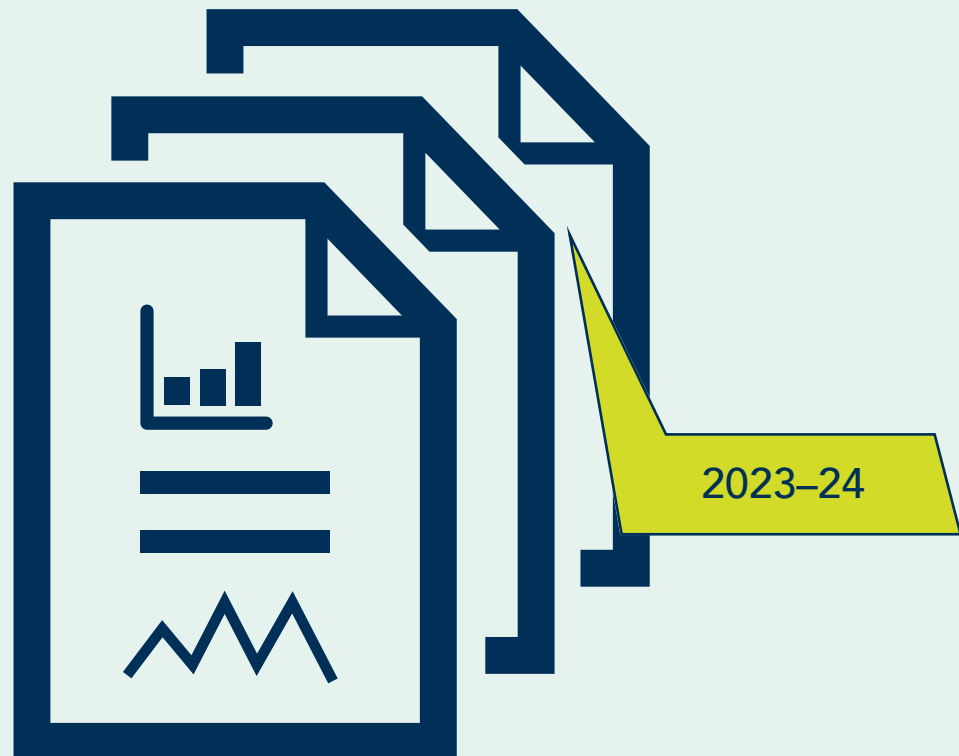


# MCA Benchmark Report Interpretive Guide



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# MCA Benchmark Report Interpretive Guide

This *Interpretive Guide* will assist you in understanding the benchmark reports for the Reading, Mathematics, and Science MCA. The guide provides an overview of benchmarks, describes the benchmark report, and suggests ways to use the benchmark report results.

The primary purpose of the MCA is to measure student learning of the Minnesota Academic Standards; therefore, the tests are designed to align with these standards. As academic standards are revised, a new series of assessments is developed to align with those standards. A series number is added to the test name to indicate the academic standards being measured. On the benchmark reports, the test name appears as MCA-III.

The chart below indicates the academic standards year the MCA-III is aligned to, and the last year the MCA-III will be administered in that subject.

Test	Subject	Grades	Alignment	Last Year of Administration
MCA-III	Science	5, 8, High School	2009 Standards	2024
	Reading	3–8, 10	2010 Standards	2025
	Mathematics	3–8, 11	2007 Standards	2027 anticipated

Note: New Minnesota Academic Standards are in the process of being adopted for all subjects. The timeline for the first administration of the revised science assessments is school year 2024–25. Refer to the *Using Assessment Results During Transition to New Academic Standards: Science* resource on the [District Resources](#) page (MDE > Districts, Schools and Educators > Teaching and Learning > Statewide Testing > District Resources > Test Score Interpretation Resources) for guidance on using and communicating about assessment results while transitioning to new academic standards.

The timeline for the first administration of the revised reading assessments is school year 2025–26. The timeline for the first administration of the mathematics assessment is anticipated to be school year 2027–28.

View the [Minnesota Academic Standards](#) for the knowledge and skill expectations in a content area for a grade. (MDE website > Districts, Schools and Educators > Teaching and Learning > Academic Standards (K-12))

Assessments are designed to provide information about student learning, but there is no single assessment that can provide the full perspective of what a student has learned. These assessments provide one data point that should be considered in the context of additional evidence of student learning.


## What is a Benchmark Report?

The MCA Benchmark Report is a guidance tool educators can use to learn about school- or district-level performance on each benchmark assessed from the Minnesota Academic Standards on the current year's MCA. Benchmark reports are produced by grade for the Reading, Mathematics, and Science MCA. The benchmark data is calculated by comparing observed performance on a benchmark to the expected performance on a benchmark.

