

TESTING 123

Updates for teachers from the MDE Statewide Testing Division

April 14, 2021

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Teaching and Learning Led by Evidence: Session 8 Rescheduled

Due to a registration error, MDE was unable to host this webinar as originally planned on March 25. We apologize for this inconvenience. This session has been rescheduled for Thursday, May 6.

Registration is required using the WebEx link below. Participants can earn one continuing education unit (CEU) for each session by sending a request to testing123@state.mn.us after attending the session.

- **Session 8:** *How should individual MCA scores be interpreted and used?*
 - **Participants will gain:** An overview of the MCA and what it is designed to measure, a better understanding of individual student score interpretations, and guidance for using results to look at growth.
 - **Presenters:** Yufeng Berry and Kendra Olsen
 - **Date:** Thursday, May 6, 3–4 p.m.

- [Register for Session 8: How should individual MCA scores be interpreted and used?](#)

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New Classroom Assessment Learning Modules on Testing 1, 2, 3

Two new virtual learning modules are available to support educators in developing a collection of assessment questions that are useful for guiding instruction: *Writing Multiple Choice Questions – Mathematics* and *Writing Multiple Choice Questions – Reading*. Each module can be launched on the [Classroom Assessment](#) page of Testing 1, 2, 3, under the blue expandable section, “Training Modules for Writing Assessment Questions.”

These modules provide:

- An overview of the principles for writing multiple choice questions of varying cognitive complexity and difficulty that are reliable for a classroom math or reading assessment.
- A checklist of best practices to use for composing multiple choice questions that assist in determining the extent to which students are mastering the knowledge, skills, and abilities outlined in the standards.

Both learning modules have pre-recorded video presentations and downloadable tools and handouts. Practice exercises are provided throughout the modules to help educators apply the knowledge and skills in their content area.

It is recommended to set aside an hour of time to work through the module, taking time to pause and reflect individually or discuss with colleagues. Note: Although the modules are designed for multiple choice question types, the same best practices can be applied for writing or improving any question type used to gain insight about student understanding.

For more information, please contact testing123@state.mn.us about these resources.

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Science and English Language Arts Standards Implementation Delay

School leaders received the following information on Friday, April 2:

To provide flexibility for districts in implementing new standards as the state emerges from COVID-19, MDE will be delaying the required implementation of the Science and the English Language Arts standards to the 2024–25 and 2025–26 school years, respectively. Implementation dates for each content area are set as part of the rulemaking process to allow flexibility for implementation needs. With both of these two content areas still in the rulemaking process, MDE will use that opportunity to update the proposed rule language to reflect the new implementation date. Since the MCAs are based on the standards, the Science MCA-IV will be delayed until the spring of 2025 for grades 5, 8, and high school, and the Reading MCA-IV will be delayed until the spring of 2026 for grades 3–8 and 10. Although districts are not required to begin work to implement the standards, MDE will continue to engage in test specifications and development to be prepared for the MCA-IVs in spring of 2025 and 2026.

Important note: Due to the fact that the Arts and Physical Education standards have already gone through rulemaking, MDE does not have the authority to delay implementation of these standards; therefore, these standards will move forward with implementation as scheduled. There is still legislation currently being considered that would delay implementation of the Arts and Physical Education standards.

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Science MCA-IV Field Testing

The Science MCA-IV, based on the *2019 Minnesota Academic Standards*, will first be administered in 2024–25. A new test design and new item type are being field tested this spring for MCA-IV including:

- Presentation of information on multiple tabs on the same page
- Constructed-response items where students answer the question by writing a response

Field testing is the process MDE uses to develop and construct tests for future years. This spring's field test data will play an important role in evaluating the new tab element and exploring the use of combined human and artificial intelligence (AI) scoring processes for constructed response items. The data will also aid in identifying exemplary phenomena and items for release to show MCA-IV style and alignment to standards.

Field test items do not count toward a student's score, but it is critical that students are familiar with these new elements and complete them to the best of their abilities. A *Science MCA-IV New Items Tutorial* and *Science MCA-IV New Items Teacher Guide* are available on the [Student Tutorial page](#) of PearsonAccess Next to familiarize students and educators with the new test design (information presented on tabs) and new item type (constructed response).

