjunction with district or school technology staff.

- As stated in the *Procedures Manual*, only district-owned computers or devices can be used for online tests; student-owned computers or devices are not permitted. Devices issued to students by the school can be used for testing but the following information should be considered when preparing technology for testing. While MDE did investigate whether student-owned devices could be used, this is not allowed due to the test security and technology preparation concerns. Contact mde.testing@state.mn.us if you have questions.
- If the devices that will be used for testing are currently issued to students for distance learning, will devices need to be updated to meet all requirements for applicable online tests?
- Have or can updates be reliably pushed out to devices, or is additional time for updates needed when students bring in their devices?
- How can the sharing of devices between students be minimized?
- If students must test on shared devices, are their disposable barriers (e.g., plastic wrap) that can be placed over keyboards or screens to provide a sanitary surface for each student?
- How will shared devices be sanitized between uses by students? Note: Some electronics cannot be sanitized in the same way as other surfaces. Confirm with technology staff the best way to sanitize devices and headsets.
- Will students be asked to bring in personal headphones to reduce required cleaning? See *Test Material Considerations* below for specific considerations for the grades 1–12 online ACCESS Speaking domain.

EL Screening and ACCESS Participation

For ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS, there may be students who were temporarily identified for EL programming this year using approved provisional identification tools. If these students are receiving EL services, the assumption is that they are indicated in MARSS as EL = Y.

- Provisionally-identified students who are [Recently Arrived English Learners](#) should be administered the ACCESS or Alternate ACCESS, even if they are not able to take a formal ELP screener to verify ELP status prior to testing.
- For all other provisionally-identified students, if there is any doubt about a given student's EL status, staff should make efforts to use a formal ELP screener to verify EL status prior to being administered the ACCESS or Alternate ACCESS. *Note: This is important because once students begin ACCESS testing, they will be formally identified for EL status and must meet the minimum English proficiency criteria before exiting EL programming and EL status.*
- Provisionally-identified students who score proficient on a formal ELP screener will no longer receive temporary EL programming and will **not** be administered the ACCESS or Alternate ACCESS. Their EL status will need to be retroactively changed in MARSS to EL = N for the 2020–21 school year.

For students provisionally-identified as not needing EL programming: If there are any doubts about a given student's EL status, staff should make efforts to use a formal ELP screener to verify EL status prior to the close of the ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS testing window. If upon formal screening, it is determined that the student is eligible for EL status, that student should be administered the ACCESS or Alternate ACCESS and will receive EL programming. The status will need to be retroactively changed in MARSS to EL = Y for the 2020–21 school year.

Please direct questions regarding EL identification and EL programming to MDE.EL@state.mn.us.

Test Material and Test Administration Considerations

- Physical test materials should be inventoried immediately upon arrival. Materials are not touched for several days during shipping so there is no need to quarantine test materials upon delivery.
- Consider having staff wear gloves when organizing, distributing, handling, or collecting materials to minimize the direct handling of materials between adults (for organizing and distributing) and adults to students (for handing out and collecting). Note: Any kind of glove may be used; medical-grade gloves are not required.
- For paper ACCESS, Kindergarten ACCESS, Alternate ACCESS, and MTAS, Test Administrators may need additional time to prepare test materials based on the health and safety guidelines outlined in the sections below. Test Administrators can be provided materials ahead of time to prepare, and there is no specific timelines for when materials may be provided as long as they are kept secure throughout preparation.
- When possible, avoid having Test Administrators/Test Monitors share materials.
 - Additional copies of resources may be printed from the WIDA Secure Portal or PearsonAccess Next as needed.
 - Additional copies of secure materials used by Test Administrators/Test Monitors (grades 1–3 *ACCESS Test Administrator's Scripts*, ACCESS Speaking test booklets, Alternate ACCESS test booklets, MCA mathematics and science scripts, and MTAS Task Administration Manuals) can be ordered in additional orders as needed.
- Student testing tickets may be provided to Test Administrators/Test Monitors electronically to reduce sharing of paper test materials. Districts need to consider their data sharing policies and refer to the information on page 163 of the *Procedures Manual* if providing electronically.
- Consider providing writing utensils for students so they do not need to share them.
- Ensure students are prepared and know what to expect for the additional measures that will be taken for health and safety reasons, as test administration may look different than in the past.
- Have a plan in place to ensure test materials are secured when not used for testing. While all districts and charter schools need to follow their chain of custody procedures, they should also know what the plan is if the district or a school is changing learning models. For example, if the district or a school is moving from in-person or hybrid instruction to distance learning:
 - Ensure someone will be at the district or schools to receive test materials shipments.
 - If buildings need to close or there will be limited access, ensure test materials are stored securely.

