TESTING 123
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MCA-IV Draft Test Specifications for Science: Public Review

As a result of the 2019 revisions to the Minnesota K–12 Academic Standards in Science, the Science Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment–Series IV (Science MCA-IV) will begin assessing these standards in the spring of 2024. In collaboration with a committee of Minnesota educators, MDE has drafted the Science MCA-IV test specifications to assist with the development of the new assessments.

Members of the public are encouraged to review the proposed *MCA-IV Draft Test Specifications for Science* and provide feedback through the Science MCA-IV Test Specifications Feedback Survey. The survey will be open until Feb. 17. Your feedback is important in creating the best assessment possible for all Minnesota students. A copy of the survey questions is available to review and discuss with colleagues before entering your individual or group survey responses. See the Test Specifications page for more information and links to the various resources.

Growth Reporting Changes: Reminder

As a result of legislative changes, there will be changes to growth reporting in the coming years to increase appropriate uses of data and prepare for MCA-IV. To ensure that timely, clear, and comprehensive information is made available to schools and districts, MDE will provide webinars and a face-to-face discussion of the changes. The overview will include background of the different reporting requirements, design of the assessments, and rationale for the changes. See registration links below, or read more in the *Growth Reporting Changes* document, posted on the District Resources page (under the Test Score Interpretation heading).

Note: There were some issues reported with a registration link sent last month for the webinar registration. The links below have been updated. We apologize for any confusion or inconvenience.

- **Monday, Feb. 10,** 11 a.m.–noon (**focused on charter schools**): Register for Feb. 10 (morning) webinar
- **Monday, Feb. 10,** 2:30–3:30 p.m. Register for Feb. 10 (afternoon) webinar
- **Thursday, Feb. 13,** 10–11 a.m. Register for Feb. 13 (morning) webinar
- **Thursday, Feb. 13**, 12:30–1:30 p.m. Register for Feb. 13 (afternoon) webinar

Alternate Assessment Participation Documentation

Previously it was announced that MDE submitted an action plan to the U.S. Department of Education describing information that will be collected from districts regarding participation in alternate assessments. All districts are therefore required to complete an Assurance, Rationale, and Context (ARC) response and submit it to MDE by March 18 via an online survey. To complete this task, districts should use the *Alternate Assessment (MTAS) Participation District Report*, which is available in Assessment Secure Reports, and the *Alternate Assessment Participation and Assurance, Rationale and Context (ARC) User Guide*, which is available on the MTAS Participation page.

The ARC survey is broken into five sections in which the district will provide information, assurances, and where appropriate, narratives regarding alternate assessment participation rates. The questions in the survey can be found in the *Assurance, Rationale, and Context (ARC) Response Survey Questions* section of *ARC User Guide* to guide district staff conversations ahead of the final submission of the ARC response to MDE. Special Education Directors, District Assessment Coordinators, Special Education case managers, and other key district staff, should be included in conversations about the district reports and completion of the ARC response. Once the district has prepared to answer the questions, complete the online ARC survey by March 18.

For more information about the federal requirements and the work Minnesota has done pertaining to the alternate assessment participation, refer to the *December Testing 1, 2, 3 Update*.

ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS Testing Window

The testing window for the ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS for ELLs opened Jan. 27, and will be open until March 20. Below are a few reminders for testing.

- Districts will need to manually add any newly enrolled or newly identified English learners directly into WIDA AMS. When adding students, ensure all student information entered matches MARSS; though not required in WIDA AMS, be sure to enter the date of birth and gender information to decrease discrepancies in Test WES during Posttest Editing.

- Paper test materials were recently delivered to districts, and the additional orders window is now open. WIDA requests that only District Assessment Coordinators complete additional orders.

For any questions about technology preparation, manually adding students in WIDA AMS, or ordering additional test materials, contact the DRC help desk at WIDA@datarecognitioncorp.com or 855-787-9615.

Student Resources

MDE requires districts to ensure that all students are familiar with the test they will be taking. Students should be able to successfully navigate the test, use the applicable tools, and respond to different item types. Each district determines which resources will be used and how they will be used. MDE does not require all students to use all resources; districts must determine the resources to use, which may vary by school, grade, or student.

ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS

As districts consider what resources to use with students for ACCESS, they should become familiar with the resources below, which are available on the Preparing Students for ACCESS for ELLs page. Districts can start by downloading the *QuickStart Guide for Preparing Students for ACCESS Online* for more information about the purpose of each resource.

- For students who are new to taking the ACCESS, the test demo and practice test are recommended.

  - The test demo is available for each grade-level cluster to show students how to navigate different features of the test. It is recommended that students watch the test demo before taking the practice test.

  - The practice test can be used to familiarize students with the ACCESS test format. These items are very easy but will help students become familiar with the test environment.

- For students who have experience taking the ACCESS, the sample items are recommended. These items can be used to familiarize students with the content and grade-level appropriate language development expectations, and they are representative of the item difficulty a student will experience on the actual test. WIDA also advises using the previous year's ACCESS score report to focus on domains where students may need additional support.

For paper administrations of the ACCESS, districts should refer to the *QuickStart Guide for Preparing Students for ACCESS Paper*; the sample items are recommended for reviewing with students.

For Alternate ACCESS, review sample items with the student.

MCA and MTAS

The *Purposes of Student Resources* document helps clarify the purposes of the resources available for MCA and MTAS.

- The student tutorial is used to familiarize students and educators with the general functionality of the online test. There are three components of the tutorial—Navigation, Tools, and Item Types—each accompanied by a teacher guide. All three components have been updated for 2019–20 and are available on the Student Tutorial page.

- The item samplers are used to familiarize students and educators with how the content is presented in the test. Item samplers are available in every grade and subject for the MCA and MTAS, as well as for applicable accommodations and linguistic supports.