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Invitation to Minnesota Science Teachers

Please share this information with science teachers and educators interested in becoming a science test item writer.

MDE invites Minnesota science teachers to apply for the *Building Capacity for Science Assessment: Science MCA-IV Item Writing Workshop*. This compensated workshop will be 4.5 days total, starting with a half-day virtual training on June 25, and followed by virtual meetings on July 12–13 and July 26–27. Approximately 15–20 additional hours may be needed outside of these dates to complete the writing assignments. This workshop is focused on writing engaging grade-level phenomena tied to the 2019 Minnesota Science Standards and also generating questions for each phenomenon. The workshop goals are to generate creative thinking, engage with teachers' unique teaching approaches, and build a repository of engaging phenomena for the Science MCA-IV.

Interested science teachers can contact [Jim Wood](#) and [Judi Iverson](#), Science Assessment Specialists at MDE for more information, or [apply for the MCA-IV item writer workshop](#) by April 23. Writers will be chosen based on grade-level and content-area writing needs, as well as experience in developing assessments. Selected writers will be contacted the week of May 3–7.

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MCA/MTAS Reminders - Preparing for Testing

Student Resources

Districts should consider the following in regards to preparing students for testing with MDE's student resources:

- Due to limited testing last year, additional students may need to review resources in order to prepare for testing this year (e.g., both grades 3 and 4 students for MCA).

- The way student resources are typically provided may need to be adjusted depending on a student’s or school’s learning model (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.

Each district determines which resources, if any, will be used before testing and how they will be used with students.

- [Student tutorials](#): Familiarizes students and educators with the general functionality of the online test including Navigation, Tools, and Item Types. Each tutorial is accompanied by a teacher guide. In addition, for students taking the Science MCA, the Science MCA-IV tutorial and teacher guide are available and provide information specific to items that will be field tested this year.
- [Item samplers](#): Familiarizes students and educators with how content is presented in the test. Item samplers are available in every grade and subject for the MCA and MTAS, as well as for accommodations and linguistic supports.

MCA Testing Directions

Test Monitors are required to use testing directions to ensure test administrations are standardized across the state as much as possible. There are two versions of the [MCA Testing Directions](#) depending on how the test is being administered: *Testing Directions: Online* and *Testing Directions: Paper*. It is imperative that Test Monitors are familiar with the relevant testing directions and that they use them during testing.

Two sections of the *Testing Directions* must be provided to Test Monitors and used for every test administration: *Script to Read to Students* and *Answering Questions and Providing Assistance*. These sections must be supplied in their entirety and cannot be modified (i.e., portions of the script removed).

Districts and schools may also determine if they will allow Test Monitors to access the directions electronically during test sessions rather than using a printed copy. If accessed electronically, Test Monitors must follow MDE and district policies regarding device usage (e.g., not checking email or using the device for other work).

The scripted portion of the *Testing Directions* is available in Hmong, Somali, and Spanish on the MCA Testing Directions page. A *Health and Safety Guidance for Test Monitors* resource is also posted.

Support for MCA Accommodations

The [Guidelines for Administration of Accommodations](#) is available for districts and schools to provide to staff who will administer the MCA using the scribe (SC), script (MS), signed interpretation of the script (OA), or signed interpretation of directions (TD).

Hard-copy versions of the multiplication and hundreds tables posted on the [Mathematics Table Accommodations](#) page of PearsonAccess Next may be provided during testing for students who require them as an accommodation for the grades 3–8 Mathematics MCA or general support for grade 11 Mathematics MCA.

- For grades 3–8, these accommodations are indicated in the student’s IEP or 504 plan and require the student to test using a paper test book in an individual setting. Students only use the tables on the segments where calculators are allowed (Segments 2, 3, and 4).
- For grade 11, since a handheld calculator is allowed on all sections/segments of the grade 11 Mathematics MCA, the student may test online or with paper test materials, but must test in an individual setting. Using these

mathematics tables is considered a general support for grade 11 Mathematics MCA and their use is not indicated with an accommodation code for MDE.

Online MCA Location

Though there is no remote administration, a question about the location where the test is being taken still appears in students online MCA tests. The question asks if the student is taking the test today “at school” or “somewhere else.”