## What are Benchmarks?

The Minnesota K–12 Academic Standards are the statewide expectations for student learning in K–12 public schools. The standards identify the knowledge and skills that all students must achieve in a content area by the end of a grade level or grade band. The Minnesota Academic Standards are divided into one or more benchmarks. The purpose of benchmarks is to provide more specific details about the academic knowledge and skills that students are taught from the Minnesota Academic Standards. Benchmarks are intended to inform and guide administrators, teachers, and other educators and stakeholders in making instruction and curriculum decisions.

The MCA measures a snapshot of a student's learning in reading, mathematics, and/or science, as described in the Minnesota K–12 Academic Standards, and the test specifications indicate how the academic standards are addressed on the test. Test specifications describe which strands, substrands, standards, and benchmarks will be assessed on the test and in what proportions, also known as the test's "blueprint." Each item on the MCA is aligned to an appropriate benchmark in the Minnesota Academic Standards. Some benchmarks are not assessed on the MCA in a given year, and some can be assessed only in the classroom and not on a standardized assessment. However, all tests meet the required "blueprints," or requirements, specified in the test specifications.

**ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**  
**SCHOOL BENCHMARK PERFORMANCE REPORT**

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**SPRING 2024 GRADE 3 READING MCA-III**

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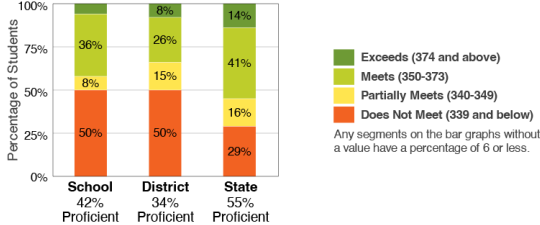
Refer to your district's data privacy policies and procedures when sharing the data in this report with district and school staff. For some schools, results may be presented for a small number of students, which may make it possible to identify individual students. Ensure student data privacy is maintained when accessing or sharing these reports electronically, or when sharing paper copies of these reports.

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### GRADE 3 READING PERFORMANCE

**Number of grade 3 students in Reading with valid scores for your school: 9,999**

The graph shows the percentage of students in each achievement level for your school, district, and the state for the grade 3 Reading MCA-III. The percent proficient under each bar in the graph is the percentage of students in the "Meets" and "Exceeds" achievement levels.



Category	Exceeds (374 and above)	Meets (350-373)	Partially Meets (340-349)	Does Not Meet (339 and below)	Proficient
School	8%	36%	8%	50%	42%
District	8%	26%	15%	50%	34%
State	14%	41%	16%	29%	55%

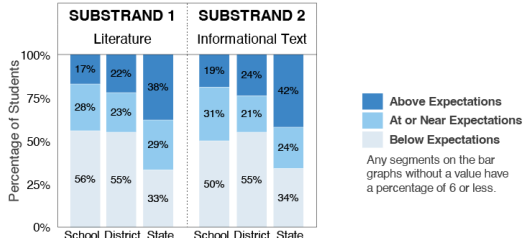
View the [MCA Achievement Level Descriptors](#) on the MDE Testing 1, 2, 3 website. (MDE Testing 1, 2, 3 > Plan and Teach > Success Criteria > Achievement Level Descriptors)

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### GRADE 3 READING PERFORMANCE BY SUBSTRAND

For the grade 3 Reading MCA-III, the substrand performance levels are reported as: Below Expectations, At or Near Expectations, or Above Expectations. The substrand performance level is determined by comparing the school performance to the state expectation at the "Meets" achievement level.

The graphs below show the percentage of students in each performance level for each substrand calculated by aggregating the individual student substrand performance levels at your school, at your district, and at the state level.



Substrand	Category	Above Expectations	At or Near Expectations	Below Expectations
SUBSTRAND 1 Literature	School	17%	28%	56%
	District	22%	23%	55%
	State	38%	29%	33%
SUBSTRAND 2 Informational Text	School	19%	31%	50%
	District	24%	21%	55%
	State	42%	24%	34%

View information about Strand Performance Levels in the [Interpretive Guide for Statewide Assessment Reports](#) (minnesota.pearsonaccessnext.com > Reporting Resources > Individual Student Reports (ISRs) Resources > Interpretive Guide for Statewide Assessment Reports)

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While test specifications provide information on how the academic standards are addressed on a test, they are **not** meant to be used as the basis for curriculum and instruction. Instead, test specifications can be a helpful reference for how the standards are assessed.