Trainings Available in TMS

MCA Test Monitor Training Course

All modules within the MCA Test Monitor Course (on the Test Monitor tab) are now available in the Training Management System (TMS). The *Administering the MCA* module was updated for 2019–20 and provides information on administering the MCA. There are no longer separate courses for online and paper administrations, since the *Administering the MCA* module now contains options for Test Monitors to select based on what is applicable to them—administering online, administering paper, or administering both. All Test Monitors administering an online and/or paper MCA are required to complete this training annually.

New Trainings for 2019–20

Understanding MCA Linguistic Supports and Accommodations provides general information on what linguistic supports and accommodations are available for the MCA, who can receive them, and how they are administered and scored. This training is designed for staff who have a role in selecting and administering MCA accommodations and linguistic supports to students. This module is on the Other Trainings tab, under the District-Assigned Trainings category. This is an optional module for DACs or other staff.

Featured Resource of the Month

Understanding Statewide Testing Resources: Test Specifications

On the MCA content page, educators can access a helpful one-page resource explaining appropriate uses of test specifications for educators. Test specifications are specific rules that guide the development of a test's content and format. They indicate which strands, sub-strands, standards, and benchmarks will be assessed on the test and in what proportions. In addition, test specifications provide the types of items to be included, number of items and distribution of cognitive levels (i.e. Depth of Knowledge).

Test specifications are excellent tools for gaining an in-depth understanding of the content and format of the tests. However, they are not meant to be used as the basis for curriculum and instruction. Teachers may want to use the information provided in the test specifications to address questions such as: "Does my classroom instruction reinforce the vocabulary necessary to meet the benchmark?", or "Does my curriculum meet the minimum requirements outlined in the test specifications, *and* does it give students the opportunity to go beyond these minimum requirements?"

Read more about test specifications and appropriate uses for educators on Testing 1, 2, 3 (testing123.education.mn.gov > Plan and Teach > MCA 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.

Creating the Schools Our Children Need

"Today in America," says assessment guru Dylan Wiliam, "the biggest problem with education is not that it is bad. It is that it variable. In hundreds of thousands of classrooms in America, students are getting an education that is as good as any in the world. But in hundreds of thousands of others, they are not." In his new book, Wiliam argues recent initiatives in U.S. schools are not the best ways to solve the problem of variability. So what does work? Wiliam believes two approaches will bring more good teaching to more students, especially those who have historically been disadvantaged:

1.) *A knowledge-rich curriculum* – "The main purpose of curriculum is to build up the content of long-term memory so that when students are asked to think, they are able to think in more powerful ways because what is in their long-term memories makes their short-term memories more powerful. That is why curriculum matters."

Wiliam outlines the following five components of a high-quality curriculum: (a) it's well aligned with the aims of K–12 education; (b) it has a carefully structured sequence for building knowledge; (c) the pacing of knowledge acquisition avoids overloading short-term memory; (d) material is distributed over weeks, months, and years with review built in; and (e) students have frequent opportunities for self-testing so knowledge is firmly embedded in long-term memory.

2.) *Improving the teachers we have* – "Schools and districts need to focus on the idea that *all* teachers need to get better," says Wiliam, "not because they're not good enough but because they can be even better. Moving the focus from evaluation to improvement also changes working relationships in a building. Where teachers are in competition, either because they are seeking scarce bonuses or to avoid sanctions, then they are unlikely to help each other. In contrast, when it is expected that all teachers improve, cooperation is encouraged and even expected."

For teacher team meetings to have the greatest benefit for students, Wiliam believes they need to be tightly structured and spend most of the time looking at evidence of student learning (from classroom assessments or samples of student work). He and his colleagues have developed the following steps for once-a-month 75-minute team meetings (with one member serving as timekeeper and facilitator). The focus is always on looking at student work and assessment evidence and thinking of the best ways to adapt instruction to meet students' needs in real time. Here's the structure:

- The teacher responsible for running the meeting outlines the meeting's aims, including the student learning intentions and criteria for success (5 minutes).
- The team does a warm-up activity, perhaps sharing something a student said that made them smile, something they're looking forward to, or something that's bothering them (5 minutes).
- Each teacher reports on an instructional change they promised to try in their classrooms at the previous meeting with evidence of how it went, and colleagues share ideas and suggestions (25 minutes).
- The team discusses a new article, book chapter, or video on formative assessment (20 minutes).
- Each teacher shares a classroom practice they are going to implement over the coming month (15 minutes).
- The team wraps up by reviewing whether the meeting's goals were met – if not, what action is next (5 minutes).

Wiliam says this protocol has been dramatically successful in improving teaching and learning in hundreds of schools across the U.S. Wiliam says "focusing on classroom assessment seems to be a smart place to begin the conversation with teachers… All teachers in America would probably agree that it is part of their day job to find out whether students have learned what they have been taught." Additionally, research points to the power of formative (on-the-spot) assessments to improve

teaching and learning by adjusting instruction minute-by-minute and day-by-day, and that is always the heart of these teacher meetings. Lastly, says Wiliam, "when we develop teachers' ability to use real-time assessment to adapt their instruction to their students' learning needs, those skills can be applied in all their teaching."

 "Creating the Schools Our Children Need" by Dylan Wiliam (Learning Sciences International, 2018).

Quote of the Month

"An amazing lesson for third graders on first grade standards produces fourth graders who are ready for the second grade."

"Beyond 'Active Learning': How the ICAP Framework Permits More Acute Examination of the Popular Peer Instruction Pedagogy" by Bryan Henderson in *Harvard Educational Review*, Winter 2019 (Vol. 89, #4, pp. 611-634).

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Statewide Testing's Mission

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

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