

TESTING 123

Updates for teachers from the MDE Statewide Testing Division

September 2, 2020

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Welcome back!

As the global pandemic has brought many changes to our lives, we know this school year will be unlike any other. “Normal” has been disrupted for everyone, especially those who were already more vulnerable. As the school year begins, we are hopeful that new and promising practices learned throughout this school year and from last spring will inspire curiosity in your students, highlight their strengths, and support you to feel valued in the work you do to cultivate a love for learning.

Classroom instruction and assessment is a key part of addressing learning gaps both pre and post-COVID. However, as the school year begins avoid the temptation to over-test students and rush to remediation in response to fears of COVID learning loss. It is recommended to identify critical content skills students need to be successful in the first unit of instruction by using short formative checks tightly aligned to the identified pre-requisite knowledge. Then, use this information to bridge gaps in understanding and guide students toward the learning goals of your first instructional unit. This allows for students to still access grade-level content and support them with critical pre-requisite skills. For more information and resources about this approach, see the “Featured Resource” section below and the 2020-21 School Year Planning guidance posted on [MDE's COVID-19 Updates Page](#).

The Testing 1, 2, 3 Newsletter will resume monthly updates throughout the school year to keep you informed of upcoming opportunities, announcements and resources related to building your classroom assessment system and data fluency. Now more than ever we are grateful and inspired by the work you do every day. Thank you for keeping students at the center of everything you do, and have a great start to the school year!

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New Report Focusing on American Indian Students

MDE is excited to announce a new report released focusing solely on state-identified American Indian students. This report is located under “Assessment and Accountability” within [Data Reports and Analytics](#) on the MDE Data Center.

This report represents American Indian students, as identified by the state definition, some of whom have not traditionally been included under the federal definition “American Indian or Alaska Native.” MDE will also release a user guide to assist in interpretation and use of the information contained within this new report.

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Preparing for Science MCA-IV

The Science MCA-IV, based on the 2019 Minnesota Academic Standards, will first be administered in 2023–24. In order to prepare for this administration, field testing of new test formats and item types will begin in spring 2021. New features will include: 1) the presentation of information on multiple tabs on the same page, and 2) the inclusion of constructed-response items where students are required to write a response. Resources will be provided this winter to familiarize students with these new formats and item type. Note: Field test items do not count towards a student’s score.

Additionally, the Science MCA-IV test specifications are now available on the [MDE website](#). Test specifications describe how the revised 2019 Minnesota Academic Standards will be assessed on the Science MCA-IV.

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Spring 2020–21 Assessment Guidance

On Thursday, July 30, MDE posted additional guidance in the *Safe Learning Plan for the 2020–21 School Year*, located on the [COVID-19 Updates page](#) under “Guidance for Districts and Schools.” In regards to statewide assessments (ACCESS, Alternate ACCESS, MCA, and MTAS), the information outlined in the *2020–21 Planning Guidance for Minnesota Public Schools* (also available on the COVID-19 Updates page) on pages 64–65 is still applicable, including whether assessments would be administered based on the district’s learning model during the testing window.

Statewide assessments must be administered in a standardized manner and environment. As of now, MDE is preparing for 2020–21 statewide assessments to be administered in-person in school buildings in the spring. However, we are also aware of the unpredictability of the COVID-19 pandemic which may impact schools’ ability to safely administer

assessments in person. We will continue to update you as we learn more. At this time, the [2020–21 testing calendar dates](#) will be as planned.

Frequently Asked Questions for Spring 2021 Test Administrations

Since the *Safe Learning Plan for the 2020–21 School Year* was announced last July, we have received questions regarding statewide test administration and what it will look like this upcoming year. These questions summarize what we know, to date, and further information will be communicated as it is available.

- *Are we still required to administer the ACCESS, Alternate ACCESS, MCA, and MTAS?* Statewide assessments are required under both state and federal legislation. As of now, those federal and state requirements have not changed.
- *Will there be a waiver from administering statewide assessments?* Currently, the United States Department of Education (USDE) is not offering states a waiver from statewide assessments for spring 2021.
- *How will students test?* Statewide assessments are planned to be administered in person, in school buildings, for spring 2021.
- *What if our school is in a distance learning model during part or all of the testing windows?* Further guidance for these situations will be provided as it is determined.
- *How will districts learn about changes?* The majority of resources being prepared for 2020–21, like the *Procedures Manual* and training modules, are being written to provide the information for a typical test administration. Any changes to these policies and procedures will be communicated through the *Assessment Update* and additional resources, as needed.

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Spring 2020 Assessment Results

Since this spring's distance learning period had an impact on both the ACCESS/Alternate ACCESS and MCA/MTAS test administration windows, MDE only provides districts with student-level results. Summary results at the school, district, or state will not be provided. The public Minnesota Report Card and Data Reports and Analytics pages have been updated to include a note with this information.

Districts are responsible for using these results appropriately, with an emphasis on student data privacy. The *2020 Statewide Assessment Reporting Guidance Due to COVID-19* is a resource that is available to answer these questions; this guidance is located on the [COVID-19 Updates web page](#) under "Guidance for Districts and Schools."

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Upcoming Opportunities

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 two sessions have already taken place. 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.

- **Leading Instructional Decisions with Evidence**
 - This session will support educators in using or modify an ORID framework to facilitate staff discussions about student learning led by evidence. This session will also discuss how data use cycles can be utilized to influence systems in schools, which can impact student achievement.
 - Thursday, Sept. 24, 4–5 p.m.
 - [Register for Session 3](#)
- **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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Featured Resource of the Month

Webinar Recordings and Resources Available for Sessions 1 & 2 of *Teaching and Learning Led by Evidence* Series

On *Testing 1, 2, 3*, educators can now download [handouts](#) and recordings from the first two webinars presented in August, **Session 1 – *Reimagining Assessment and Data to Guide Learning for All Students, Considerations for Fall 2020***, and **Session 2 – *Balancing Your Assessment System to Reflect Your Students***. Please share these resources with others including those who were unable to attend.