All Minnesota Academic Standards use a coding system for easy reference to the standards and their benchmarks; this code is used on the benchmark reports. Reading specifies information at the substrand level, mathematics at the strand level, and science at both the strand and substrand levels.

Reading: The four-digit code for reading lists, in order, the grade, substrand, standard, and benchmark.

four-digit benchmark code



Code	Grade	Substrand	Standard	Benchmark
5.2.8.8	5	2. Informational Text	8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.	8. Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text, identifying which reasons and evidence support which point(s).

four-digit benchmark code



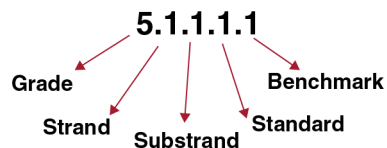
Code	Grade	Strand	Standard	Benchmark
5.1.1.2	5	1. Number & Operation	1. Divide multi-digit numbers; solve real-world and mathematical problems using arithmetic.	2. Consider the context in which a problem is situated to select the most useful form of the quotient for the solution and use the context to interpret the quotient appropriately.

Mathematics: The four-digit code for mathematics lists, in order, the grade, strand, standard, and benchmark.

Science: The five-digit code for science lists, in order, the grade, strand, substrand, standard, and benchmark.

Science benchmark reports for grades 5 and 8 have benchmark codes numbered for multiple grades (i.e., standards for grade 5 include benchmarks that start with 3, 4, and/or 5). High school science benchmark reports have benchmark codes that start with 9 for grade 9, although instruction may occur outside of grade 9 in grades 10, 11, or 12.

five-digit benchmark code



Code	Grade	Strand	Substrand	Standard	Benchmark
5.1.1.1.1	5	1. The Nature of Science and Engineering	1. The Practice of Science	1. Understand that science is a way of knowing about the natural world, is done by individuals and groups, and is characterized by empirical criteria, logical argument and skeptical review.	1. Explain why evidence, clear communication, accurate record keeping, replication by others, and openness to scrutiny are essential parts of doing science.

## How is the Benchmark Report Calculated?

Benchmark performance is calculated by comparing students' observed performance on test content aligned to a benchmark to the expected performance of the "Meets" achievement level cut score for a benchmark at the school or district.

- Observed performance is calculated as the average percent of correct student responses in the school or district on test questions assessing that benchmark.
- Expected performance is calculated using the psychometric measurement model for the assessment. It can be interpreted as how those students who perform at the "Meets" achievement level cut score would likely perform on the particular benchmark test questions. The benchmark symbols less than, similar to, and greater than correspond to whether the observed average is below, within, or above the expected range.

A minimum of 20 student responses for test questions in a particular benchmark are required to calculate benchmark performance in order to provide reliable reported outcomes.

In 2019, the MCA Benchmark Report was redesigned using a different calculation method to measure school and district performance on benchmarks. School and district staff should not compare benchmark reports before 2019 to benchmark reports from 2019 and after.

Due to COVID-19, there was very limited testing in 2020 and no benchmark reports were produced for 2020. Benchmark reports from 2019 are available.

## How to Interpret Each Section of the Benchmark Report

Each benchmark report begins with the overall achievement performance, followed by strand and substrand results. Providing these additional levels of performance data helps give context for evaluating benchmark performance. Links to additional resources to use when interpreting the benchmark reports are provided throughout and at the end of the report.

Note: The first page of each benchmark report includes overall performance and strand/substrand performance with bar graphs that match those in the Individual Student Reports (ISRs) and in Longitudinal Reports in PearsonAccess Next.


The Benchmark Reports are available to download as PDFs in Published Reports in PearsonAccess Next. Details on accessing these reports are available in the **Published Reports Quick Guide** (PearsonAccess Next > Reporting Resources > Additional Reporting Resources).

For the technical details of the benchmark report calculations, refer to Appendix A: Benchmark Report Calculations Resource in the **Technical Manual for Minnesota's Statewide Assessments** (MDE website > Districts, Schools and Educators > Teaching and Learning > Statewide Testing > Technical Reports (under the Technical Manual heading))

# Section 1: Overall Performance

School/District Performance: Indicates the number of students with a valid, reportable score at the organization level for the grade and subject combination of the report. Only students who received a score on the MCA are included; students who did not complete or attempt the test are not included.

For a valid score, a student must respond to 90% or more of the items on the test. Students responding to fewer than 90% of the items will not receive a score. Refer to Chapter 6 of the **Procedures Manual** (PearsonAccess Next > Resources & Training > Policies and Procedures) for more detail about valid score rules.



