

TESTING 123

Updates for teachers from the MDE Statewide Testing Division

September 21, 2021

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Spring 2021 Assessment Results

The final 2021 assessments results were released publicly on Friday, Aug. 27. The information is available in two places for families, educators, and community stakeholders to access:

- The [Minnesota Report Card](#) allows users to create graphs and tables to view results for various groups of students across the state and within districts and schools.
- Downloadable data files are under [Assessment Files](#) (MDE website > Data Center > Data Reports and Analytics), which provide summary assessment data for the state, county, districts, and schools that can be used to perform analyses. These are the same files that were provided to districts and the media ahead of the public release.

Educator and School Leader Toolkit

The Toolkit for School Leaders and Educators: Communicating Statewide Assessment Results is available to help support school leaders and educators in communicating results with their staff, families, and the community. This toolkit contains links to existing materials for interpreting and understanding results and new customizable materials, such as a PowerPoint presentation and template letter, which can be modified as needed and shared with school staff and families. Use of these resources is optional but they are being provided to support districts in communicating assessment results from spring 2021.

The educator toolkit is available on the Test Results Summary secure page, located under Assessment Secure Reports on the [Secure Reports](#) page of the Data Center on the MDE website. However, it will not be viewable on the public MDE website as the resources are intended to be accessed and modified by district staff before being shared. If you do not have access to secure reports, please contact your District Assessment Coordinator.

Toolkit for Families

The [Toolkit for Families: Understanding Statewide Assessment Results](#) is available to provide information in one place for families about interpreting and understanding results. The direct link may be provided to families and the toolkit is also available on the [Students and Families Statewide Testing](#) page. It includes links to existing materials, including Individual Student Report (ISR) resources, and to the new What Families Need to Know about Using MCA and MTAS Results and What Families Need to Know about Using ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS Results resources.

Additional Resources

The following resources are available to support districts with using and understanding the public release of results:

- The 2021 Statewide Assessment Reporting Guidance provides guidance for districts with information on using 2021 results appropriately and in context. The second phase of this document, with data included, is posted on the [District Resources](#) page (under the Test Score Interpretation Resources expandable header).
- A [Minnesota Report Card User Guide](#) (select Using the Report Card menu choice) provides information on interpreting and using the data on the Report Card.
- The [Assessment Files User Guide](#) (linked at the end of the overview paragraph located at the top of the Assessment Files page) provides information about the content of the files.

- The Statewide Assessments: Using Public Results, located under the Test Score Interpretation Resources expandable header, is a one-page resource that provides information for district staff about using these summary results for statewide assessments, including specific contexts to consider for this year.
- Educator resources are available on the [Testing 1, 2, 3](#) website to provide information on assessment and data resources on one central site, including test details organized by subject and grade, explanations of MCA data and appropriate uses in the classroom, and helpful resources for data literacy.

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Benchmark Reports

The 2020–21 MCA Benchmark Reports are now available in PearsonAccess Next under Reports > Published Reports for DAC and Assessment Administrator (AA) user roles.

Benchmark reports are generated at a school or district level for each grade and subject. They may be helpful as an additional resource for understanding school or district performance on each benchmark assessed on the MCA from the grade-level standards. The reports also provide summarized information about student performance on each strand or substrand from the standards. Educators should always consider additional information about student learning and instruction when reviewing benchmark reports, but may find the report helpful as one piece of information when making decisions that are larger in scope like curriculum alignment or scope and sequence planning. In addition, during the 2020–21 school year, educators and students experienced significant and profound changes in teaching and learning, as well as social and emotional well-being. It is important to keep this in mind when interpreting assessment results, including the benchmark reports.

Before digging in and making inferences from the benchmark reports, review the following resources:

- The 2020–21 Benchmark Report Interpretive Guide and 2020–21 Benchmark Report “How To” Quick Guides are posted on the [Additional Reporting Resources page](#).
- The 2020–21 Benchmark Report Video Guide is available on the [Additional Reporting Resources page](#).
- View the [Benchmark Achievement Level](#) Descriptors developed by MDE staff for reading and mathematics on the on the Testing 1, 2, 3 website. The Benchmark ALDs can help make meaning out of the benchmark reports as they describe the knowledge and skills students typically demonstrate across the four achievement levels for each benchmark from the standards.
- For the technical details of the benchmark report calculations, refer to Appendix A: Benchmark Report Calculations Resource in the [Technical Manual for Minnesota’s MCA and MTAS Assessments](#).

For questions about the benchmark reports, please contact mde.testing@state.mn.us. If DACs or AAs have questions about accessing the benchmark reports, contact Pearson at 888-817-8659 or [submit a Pearson help desk request](#).

Note: There were no benchmark reports produced for 2020 due to COVID-19. In 2019, the MCA Benchmark Report was redesigned using a different calculation method to report school and district performance on benchmarks. School and district staff should not compare benchmark reports before 2019 to benchmark reports from 2019 and 2021.