Highlights from these webinars and resources include tips and reflections from a panel of experienced educators and school leaders on how they plan to utilize assessment and data resources as schools reopen, a downloadable tool for planning classroom formative pre-assessment at the beginning of your first instructional unit, guidance for embedding checks for students' Social Emotional Learning (SEL) skills within instruction, and a discussion framework you may use or modify to facilitate a discussion with colleagues about evaluating your classroom assessment system.

Please note that while these webinars are intended for any educator and school leader who would like to sharpen their skills around data driven instruction, they are intended to provide more of an introduction for educators to classroom assessment and data literacy topics as we continue to adjust to school happening in a pandemic. If you would like to dive deeper into any of the topics presented throughout the webinar series, or would like to request additional professional development opportunities for your staff or group of educators, please contact [Kendra Olsen](#).

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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.

Learning as We Go: Principles for Effective Assessment During the COVID-19 Pandemic

This paper from the *Center for Reimagining Public Education* (CRPE), outlines the recommendations from a panel of assessment experts about how districts can approach testing this fall. They specifically address the concern of diagnostic testing taking away from valuable instruction time. The panel is part of the Evidence Project, an effort to close the gap between research and policy in K–12 responses to COVID-19.

They outline the following principles which may help educators plan for fall and discuss appropriate uses of assessment with their school leadership:

1. Ask why – or why not – to assess.
2. Do no harm.
3. Take the first two or three weeks to focus on students' physical and emotional well-being and to strengthen relationships as foundational to learning.
4. Prioritize measures closest to classroom instruction to help teachers know what to do next.
5. Use interim assessments for school and district decision-making with caution.
6. Engage parents as partners.
7. Don't use assessments for accountability unless they were designed for that purpose.

[Learning as We Go: Principles for Effective Assessment During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) by Robin Lake and Lynn Olson, *Center for Reimagining Public Education*, July 2020.

Restart & Recovery: Assessment Considerations for Fall 2020

This paper was written in collaboration with the *Center for Assessment* as part of a larger project designed by the *Council of Chief State School Officers* (CCSSO) to support states and school systems in teaching and learning in the 2020-21 school year amidst a pandemic. There is a section for academic guidance that specifically focuses on assessment as a way to address the question: “How prepared is each student to learn this content?”

The assessment paper offers considerations for fall 2020 assessment, focusing on specific “use-cases” presented through the lens of key stakeholders: state/district leadership, parents/guardians, school leadership, and teachers. They address the need for assessment to support teachers to ensure students have access to grade-level content, and is based on a guiding principle that “all students are capable of grade-level learning, regardless of their starting points.”

The authors address issues of time to use assessment evidence to make effective changes, including prioritizing opportunities for school and grade-level teacher teams to collaborate and develop their assessments and to work together to identify and align specific prerequisite knowledge necessary for success in the current or next instructional unit. The paper concludes with ten recommendations regarding assessment considerations for fall 2020, some of which are highlighted below:

- Prioritize assessments to support instructional actions (standards aligned). If it does not lead to action, then the assessment should not be administered.
- Prioritize resources for teachers to create or use existing pre-assessments that are tied to specific instructional units.
- Employ commercial interim assessments sparingly – and use them to support an equity agenda.
- Avoid administering assessments during the first week of school.

[Restart and Recovery: Assessment Considerations for Fall 2020](#) by Scott Marion, Brian Gong, Will Lorie, and Rebecca Kockler, *The Council of Chief State School Officers* in collaboration with *The Center for Assessment*, July 2020.

A School Shifts to Online Standards-Based Assessments

In this *Better Lesson* article, elementary administrator David Saltzman says that when his school went virtual at the beginning of the pandemic, he and his colleagues found themselves rethinking how they assessed student learning. The school decided to shift toward standards-based grading by following these steps: they identified specific standards, taught them, gave an authentic assessment of each standard, and communicated progress to students and parents.

This article discuss two major changes that may be helpful to educators, even those who are not implementing standards based grading. Saltzman outlines how the teacher teams met virtually together to align grading rubrics to the standards and designed a variety of targeted, synchronous assessments for reading and math that allowed students to demonstrate their knowledge in different and creative ways. One example shared was an assessment activity which prompted students to work out math problems on whiteboards at home, then show their whiteboard on camera so their teacher could gain insight about their mathematical thinking. In the fall, the school intends to continue this process

and pursue the long-range goal of empowering students to pace themselves and use rubrics to track their own progress toward mastery.

[“Distance Learning Pushed Us to Standards-Based Grading. We’ll Keep It”](#) by David Saltzman in *Better Lesson*, July 21, 2020.

Quotes of the Month

“If you can smell what I had for lunch, you’re getting my air, and you can be getting virus particles as well.”

- Carey B. and Glanz, J., “Study Finds Evidence Virus Can Float in Air for Minutes Longer,” *The New York Times*, July 31, 2020

“Children will need a trusted adult with whom to share their troubles. Research on previous disasters shows that a teacher is most likely that trusted adult, but whether that teacher’s response is supportive determines whether students’ well-being improves.”

- Micere Keels, [“Preparing Educators for the Challenge Ahead,”](#) *Education Update*, August 2020 (Vol. 62, #8, pp. 1, 4)

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Statewide Student Assessment and Data Analytics

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