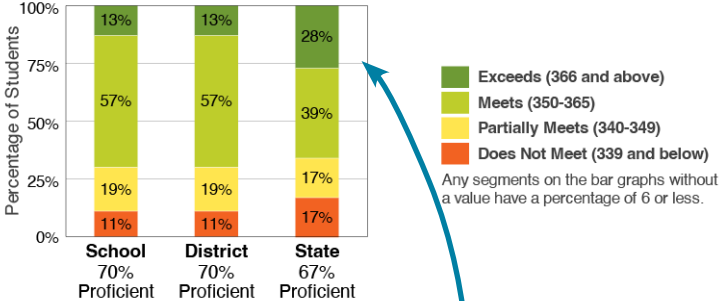
**ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**  
SCHOOL BENCHMARK PERFORMANCE REPORT

SPRING 2024 GRADE 3 MATHEMATICS MCA-III

Refer to your district's data privacy policies and procedures when sharing the data in this report with district and school staff. For some schools, results may be presented for a small number of students, which may make it possible to identify individual students. Ensure student data privacy is maintained when accessing or sharing these reports electronically, or when sharing paper copies of these reports.

**GRADE 3 MATHEMATICS PERFORMANCE**  
Number of grade 3 students in Mathematics with valid scores for your school: 9,999

The graph shows the percentage of students in each achievement level for your school, district, and the state for the grade 3 Mathematics MCA-III. The percent proficient under each bar in the graph is the percentage of students in the "Meets" and "Exceeds" achievement levels.



Achievement Level	School	District	State
Exceeds (366 and above)	13%	13%	28%
Meets (350-365)	57%	57%	39%
Partially Meets (340-349)	19%	19%	17%
Does Not Meet (339 and below)	11%	11%	17%
<b>Proficient</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>67%</b>

View the [MCA Achievement Level Descriptors](#) on the MDE Testing 1, 2, 3 website. (MDE Testing 1, 2, 3 > Plan and Teach > Success Criteria > Achievement Level Descriptors)

View the **Achievement Level Descriptors (ALDs)** for reading, mathematics, and science on the Testing 1, 2, 3 website. (Testing 1, 2, 3 site > Plan and Teach > Success Criteria). The ALDs describe the four levels of achievement specific to grade-level for the statewide assessments, based on the standards.

## Achievement Level Graph:

Shows the percentage of students at each achievement level at the school, district, and state levels.

The percent proficient listed under each bar graph is the combined percent of students at the "Meets" and "Exceeds" achievement levels of the academic standards. Any segment shown without a percentage value in the graph has a percentage of 6% or less.



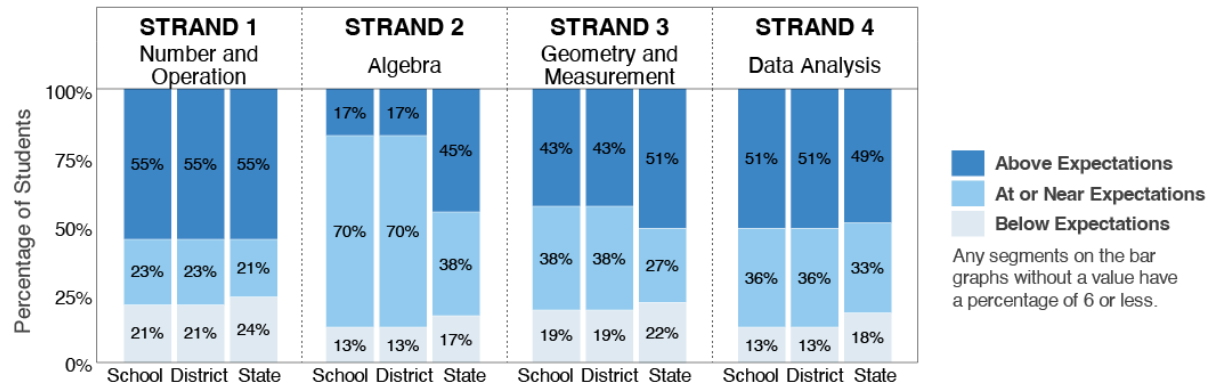
# Section 2: Strand/Substrand Performance Descriptors

Strand/Substrand Performance: Content area strand and substrand names and performance level percentages are provided at the school, district, and state levels. Like the Achievement Level Graph, any segment on the graph with a value of 6% or less will not display a numerical value.

## GRADE 3 MATHEMATICS PERFORMANCE BY STRAND

For the grade 3 Mathematics MCA-III, the strand performance levels are reported as: Below Expectations, At or Near Expectations, or Above Expectations. The strand performance level is determined by comparing the school performance to the state expectation at the "Meets" achievement level.