Note: For Kindergarten ACCESS, paper grades 1–12 ACCESS, and Alternate ACCESS, do NOT modify test materials that are returned for scoring in any way.

Kindergarten ACCESS

- Some materials, like the activity board, can be wiped down as needed between administrations.
- The activity pages in the back of the storybook can be laminated or placed in clear plastic bags that can be wiped down after each administration.
- Cards may be put in page protectors, placed on the table under a transparent overlay (such as a sheet of Plexiglass or plastic wrap), or laminated to make them easier to sanitize and reuse.
- Avoid sharing materials. In situations where the Test Administrator or a student can turn pages in a booklet, do not have the student assist with page turning.
- If there is concern about working in the same student response booklet during test administration, one option is for the Test Administrator to use scratch paper to transcribe the student’s writing response and then transferring it to the student response booklet later. Once entered in the student response booklet, Test Administrators must securely destroy the used scratch paper.
- Encourage students to use their pencils as pointers to indicate their answers in the books or on the cards, instead of using their hands.

Grades 1–12 ACCESS

Typically, different domains should not be administered at the same time. However, if required for scheduling purposes, districts may combine domains (as well as grade-level clusters and tiers) within the same testing location for this year. Ensure Test Administrators are aware of differences in administration or directions that may need to be clarified for students. When possible, the Speaking Tier Pre-A and grades 1–3 Writing should still be administered separately.

Note: When an individual student is unable to complete the domain in the same day, the student may still finish on another day.

Grades 4–5 Writing Domain

Only students who are proficient at keyboarding should be moved to a keyboarding session in WIDA AMS and respond online; students should not be moved to a keyboarding session only because of considerations such as ease of administration or reducing paper materials that require additional handling between adults and students.

Grades 1–12 Online ACCESS Speaking Domain

- Have students continue to wear masks throughout testing. Encourage students to speak loudly during the Speaking test.
- Consider allowing students to use their own headsets or earbuds with built-in microphones for online test administration; make sure that the microphone attached to personal headsets or earbuds passes the mic check prior to the start of the test session. In addition, make sure that a child who is wearing a mask can be understood using the mic check feature at the beginning of the test.

- Although not recommended by WIDA, districts and charter schools may consider having students use the built-in microphone on their testing device if health and safety protocols require. This would require students to test individually or ensure there is additional space between students to ensure that only that student’s speaking response is recorded.

Alternate ACCESS

There are no manipulatives involved in the Alternate ACCESS; the student responds by pointing at pictures in the test book or responding with their voice when prompted. If appropriate for the student, Test Administrators can have students point with their pencil or some type of pointer that can be sanitized (rather than their finger).

MCA Online In Person

Within student tests, a question about the location where the test is being taken has been added to the student directions.

- Where are you taking the test today?
 - At school
 - Somewhere else

Students testing in-person should select “at school”, even if taking the test at a different location than they typically would have (e.g., testing at different school than the one they would normally attend). Test Monitors may assist students with this question as needed.

Even though the decision has been made not to offer a remote administration, the question will still appear in student tests; the timing of the decision does not allow enough time to remove it. Instructions are provided to the Test Monitor in the *Testing Directions: Online* to assist students as needed. If student responses to the question indicate a high number of students in a session may have taken the test at home, MDE may contact the DAC to confirm where students tested to ensure test security has been maintained.

