

TESTING 123

Updates for teachers from the MDE Statewide Testing Division

October 19, 2020

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Benchmark Achievement Level Descriptors (ALDs)

Over the years, educators have requested more detailed descriptions of the knowledge, skills, and abilities demonstrated by students who scored at various achievement levels on the MCA, beyond what the traditional [Achievement Level Descriptors \(ALDs\)](#) offer. In response to this need, MDE staff collaborated to outline more specific descriptions: Benchmark ALDs for Mathematics and Reading in grades 3–8 and high school. The purpose of the Benchmark ALDs is to:

- Promote equity for all students across the state, by clarifying the expected learning outcomes for instruction and classroom assessment aligned to the Minnesota Academic Standards in reading and mathematics.
- Support teacher analysis of the depth of their curriculum, instruction, and classroom assessments.

The Benchmark ALDs will be available in two formats. The table format for all grades is now available for download on [Testing 1, 2, 3](#). Classroom teachers may find this format useful for lesson and unit planning, as it shows all the benchmarks continuously for a grade.

The Benchmark ALDs will be available in a vertical articulation format later in October. District curriculum planning and professional learning communities (PLCs) may prefer this format, as it provides the benchmarks by reporting category across all grades. Note: The specific descriptions of the knowledge, skills, and abilities are the same in both formats.

Additionally, a training module will be available in early November on Testing 1, 2, 3.

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Educator Resources on PearsonAccess Next

The following resources are available through Pearson for teachers and families to use in support of both in-person and virtual instruction.

Pearson Perspective

[Perspective for Educators](#) and [Perspective for Families](#) provide thousands of learning resources aligned to the Minnesota Academic Standards for reading, mathematics, and science. Teachers can create assignments, build tests, and differentiate resources using Learning Locators. Enter the “mn_edu” pass phrase in Perspective for Educators to get started. Resources are available within Perspective to help teachers and parents navigate the site.

For more information, select Pearson Perspective under Quick Links on [PearsonAccess Next](#), or contact Pearson at 888-817-8659 or [submit a Pearson help desk request](#).

WriteToLearn

[WriteToLearn](#) (under Quick Links on [PearsonAccess Next](#)) is a complimentary online literacy tool available for Minnesota teachers and students in grades 8 and 10. WriteToLearn provides students the opportunity to practice their essay and summary writing skills and expand their vocabulary. As students participate in assigned activities, they receive personalized feedback, hints, and tips to encourage, instruct, and reward their progress, and teachers have the benefit of assigning more writing practice without the added grading. To get started, District Assessment Coordinators should email MNWriteToLearn@Pearson.com.

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Statewide Assessments for 2020–21

The MDE Statewide Student Assessments and Data Analytics team has received some questions from districts regarding MDE’s plan for administering statewide assessments this spring.

Statewide assessments (ACCESS/Alternate ACCESS and MCA/MTAS) are required by both federal and state statute. As explained in a recent letter from Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos to Chief State School Officers (including MDE) regarding statewide assessments, the U.S. Department of Education does not anticipate granting waivers to states this year, as they did in the 2019–20 school year.

Regardless of the learning mode of a district or an individual student, districts should prepare and plan to administer all required statewide assessment in person for the 2020–21 school year. Information in the *2020–21 Planning Guidance for Minnesota Public Schools* has been updated to reflect this.

MDE continues to discuss considerations for this spring’s administration and will provide information as it is known.

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WIDA Updates

WIDA eSummit

WIDA is hosting an eSummit for educators from Oct. 12–30. All Minnesota educators have access to this free virtual learning opportunity as long as they have a WIDA Secure Portal account. The content is designed to be relevant to all educators including content teachers. Since a WIDA Secure Portal account is required, contact your District Assessment Coordinator (DAC) to confirm or provide an account if interested in this event. You can look up your DAC's contact information in [MDE-ORG](#). See [WIDA's eSummit webpage](#) for more information.

WIDA on Social Media

WIDA has a new Facebook group: [Supporting Success for Multilingual Learners with Disabilities](#). This group creates a space for people who care about multilingual students with disabilities to share ideas and resources, ask questions, and network. Consider sharing this opportunity with staff in your district who may be interested.

WIDA Webinar: Test Scheduling

WIDA will host the *Test Scheduling* webinar on Thursday, Oct. 22, from 1–2 p.m. [Join the Test Scheduling webinar on Oct. 22](#). The webinar is designed for DACs and Test Administrators and will address the following topics:

- Scheduling paper and online testing
- Grouping students
- Timing of tests
- Scheduling practice tests
- Scheduling a room

For a list of all of WIDA's planned webinars, the *2020-21 ACCESS and Screener Webinar Calendar* document is available on the [ACCESS Webinars page](#), which includes registration links. WIDA also posts recordings of their webinars on the ACCESS Webinars page for those who are unable to attend the live webinars.

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Upcoming Opportunities

Teaching and Learning Led by Evidence

This series of webinars is for any teacher or school leader who wants to center instruction on evidence of student learning. MDE's Outreach Specialist in Student Assessment and Data Analytics, [Kendra Olsen](#), will facilitate each session to engage teachers and school leaders in making sense of assessment and data, so that it can be used to build trust and collaboration and develop fluency in decision making to help close gaps in instruction and learning.

Registration is required for each WebEx session, using the links below to sign up. Participants will earn one continuing education unit for each session. All sessions will be recorded and posted for future reference.

Note: The first three sessions have already taken place. Recordings and resource shared are available on [Testing 1, 2, 3](#). Staff can join any session, and if someone did not attend the first two sessions, they are still encouraged to attend any session of interest.