In the [Testing Directions: Online](#) there is a script box that the Test Monitors must read aloud, where students are directed to **select “at school.”** Students who take their online MCA in a different physical location than where they typically receive instruction (i.e., distance learners or students in an online school) may need additional clarification by the Test Monitor during that part of the directions.

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Test Security Training Reminder

Prior to spring testing, all applicable staff must complete the *Test Security Training*, receive guidance for district-specific policies and procedures, and complete test-specific trainings. Training requirements may vary by role and test, but the *Test Security Training* is required for all individuals associated with any aspect of test administration or test content.

The *Test Security Training* addresses MDE policies and procedures for testing. In addition, each district has additional policies and procedures for test administration that must be communicated and followed. Each district determines how to communicate this information to staff as appropriate for their role. This may be through a district or school training or in writing (e.g., email, handout, etc.). Contact your District’s Assessment Coordinator (DAC) for more information.

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Test Administration Reminders

In-Person Testing Required

As in previous years, all Minnesota Assessments (ACCESS, Alternate ACCESS, MCA, and MTAS) must be administered at school (in-person) and with a Test Monitor present. There is NOT an option for students to take any of these tests remotely.

While a remote option for MCA was previously evaluated, it was determined that it was not feasible as it could not be a secure administration (i.e., could not be monitored remotely).

Cell Phone and Device Policy

For all statewide test administrations (MCA/MTAS and ACCESS/Alternate ACCESS), students may **not** use or access cell phones, wearable technology, or other devices at any time during testing, including during breaks or when testing is completed. District and School Assessment Coordinators must develop and train staff on school-specific policies and procedures prior to test administration.

Note: Use of a device is allowed if it is used as a medical monitor, as long as the use is officially documented by a medical professional. The Test Administrator/Test Monitor must ensure the device is not accessed for other purposes.

Headphones Reminder

Headphones or earbuds may be supplied by the school, or students may use their own. They are required for the online reading, listening, and writing domains of ACCESS, and the online Mathematics and Science MCAs. Headphones or earbuds with built-in microphones are required for the online speaking domains of ACCESS, though districts and charter schools may consider having students use the built-in microphone on their testing device depending on the district's health and safety protocols. Headphones or earbuds are recommended for the online Reading MCA so that students can listen to the Student Directions at the beginning of the test.

Bluetooth headphones and earbuds are not allowed as they have the ability to connect to and receive information from a device other than the testing device, which cannot be verified by the Test Administrator or Test Monitor during testing.

Students Who Have Finished Testing

There have been questions from districts about MDE's policy regarding which students are allowed in the testing room. This policy is included in the [2020–21 Minnesota Assessments Guidance during COVID-19](#).

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 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. 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.

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Important Ideas and Research in School Assessment and Data

Robert Slavin on Tutoring as a Crucial Post-Covid Intervention

In this article on his website, Robert Slavin (Johns Hopkins University) outlines the research-to-practice gap that is well documented in our education system. Medicine used to have an evidence-to-practice gap, but in the 1900s, vaccines and cures for diseases like polio changed people's mindset. "These breakthroughs," says Slavin, "were explicitly engineered to solve health problems of great concern to the public, just as the Covid-19 vaccines were explicitly engineered to solve the pandemic."

What about the unfinished learning of millions of students in the pandemic? "All sorts of solutions have been proposed," says Slavin, "but only one, tutoring, has both a solid and substantial research base and a significant number of proven, practical, cost-effective solutions."

Slavin suggests recruiting and training college-educated tutors “because evidence finds that well-supported teaching assistants get results as good as those obtained by certified teachers” – and getting thousands of tutors certified is not practical in the short term. His idea is to give schools and districts a choice of proven tutoring programs and then provide PD via webinars to make sure the quality of tutoring is maintained as it’s taken to scale.

If the tutoring initiative is successful, says Slavin, this might be the “penicillin/polio/Covid moment” for educational research, proving that it can solve big, practical problems in schools.

[“ProvenTutoring.org: Getting Proven Tutoring Programs Into Widespread Practice”](#) by Robert Slavin, March 2, 2021.



Statewide Student Assessment and Data Analytics

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