The graphs below show the percentage of students in each performance level for each strand calculated by aggregating the individual student strand performance levels at your school, at your district, and at the state level.



View information about Strand Performance Levels in the [Interpretive Guide for Statewide Assessment Reports](#) (minnesota.pearsonaccessnext.com > Reporting Resources > Individual Student Reports (ISRs) Resources > Interpretive Guide for Statewide Assessment Reports)

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Refer to the [Interpretive Guide for Statewide Assessment Reports](#) for additional information about strand performance levels (PearsonAccess Next > Reporting Resources > Individual Student Reports (ISRs) Resources).

Performance level categories include *Below Expectations*, *At or Near Expectations*, or *Above Expectations*. The strand performance level is determined by comparing the school (or district) performance to the state expectation at the "Meets" achievement level.



# Section 3: Benchmark Performance

Benchmark Performance Description: School or district performance on each benchmark is compared with the “Meets” achievement level cut score.

## Performance Symbols:

Three symbols specific to the benchmark reports are used to represent performance by a school or district on each benchmark. An asterisk (\*) indicates there were less than 20 student responses for that benchmark and results are not available.

View the **Benchmark Achievement Level Descriptors** (ALDs) on the Testing 1, 2, 3 website. (Testing 1, 2, 3 site > Plan and Teach > Success Criteria). Benchmark ALDs provide more detailed descriptions of the knowledge, skills, and abilities demonstrated by students across the four achievement levels on the MCA, beyond what the traditional (ALDs) offer.



Red circle with minus (-) sign: School/district performance on this benchmark is less than the “Meets” achievement level.



Blue circle with double tilde (≈) symbol: School/district performance on this benchmark is similar to the “Meets” achievement level.



Green circle with plus (+) sign: School/district performance on this benchmark is greater than the “Meets” achievement level.

Mathematics Benchmark Report		Spring 2024 - Grade 3	
<b>GRADE 3 MATHEMATICS PERFORMANCE BY BENCHMARK</b>			
School performance on each benchmark is compared at the “Meets” achievement level cut score. Performance on each benchmark is calculated by comparing school performance on a benchmark to the expected performance on a benchmark that would be achieved at the “Meets” achievement level cut score.			
	School performance on this benchmark is <b>less than</b> the “Meets” achievement level.		School performance on this benchmark is <b>similar to</b> the “Meets” achievement level.
	School performance on this benchmark is <b>greater than</b> the “Meets” achievement level.		less than 20 student responses on a benchmark
<b>STRAND 1: NUMBER AND OPERATION</b>			
<b>1</b>			
Compared to “Meets” Achievement Level	Benchmark		
<b>2</b>	<b>Standard 3.1.1</b>	Compare and represent whole numbers up to 100,000 with an emphasis on place value and equality.	
	<b>3.1.1.1</b>	Read, write and represent whole numbers up to 100,000. Representations may include numerals, expressions with operations, words, pictures, number lines, and manipulatives such as bundles of sticks and base 10 blocks.	
	<b>3.1.1.2</b>	Use place value to describe whole numbers between 1000 and 100,000 in terms of ten thousands, thousands, hundreds, tens and ones. For example: Writing 54,873 is a shorter way of writing the following sums: 5 ten thousands + 4 thousands + 8 hundreds + 7 tens + 3 ones 54 thousands + 8 hundreds + 7 tens + 3 ones.	
	<b>3</b>	<b>3.1.1.3</b>	Find 10,000 more or 10,000 less than a given five-digit number. Find 1000 more or 1000 less than a given four- or five-digit number. Find 100 more or 100 less than a given four- or five-digit number.
		<b>3.1.1.4</b>	Round numbers to the nearest 10,000, 1000, 100 and 10. Round up and round down to estimate sums and differences. For example: 8726 rounded to the nearest 1000 is 9000, rounded to the nearest 100 is 8700, and rounded to the nearest 10 is 8730. Another example: 473 – 291 is between 400 – 300 and 500 – 200, or between 100 and 300.
		<b>3.1.1.5</b>	Compare and order whole numbers up to 100,000.

**Key for benchmark performance in example graphic:**

1. Strand, substrand, or skill domain codes and titles.
2. Standard code and description.
3. Benchmark performance, benchmark code, and description.

## Reading MCA

The Reading MCA is an adaptive assessment at the “testlet” level, meaning questions are chosen based on the student’s responses to a group of questions for a passage or passages. The reading benchmark reports show benchmarks organized under one of the three skill domains assessed on the MCA. Not all students see items for each benchmark, and other students may see more than one item for the same benchmark. The left column indicates benchmarks not assessed on the MCA or only within the classroom, or those that are not applicable to a substrand.