MTAS

- MDE recommends ordering separate MTAS test materials for each student this year for health and safety reasons. Additional kits (containing the Task Administration Manual, Presentation Pages, and Response Option Cards) can be ordered in additional orders as needed.
- If needed, Presentation Pages materials may be disassembled and placed in sheet protectors or laminated, as needed, so they can be easily wiped down. As with any other adaptations to Presentation Pages, these pages must be returned to Pearson following testing.
- Objects or manipulatives can be placed in clear plastic bags, which can be wiped down or discarded after each test administration.
- If appropriate for the student, Test Administrators are encouraged to have the student respond with their voice or by pointer with their pencil or some type of pointer that can be sanitized (rather than their finger).

Testing Rooms

- Identify a testing room as large as is possible and practical. While the guidance typically is to use a closed space to prevent disruptions, this may not be possible, especially if larger groups of students need to test at one time. Ensure to allow for a minimum of 6 feet of space between students when planning seating arrangements and follow local guidance on desk or chair spacing.
- Even for smaller or individual administrations, avoid small offices or classrooms when possible.
- If feasible and available, schools may consider using clear dividers between the students and Test Administrators/Test Monitors, especially for Kindergarten ACCESS, Alternate ACCESS, and MTAS where the administration requires close physical contact.
- Consider setting up the room before students enter with the applicable test materials already placed at student work areas (e.g., ACCESS test booklet, MCA paper test books, scratch paper and testing tickets). At the end of the testing session, have students return materials to a specific container to minimize handling materials between Test Administrators/Test Monitors and students.
- Consider the following in line with your district and school policies:
 - The use of face coverings and/or face shields as outlined in MDE’s [Safe Learning Plan](#) and MDH’s [2020-2021 Planning Guide for Schools: Health Considerations for Navigating COVID-19](#).
 - Providing hand sanitizer and cleaning supplies for each testing room.
 - Designating someone to be responsible for cleaning frequently touched surfaces between testing sessions if room or supplies are used by different groups.

Results and Reporting

Final decisions about how test results will be communicated is still to be determined, but the following provides some general information about results for this year.

- Results from all Minnesota Assessments are intended to be used as a “system check” at the district and school levels. For ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS, the individual student results are used for EL programming and reclassification decisions. There are two [infographics](#) available about appropriate and inappropriate uses of MCA and ACCESS results (MDE website > Districts, Schools and Educators > Teaching and Learning > Statewide Testing > District Resources). [**UPDATED 3/9/2021**]: In addition, the [Testing 1, 2, 3 website](#) includes information and resources about the Minnesota Assessments. These resources can be used and shared as districts plan for and communicate about results.
- [**UPDATED 3/9/2021**]: As described under *Minnesota’s Response to Federal Guidance* above, all state and district reporting requirements for must be maintained, including the requirements to disaggregate data by student subgroup. For Minnesota, this means that districts will be provided assessment results as in past years through Assessment Secure Reports (District and School Student Results (DSR and SSR) and Test Results Summary) and on the MDE website.
- [**UPDATED 3/9/2021**]: With the extension of the testing windows, Posttest Editing will now take place in June (tentatively planned for June 7–25). Even if some districts are able to finish testing earlier, all data files come from service providers at the close of the respective windows (DRC and Pearson) so Posttest Editing cannot open earlier.

- In addition, information on updated reporting timelines for all assessments will be communicated when available, but timeliness of results, even with the extension of testing windows, is a priority of MDE.

Note: The 2020–21 statewide assessments have been developed following all of Minnesota’s statewide assessment processes; statistical checks and validations that are used every year after the administrations and prior to official reporting activities are planned for the 2020–21 statewide assessments. All Minnesota statewide assessments will reliably measure what each assessment is designed to measure. MDE is aware that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted student learning. The assessments will be an important reliable measure of student achievement and the results will be an accurate reflection of student learning. This information will help us continue addressing potential learning loss and ensure all Minnesota students are on track for success in school and in life.