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Final Reports Resources Overview

Individual Student Reports (ISRs) for both MCA/MTAS and ACCESS/Alternate ACCESS were delivered to districts on Aug. 26. Electronic copies of ISRs can be retrieved in [PearsonAccess Next](#) and [WIDA AMS \(DRC\)](#) respectively.

ISRs must be provided to parents/guardians no later than Dec. 1. Each district decides if the paper reports are distributed or if electronic versions are provided (i.e., through a secure parent portal). If provided electronically, the final version from WIDA AMS or Published Reports in PearsonAccess Next must be used. Paper results must be securely disposed of if providing electronically.

ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS Reporting Resources

The following resources are available on the WIDA website:

- The updated [ACCESS for ELLs parent letters](#) are now available in the same 47 languages as the ACCESS ISRs. They provide general information about the ACCESS and are meant to be provided to parents/guardians alongside the ISR. The letters are available in Word format so that they can be customized at the district as desired with local test administration information and state or district policies.
- The [ACCESS for ELLs Interpretive Guide for Score Reports](#) and the [Alternate ACCESS for ELLs Interpretive Guide](#) for Score Reports provide an overview of the various types of score reports, explain how scores are calculated, and how to use proficiency level and scale scores to support students' language growth.
- The [ACCESS for ELLs: Understanding Your Child's Scores](#) flyer, available in 13 languages, helps explain ACCESS scores and the ISR to families. Use the [Alternate ACCESS for ELLs: Understanding Your Child's Scores](#) flyer for students who took Alternate ACCESS.
- Find sample score reports and additional information about ACCESS scores on the [ACCESS for ELLs Scores and Reports](#) and the [Alternate ACCESS Scores and Reports](#) pages.

In addition, a new resource, What Families Need to Know about Using ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS Results, is posted on the [More about ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS](#) section of the MDE website. This resource can be provided to help families understand the purpose and uses of their student's results from spring 2021.

MCA/MTAS Reporting Resources

Related resources and samples for MCA and MTAS ISRs are available on the [ISR Resources page](#) of PearsonAccess Next:

- Interpretive Guide for Minnesota Reports: This comprehensive guide contains detailed information on how to read the ISRs and use the results, including important context to consider for this year's extenuating circumstances.
- MCA and MTAS ISR Quick Guides: The quick guides provide a high-level overview of how to read the ISRs and may be useful for educators when reviewing student results with parents/guardians.
- Understanding the MCA and MTAS ISR Videos: These short videos provide a high-level overview of the information presented on the ISRs and may be a useful resource to provide to parents/guardians when reviewing results for their student at home.
- Samples of MCA and MTAS ISRs.

In addition, a new resource, What Families Need to Know about Using MCA and MTAS Results, is posted on the [More about MCA and MTAS](#) section of the MDE website. This resource can be provided to help families understand the purpose and uses of their student's results from spring 2021.

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Participation Calculation on Minnesota Report Card

Participation on the [Minnesota Report Card](#) (under How Well are Students Doing? > Test Achievement Levels, Test Results and Participation) is calculated by dividing the number of students who tested, or attempted a test, by the number of students who were expected to test. The number of students who were expected to test in reading, mathematics, and science are defined by those enrolled during the two-week accountability window. The extenuating circumstances (EXC-N and EXC-A) test codes indicated for students who could not test or complete testing due to COVID or other circumstances are used as part of determining participation. These test codes were used instead of using the NA (not attempted) and NC (not complete) score codes, which are used in typical years for those students who did not test.

Participation for high school Science MCA/MTAS is calculated differently. High school science participation looks at graduates in a given year, and calculates the percent of those students who have

taken the Science MCA or MTAS at some point during their high school career. For example, if students in a district typically take Life Science in grade 11, this means that students who graduated in 2021 who would have taken the test in 2019–20 (but didn't due to COVID-19 and were coded as EXC-N instead) are now included in the denominator of the 2021 science participation calculation. The EXC-N code does not count towards the numerator. Students who take their Science MCA this year will be counted in the participation calculation the year they graduate. For the next 4-5 years, participation rates for high school science will be impacted due to EXC-N and EXC-A codes in 2020 or 2021.

Note: Assessment participation is a state-level (not a district- or school-level) requirement. Assessment participation is not included as part of North Star Accountability calculations. Districts may choose to include this explanation as assessment results are shared publicly.

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Updates to Data and Availability of Reports

Longitudinal Reports/Exports and Historical Student Data are available in [PearsonAccess Next](#). The Subscore Report is publicly available on the PearsonAccess Next website under Reporting Resources > Subscore Report. User guides providing instruction on viewing, printing, downloading, and exporting the data are posted on the PearsonAccess Next website, under [Additional Reporting Resources](#).