## Mathematics MCA

The Mathematics MCA is an adaptive assessment at the “item” level, meaning questions are chosen based on the student’s responses to the previous items. Not all students see items for each benchmark, and other students may see more than one item for the same benchmark. The left column indicates benchmarks not assessed on the MCA or assessed within a different benchmark. Refer to the Minnesota Academic Standards for exact formatting of the mathematics benchmarks and examples, as slight adjustments were made to fit the report.

## Science MCA

The Science MCA is a fixed-form assessment, meaning that for the current year, all students are administered the same items that count for their score. Not all benchmarks are assessed each year on the Science MCA. The italicized text below the Standard description indicates benchmarks not assessed on that year’s test or not assessed on the MCA.

For each subject, benchmarks with fewer than 20 student responses are indicated with an asterisk (\*) in the left-hand column.

Reading Benchmark Report		Spring 2024 - Grade 3
<b>GRADE 3 READING PERFORMANCE BY BENCHMARK</b>		
<b>INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND IDEAS</b>		
Compared to “Meets” Achievement Level	Benchmark	
Assessed classroom only	3.1.7.7	Literature Explain how specific aspects of a text’s illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g., create mood, emphasize aspects of a character or setting).
Not applicable to literature	3.1.8.8	Literature
Assessed classroom only	3.1.9.9	Literature Compare and contrast the themes, settings, and plots of stories written by the same author about the same or similar characters (e.g., in books from a series).
Assessed classroom only	3.2.7.7	Informational Text Use information gained from illustrations (e.g., maps, photographs) and the words in a text to demonstrate understanding of the text (e.g., where, when, why, and how key events occur).
~	3.2.8.8	Informational Text Describe the logical connection between particular sentences and paragraphs in a text (e.g., comparison, cause/effect, first/second/third in a sequence).
Assessed classroom only	3.2.9.9	Informational Text Compare and contrast the most important points and key details presented in two texts on the same topic.

Mathematics Benchmark Report		Spring 2024 - Grade 6
<b>GRADE 6 MATHEMATICS PERFORMANCE BY BENCHMARK</b>		
<b>STRAND 1: NUMBER AND OPERATION</b>		
Compared to “Meets” Achievement Level	Benchmark	
~	<b>Standard 6.1.2</b> Understand the concept of ratio and its relationship to fractions and to the multiplication and division of whole numbers. Use ratios to solve real-world and mathematical problems.	
~	6.1.2.1	Identify and use ratios to compare quantities; understand that comparing quantities using ratios is not the same as comparing quantities using subtraction. For example: In a classroom with 15 boys and 10 girls, compare the numbers by subtracting (there are 5 more boys than girls) or by dividing (there are 1.5 times as many boys as girls). The comparison using division may be expressed as a ratio of boys to girls (3 to 2 or 3:2 or 1.5 to 1).
~	6.1.2.2	Apply the relationship between ratios, equivalent fractions and percents to solve problems in various contexts, including those involving mixtures and concentrations. For example: If 5 cups of trail mix contains 2 cups of raisins, the ratio of raisins to trail mix is 2 to 5. This ratio corresponds to the fact that the raisins are 2/5 of the total, or 40% of the total. And if one trail mix consists of 2 parts peanuts to 3 parts raisins, and another consists of 4 parts peanuts to 8 parts raisins, then the first mixture has a higher concentration of peanuts.
1	6.1.2.3	Determine the rate for ratios of quantities with different units. For example: 60 miles for every 3 hours is equivalent to 20 miles for every one hour (20 mph).
~	6.1.2.4	Use reasoning about multiplication and division to solve ratio and rate problems. For example: If 5 items cost \$3.75, and all items are the same price, then 1 item costs 75 cents, so 12 items cost \$9.00.

