

# TESTING 123

*Updates for teachers from the MDE Statewide Testing Division*

*December 9, 2019*

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## ***MCA-IV Reading Test Specification Committee***

MDE is requesting applications from language arts, special education, and EL teachers in grades 3–10 for the MCA-IV reading test specifications committee. MDE is looking for a diverse representation of educators to ensure the committee represents the state with respect to ethnicity, gender, school district type, district size, and geographical region. This is an opportunity for educators to provide advice on the new assessment, and to ensure test content aligns closely with best practices in classroom instruction.

Committee members will receive an honorarium or substitute reimbursement. Travel expenses and lodging for those travelling from outside the metro area will be provided. The committee will meet at MDE in Roseville for a total of eight days. Committee members must commit to attend all meetings. Meeting dates are as follows:

- June 23–24, 2020
- Sept. 29–30, 2020
- Nov. 17–18, 2020
- Feb. 23–24, 2021

Interested applicants need to [apply for the Reading MCA-IV test specifications committee](#) by Jan. 5.

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## ***Alternate Assessment Participation***

Over the years, students with disabilities have been included in accountability systems in more meaningful ways. Alternate assessments, such as the Minnesota Test of Academic Skills (MTAS), are designed for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. From 2003–2015, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) set forth a 1.0 percent cap on the amount of proficient or advanced alternate assessment scores that could be counted in district and statewide totals for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). In 2016, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) revised the cap to limit alternate assessment takers to a 1.0 percent statewide participation rate, or rather, no more than 1.0 percent of the total number of students statewide may take an alternate assessment in each subject.

This summer, the U.S. Department of Education informed MDE that Minnesota was above the 1.0 percent participation cap and would require MDE to create an action plan to come into compliance with the 1.0 percent requirement set forth in ESSA. Part of the action plan MDE submitted to the U.S. Department of Education described how MDE will collect information from districts regarding the following:

- Statewide and local participation on the MTAS
- Assurances that each student is provided the appropriate assessment
- A narrative describing local context and rationales to support the district’s participation rate, if needed

To accomplish this, MDE formed an Alternate Assessment Workgroup. This workgroup includes both district and community stakeholders who have been meeting from October 2019 through April 2020. Their work includes analyzing statewide participation rates and providing feedback on how to best provide support to districts. One of the tasks of the workgroup is to create and finalize individual district reports of MTAS participation. A communication will go out in January to all Special Education Directors, DACs, and Superintendents/Directors, with the location of these reports, as well as a guide and Assurance, Rationale, and Context (ARC) template for districts to submit information, assurances, and where appropriate, narratives regarding alternate assessment participation rates to MDE.

Contact MDE’s Alternate Assessment Specialist Lauren Walker ([lauren.walker@state.mn.us](mailto:lauren.walker@state.mn.us)) with any questions.

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## ***Calculator Usage: Updated Online Graphing Calculator***

All MCA (and MTAS) mathematics test items can be solved in a variety of ways; therefore, calculators are not required. However, they may be used to answer items when a calculator is allowed. Guidelines for calculator use are outlined in Chapter 8 (starting on page 160) and Appendix B (starting on page 249) of the [Procedures Manual](#).

**New for 2019–20:** The graphing calculator used in the Mathematics MCA for grades 8 and 11 has been updated to the TI-84 Plus CE (Color Edition). The main change from the TE-84 Plus to the CE version is that the CE version allows for graphing in color.

Students may view and use the online calculators that are available for the MCAs on the [stand-alone calculators page](#). Students may also practice using the online calculator by using the [item samplers](#). See the recent [MathBits article](#) for more information about the online calculators.