- **Assessment *for* Learning – How do we know what our students really know?**
 - This session will support educators in integrating simple, frequent "checks for understanding" into existing instructional plans; discuss how to improve rigor and alignment of formative assessment to learning outcomes; as well as discuss the importance of articulating success criteria for students.
 - Thursday, Oct. 22, 4–5 p.m.
 - [Register for Session 4](#)
- **Assessment *of* Learning – Summative Assessments for your Classroom**
 - In this webinar, attendees will discuss how to improve alignment of classroom assessments to learning outcomes, increase the rigor of questions on assessments to eliminate student misconceptions, and the extent to which their assessments measure mastery of the standards for an instructional unit.
 - Thursday, Nov. 12, 4–5 p.m.
 - [Register for Session 5](#)

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Opportunity for ACCESS Review

WIDA invites Minnesota educators to participate in their upcoming ACCESS review events. Note that these events are virtual, so no travel is necessary. DACs, please share this information with applicable educators in your district.

If educators are interested in being a part of one of the events listed below, [WIDA asks that they complete this brief survey](#) by Friday, Oct. 23, to indicate their interest. Note that one of the events takes place on Veteran's Day (Nov. 11). Participants will be selected based on experience, expertise, representation of regions, and diversity. If selected, WIDA will contact participants directly with event details and next steps.

Virtual Writing ACCESS for ELLs Bias & Sensitivity Review

- **Purpose:** Review the ACCESS for ELLs writing domain to ensure that test items are free of material that might favor any subgroup of students over another on the basis of gender, race or ethnicity, home language, religion, culture, region, or socio-economic status.
- **Staff needed:** Any educators
- **Total time commitment:** Four hours over two evenings
- **Dates**
 - Training (all grades): Wednesday, Nov. 11, from 5–7 p.m.
 - Review breakout groups: Thursday, Nov. 12, from 5–7 p.m.
 - Grade 1 and Grades 2–3

- Grades 4–5 and Grades 6–8 Tier A
- Grades 6–8 Tier B/C and Grades 9–12

Virtual Writing ACCESS for ELLs Content Review

- **Purpose:** ACCESS for ELLs writing domain to ensure that test item content is grade-level appropriate and factually accurate.
- **Staff needed:** EL educators, including those with content expertise in English language arts, math, science, and social studies
- **Total time commitment:** Four hours over two evenings
- **Dates**
 - Training (all grades): Monday, Nov. 9, from 5–6:30 p.m.
 - Review breakout groups: Tuesday, Nov. 10, or Wednesday, Nov. 11; from 5–7 p.m.
 - Grade 1 (Nov. 10)
 - Grades 4–5 (Nov. 10)
 - Grades 9–12 (Nov. 10)
 - Grades 2–3 (Nov. 11)
 - Grades 6–8 (Nov. 11)

If you have questions, please reach out to Sonia Upton at Sonia.upton@wisc.edu.

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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 and assessment in the classroom.

6 Strategies for Successful Distance Learning

In this *Edutopia* article, Lindsay Mitchell distills more than a decade of experience teaching online into six strategies for teaching in a remote setting:

- *Be authentic.* “Attempting to incorporate another teacher’s style will not always work,” says Mitchell. “You can use approaches that bring you joy as an educator – and if you can find a way to incorporate the interests of your students, the odds of having a successful environment improve.”
- *Go with familiar, easy-to-use tools.* To avoid overload of new online resources, you might consider polling students on their familiarity with tools like Flipgrid, Google Forms, Padlet, Parley, and others – and which they’ve used successfully.
- *Keep it simple.* “Tasks can be technologically simple to complete but still require depth of knowledge,” says Mitchell. Lack of complexity is also helpful for students whose Internet bandwidth and devices can’t handle complex programs. Importantly, this doesn’t mean watering down curriculum.
- *Build in choice.* This means giving students several options for how to show their understanding – for example, after reading a passage, students can write a bullet-point list, create a timeline, or a short video.

- *Be organized.* Students (and family members supporting them) benefit from a logical sequence of tasks, a clear rationale, and helpful infographics and charts to reduce the cognitive load of understanding the content. Hyperlinks can then give access to material with more depth and scope.
- *Be concise.* Since students are quite likely to be overloaded with assignments and instructions, the shorter and more bullet-pointed yours are, the better. “When we are with them personally, we can verbally reinforce what needs to be done,” says Mitchell, “but this is not always possible in the remote format.”

[“6 Strategies for Successful Distance Learning”](#) by Lindsay Mitchell in *Edutopia*, June 19, 2020.

What to do about Cheating on Assessments in Virtual Learning?

In this *Education Week* article, Thomas Guskey (University of Kentucky) addresses students cheating on assessments in remote instruction. Why do students cheat in any class? Guskey believes cheating happens mostly because students are uncertain about their level of proficiency and worried about what will happen if they don’t do well.

Common approaches to discouraging cheating are strict supervision during testing (which can be challenging remotely) and/or escalating the consequences for dishonesty. Guskey suggests a different approach: ensure classroom tests are more about feedback and learning than grading and accountability. If this is done right, it takes away the reasons for cheating. He recommends teachers consider the following steps:

- Ensure that formative tests don’t automatically determine report card grades.
- Keep parents informed about formative assessment results so they can monitor progress.
- Assign summative grades based on the best evidence available when the grading period has ended.

This approach, says Guskey, “allows students to make mistakes along the way and not worry about irreparable consequences. It also gives students the chance to experiment, be creative, try new ideas and new approaches. Instead of worrying about how to detect cheating and how to prevent students from cheating, teachers can concentrate on helping students use assessment results to improve their learning and reach higher levels of achievement.”

[“What to Do About Cheating on Assessments in Virtual Learning?”](#) by Thomas Guskey in *Education Week*, August 30, 2020.

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Statewide Student Assessment and Data Analytics

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