Science Benchmark Report		Spring 2024 - Grade 8
<b>GRADE 8 SCIENCE PERFORMANCE BY BENCHMARK</b>		
<b>STRAND 1: THE NATURE OF SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING</b>		
<b>SUBSTRAND 1.1: THE PRACTICE OF SCIENCE</b>		
Compared to “Meets” Achievement Level	Benchmark	
~	<b>Standards 7.1.1.1 / 8.1.1.1</b> Understand that science is a way of knowing about the natural world and is characterized by empirical criteria, logical argument and skeptical review. <i>Benchmarks 7.1.1.1.1 and 8.1.1.1.1 were not assessed on this year’s test.</i>	
~	7.1.1.1.2	Understand that when similar investigations give different results, the challenge is to judge whether the differences are significant, and if further studies are required. For example: Use mean and range to analyze the reliability of experimental results.
~	<b>Standards 7.1.1.2 / 8.1.1.2</b> Understand that scientific inquiry uses multiple interrelated processes to investigate questions and propose explanations about the natural world. <i>Benchmark 7.1.1.2.3 was not assessed on this year’s test.</i>	
*	7.1.1.2.1	Generate and refine a variety of scientific questions and match them with appropriate methods of investigation, such as field studies, controlled experiments, reviews of existing work, and development of models.
~	7.1.1.2.2	Plan and conduct a controlled experiment to test a hypothesis about a relationship between two variables, ensuring that one variable is systematically manipulated, the other is measured and recorded, and any other variables are kept the same (controlled). For example: The effect of various factors on the production of carbon dioxide by plants.
1	7.1.1.2.4	Evaluate explanations proposed by others by examining and comparing evidence, identifying faulty reasoning, and suggesting alternative explanations.
1	8.1.1.2.1	Use logical reasoning and imagination to develop descriptions, explanations, predictions and models based on evidence.

## Cautions when interpreting the benchmark report

The source documents for the text in the benchmark reports are the Minnesota Academic Standards for each subject. Some additional resources to use while looking at the benchmark reports include the achievement level descriptors, the benchmark user guides, and the test specifications. Links to available resources are provided at the end of this guide.

- Benchmark report data are based on student responses to test questions for a particular benchmark that was administered to students in a school or district; therefore, the data is based on a limited set of items. In addition, for reading and mathematics, the number of items for each benchmark will vary by student.
- The purpose of the data in this report is not to designate strengths and weaknesses in a school or district; rather, it is to serve as a guidance tool to identify possible gaps in instructional content that staff may find relevant and important.
- Benchmark performance symbols do not correspond to overall achievement levels (Does Not Meet, Partially Meets, Meets, or Exceeds the Standards), and the color/shape of each symbol does not reflect benchmark difficulty.
- It is important to frame any interpretation within the context of the school or district environment. Consideration of external information about the curriculum, instructional practices, and data from other classroom assessments is critical to making appropriate inferences from the data in this report.

## Using the benchmark report in your classroom, school, or district

The MCA Benchmark Report is meant to serve as an additional resource educators can use to identify benchmarks for which students show performance less than, similar to, and greater than on the current year's MCA relative to the "Meets" achievement level cut score.

Consider the following questions when reviewing and discussing the benchmark reports:

- Are the students who completed the assessment representative of the total student population at your school or district?
- Where and how are specific benchmarks taught in a course's scope and sequence?
- What do you notice about the benchmark data? What surprises you?
- How does the data compare with what you saw in the classroom?
- What additional information do you have about student learning of the benchmarks?
- What may be some reasons for the benchmarks that have symbols indicating performance above the "Meets" achievement levels?
- What may be some underlying causes for benchmarks below the "Meets" achievement level?
- Are there additional emerging themes in all the information?
- What are your next steps after reviewing your benchmark data?

Take your district's standards implementation plan into consideration when communicating about and using benchmark data. For science, the Benchmark Reports will show the specific 2009 benchmarks on the Science MCA-III, which may not align with certain grade-level instruction depending on the transition plan.

# Glossary

**Academic Standards**—The Minnesota Academic Standards are the statewide expectations that identify the knowledge and skills all K–12 students are expected to achieve by the end of a grade level or grade band.

The MCAs are the statewide assessments to help districts measure student learning of Minnesota’s academic standards. The academic standards are revised according to a schedule set forth by statute. The timeline for the first administration of the revised science assessments is school year 2024–25, and reading assessments is school year 2025–26. The timeline for mathematics assessments is still to be determined based on the standards revision schedule.

**Achievement Levels**—For MCA, there are four achievement levels: Exceeds the Standards (proficient), Meets the Standards (proficient), Partially Meets the Standards (not proficient), and Does Not Meet the Standards (not proficient). Students are assigned an achievement level based on their scale score.

**Achievement Level Descriptors (ALDs)**—ALDs describe the four levels of achievement on the Minnesota Academic Standards. Note: Achievement Level Descriptors are referred to as Performance Level Descriptors on the Individual Student Reports (ISRs).

**Benchmark Achievement Level Descriptors (ALDs)**—Educators have requested more detailed descriptions of the knowledge, skills, and abilities demonstrated by students across the four achievement levels on the MCA, beyond what the traditional Achievement Level Descriptors (ALDs) offer. In response to this, 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:

- Support educators in implementing equitable instruction for all students aligned to the Minnesota Academic Standards in Reading and Mathematics.
- Support educators in evaluating the depth and rigor of their curriculum, instruction, and classroom assessments.