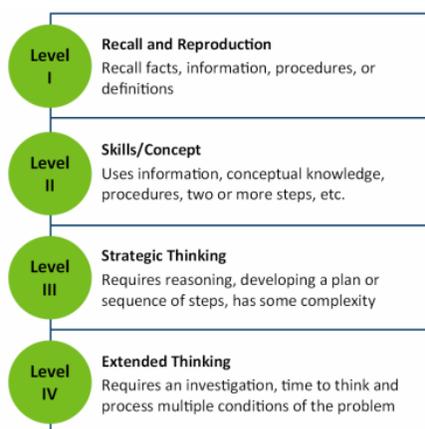
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## Featured Resource of the Month

### Understanding Statewide Testing Resources: Webb's Depth of Knowledge

Did you know that Minnesota uses Norman Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DOK) as a guideline when measuring cognitive complexity of a test question on the MCA? Cognitive complexity can provide insight into the level of thinking and reasoning required for students to respond to a particular question.

Strategically planning classroom assessments and activities based on these levels of questioning can give students more experience answering a variety of questions, and increase the rigor in your classroom discussions. More information about incorporating these levels of questions can be found on [Testing 1, 2, 3](https://testing123.education.mn.gov) (testing123.education.mn.gov > Plan and Teach > MCA Content Resources > Content Resources).



## 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 related to assessment and data use in the classroom. In each issue, 2–4 articles will be featured that have relevant ideas to improve teaching, leadership, and learning.

### What We're Getting Wrong about Gifted Education

In this article in *Education Week*, Joseph Renzulli (University of Connecticut) argues that using tests as a prerequisite for gifted classes fails to distinguish between two kinds of giftedness:

- Lesson-learning, high-achieving;
- Productive, creative.

These represent different ways of thinking about exceptional qualities: Are children *born* gifted? or Can giftedness be *developed*? "Treating giftedness as an inborn trait that can be identified by test scores," says Renzulli, "has resulted in severe underrepresentation of high-potential children from low-income families and students of color in gifted education programs, because these groups have traditionally scored lower on standardized tests than middle-class and white populations. This approach also leaves out any student who is

not the best lesson-learner of traditional standards-driven curricula but may be highly creative, think differently and pursue tasks with fresh approaches, communicate in different expression styles, or have highly specialized talents, interests, imaginations, or motivations.”

He claims it’s important to recognize the difference between two kinds of assessments:

- Assessments *of* learning, which identify what students already know and compare their performance to their peers. Results from tests like these are highly correlated with family background, neighborhood demographics, and prior school experiences.
- Assessments *for* learning, which focus on the student’s potential, including curiosity, planning skills, styles of learning, empathy, creativity, and self-regulation. Results from this kind of assessment can be used to support students with resources and opportunities, encouraging them to stretch beyond their current abilities.

“[How to Close Gifted Education’s Opportunity Gap](#)” by Joseph Renzulli in *Education Week*, November 13, 2019 (Vol. 39, #13, p. 16).

## 10 Simple Steps for Reducing Toxic Stress in the Classroom

In this article in *Education Week*, Jim Hickman (Center for Youth Wellness) and Kathy Higgins (Alliance for a Healthier Generation) argue that students’ restlessness in classrooms can stem from disturbing experiences at home. Students with toxic stress have abnormal levels of certain hormones, which changes brain architecture and makes it more difficult to “do school.” They propose the following: “with nearly 35 million children across the country at risk for toxic stress, what if the person giving the biggest daily dose of healing treatment for toxic stress isn’t a doctor or a therapist, but a teacher?” Here are some of their recommendations:

- *Nurture long-term relationships with students.* These support academic, cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development, as well as help overcome trauma.
- *Be predictable.* Develop and stick to a consistent daily routine in the classroom.
- *Model empathetic verbal interactions.* Hang signs on classroom walls that encourage “talk moves” for students like *What do you think?* and *I heard you say X – can you explain that?*
- *Encourage curiosity.* Ask students to use stems like *I wonder...* and *I notice...* which can engage them with others and reveals gaps in their knowledge and relationships.

“[10 Simple Steps for Reducing Toxic Stress in the Classroom](#)” by Jim Hickman and Kathy Higgins in *Education Week*, November 27, 2019 (Vol. 39, #14, p. 19).

*Statewide Testing's Mission*

Produce reliable data and support its use through a system of tools that promotes equity

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