- Longitudinal reports provide a graphical display of historical results for review and comparison at the student, school, district, and/or state level by administration, performance, and student group. Results in longitudinal reports are available to school- or district-level users only. There is also an option to export longitudinal results in Excel format.
- Historical test results are available in historical student data for students who previously tested in the district and for students who are currently enrolled in the district, regardless of where they tested. Note: Contact your District Assessment Coordinator (DAC) for this information.
- **New for 2020-21:** The Subscore Report has been redesigned and is available on the PearsonAccess Next website on a new page under the Reporting Resources dropdown.
- The report provides an easy way for the public to access school, district, and state level MCA subscore data, also known as strand/substrand performance levels, for a selected test, year, grade, and subject.
- The subscore performance levels are reported as aggregated strand performance level percentages, using the strand performance level descriptors of Below Expectations, At or Near Expectations, and Above Expectations. The strand performance level is determined by comparing the school (or district) performance to the state expectation at the "Meets" achievement level. For each grade and subject the MCA is administered in, 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 level.

- Keep in mind that subscore data is based on a limited number of items. Examine this data along with local district and classroom data to determine the extent that the same trends are seen when making decisions about curriculum and instruction.

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Upcoming Opportunities

Apply for the Mathematics Standards Review Committee

The application for serving on the 2021-22 Minnesota Academic Standards Mathematics Review Committee is posted on the [Minnesota Department of Education's Mathematics webpage](#). The deadline for application is **October 15, 2021**.

Serving on the committee means a commitment of at least 10 full-day committee meetings from November 18, 2021, through August 2022, as well as work between these meetings. Please encourage teaching staff to participate. While it requires seven days out of the classroom, it is fantastic professional development for teachers.

The Minnesota Department of Education seeks to establish a highly qualified, diverse committee with a broad representation of stakeholders including teachers, administrators, school board members, higher education, business/industry, and citizens; content specialists with expertise across all developmental levels; people from diverse educational settings and from urban, suburban, and rural communities.

The applications for the Mathematics Review Committee are due October 15, 2021. Committee members will be announced October 25, 2021, on the [Minnesota Department of Education's Mathematics webpage](#).

If you have any questions, please contact [Doug Paulson](#).

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Important Ideas and Research in School Assessment and Data

This section of the newsletter is designed to keep educators well-informed on current research and best practices to improve teaching, leadership, and learning in relation to data use and assessment in the classroom.

Understanding Learning 'Acceleration': Going Slow to Go Fast

In this Education Week article, many schools report planning to deal with students' unfinished learning by teaching on-grade material while providing "just in time" supports and scaffolds to help students catch up. Time-honored advice to teachers is to meet students where they are, but will that work with those who have missed large chunks of instruction?

The report below addresses these challenges for three problems of practice centered on students undergoing key transitions that are traditionally formally taught in the classroom: students entering grade 1 who have learned phonics mostly in remote environments (foundational literacy), grade 9 algebra, and English-language acquisition among English-learners.

"What we've seen," says Bailey Cato Czupryk of TNTP, "is that when we try to meet kids where they are, we never build a bridge to where they should be. We just stay where they are forever." Instead, the thought behind acceleration is that teachers start with the current grade's learning objectives, then backtrack for students on concepts as needed. For each of the three scenarios identified above, case studies were developed by Ed Week based on the problem of practice, along with strategies teachers can use to adapt learning.

["Understanding Learning 'Acceleration': Going Slow to Go Fast"](#) by Stephen Sawchuk and Liana Loewus in Education Week, June 22, 2021.

Making Word Problems Meaningful

In this article in Teaching Mathematics: Learning & Teaching PK-12, a group of researchers and teachers make the claim that on math standardized tests, many students are proficient with the computation tasks but do less well with word problems. They believe this happens because students tend to jump into word problems without understanding the situation presented, many are taught to rely on key words to decide which operations to use, and some students jump to plugging in the numbers and solving without making sense of the problem.

The authors believe that students should be encouraged to apply the reading comprehension strategies learned in their ELA classes to math problems: visualizing, retelling, making connections, asking questions, etc. Here's how they recommend applying the reading strategies:

- Visualizing – Students create a mental image as they read the problem – a picture of what's going on, and a schematic representation of the math involved.
- Retelling – Students recap the main ideas of the problem with a partner, in their own words, including as many details as possible (but not the numbers or the final question).

- Making connections – As they retell the word problem, students make personal and mathematical connections. Making connections may be challenging however if students lack personal connections to the math problem.
- Asking questions – Students use questions to clarify what’s going on and make connections before they start to do the math. The authors say this “positions them as problem posers and provides them more agency to solve the problem once the question is posed.”

The goal is “to get students talking about word problems and thinking about them deeply.” The authors don’t recommend having students memorize and repeat the steps; research has shown this to be an ineffective strategy. Rather, the process of visualizing, retelling, making connections, and asking questions should become part of the classroom culture, so students can apply math in novel scenarios without the need for prompts.

[“Making Word Problems Meaningful”](#) by Melissa Gallagher, Laura Ellis, and Travis Weiland in *Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12*, August 2021 (Vol. 114, #8, pp. 580-590).

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