**Benchmarks**—The MCAs are aligned by grade and subject at the benchmark level of the Minnesota Academic Standards. The purpose of benchmarks is to provide details about the academic knowledge and skills that schools teach and students learn from the Minnesota Academic Standards.

**Benchmark Performance**—Performance on a benchmark is calculated by comparing school or district performance for a grade and subject on a benchmark to the expected performance on that benchmark that would be achieved at the “Meets” achievement level cut score. The benchmark symbols of less than, similar to, and greater than are used in reporting benchmark performance.

**Expected Performance**—Expected performance is used in calculating benchmark performance. It can be interpreted as how those students who perform at the “Meets” achievement level cut score would likely perform on a particular benchmark. Calculated using the psychometric measurement model for the assessment.

**Individual Student Report (ISR)**—An Individual Student Report (ISR) is the final and official report of a student’s assessment results provided by MDE to districts to distribute to parents or guardians.

**Longitudinal Reports**—Longitudinal Reports include historical test results in a graphical display at the student, school, district, and/or state level for review or comparison by administration (test and year). Comparisons include overall and average scale score, achievement level, strand performance detail, and/or student group. A Dashboard view will display performance comparisons across all tests, as they apply to the administration being reported, in a summary graph for a side by side comparison. The first page of the benchmark reports displays overall results and strand performance details available in longitudinal reports on PearsonAccess Next.

**MCAs**—The Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs) are state tests in reading, mathematics, and science that are used to meet federal and state legislative requirements. The tests are administered every year to measure student performance relative to the Minnesota Academic Standards that specify what students in a particular grade should know and be able to do.

**Observed Performance**—Calculated as the average percent of correct student responses in the school or district on test questions assessing that benchmark.

**Strand Performance Levels**—School or district performance by grade and subject on a strand compared to the “Meets” achievement level. They are reported as Below Expectations, At or Near Expectations, or Above Expectations.

**Test Specifications**—Specific rules and characteristics guide the development of a test’s content and format. They indicate which strands, substrands, standards, and benchmarks will be assessed on the test and in what proportions.

# Benchmark Resources

View additional resources at the MDE website links below:

Resource	Location
<a href="#">Achievement Level Descriptors</a>	View the Achievement Level Descriptors for reading, mathematics, and science on the MDE Testing 1, 2, 3 website. (MDE Testing 1, 2, 3 site > Plan and Teach > Success Criteria)
<a href="#">Benchmark Achievement Level Descriptors</a>	View the Benchmark Achievement Level Descriptors for reading and mathematics on the Testing 1, 2, 3 website. (MDE Testing 1, 2, 3 site > Plan and Teach > Success Criteria)
<a href="#">Benchmark Report "How To" Quick Guides</a>	View the subject specific "How To" Quick Guides for reading, mathematics, and science for information about how you can use the reports. (PearsonAccess Next > Reporting Resources > Additional Reporting Resources)
<a href="#">Frameworks for the Minnesota Science &amp; Math Standards</a>	View the Frameworks for the Minnesota Science & Math Standards for resources to help translate Minnesota state standards into classroom practice and assist in student achievement of those standards. ( <a href="https://stemtc.scimathmn.org/">https://stemtc.scimathmn.org/</a> )
<a href="#">MCA Test Specifications</a>	View how the Minnesota Academic Standards and benchmarks are addressed in the development of the MCA in the MCA test specifications. (MDE website > Districts, Schools and Educators > Teaching and Learning > Statewide Testing > Test Specifications)
<a href="#">2007 Mathematics Standards Progression Across Grades</a>	View the 2007 Mathematics Standards Progression Across Grades resource on the MDE Testing 1, 2, 3 website. (MDE Testing 1, 2, 3 > Plan and Teach > Standards Based Learning Goals > Resources)
<a href="#">Minnesota Academic Standards</a>	View the Minnesota Academic Standards for the knowledge and skill expectations in a content area for a grade. (MDE website > Districts, Schools and Educators > Teaching and Learning > Academic Standards (K-12))
<a href="#">Minnesota Questions Tool</a>	View the Minnesota Questions Tool for released items from MCA test. (MDE Testing 1, 2, 3 > Assess > Released MCA Questions > Minnesota Questions Tool)
<a href="#">MDE Testing 1, 2, 3</a>	View the MDE Testing 1, 2, 3 educator website for more information about using data in the classroom. ( <a href="https://testing123.education.mn.gov">https://testing123.education.mn.gov</a> )
<a href="#">Understanding the Benchmark Reports Video</a>	View the Understanding the Benchmark Reports Video for a walk through of the sections of the report. (PearsonAccess Next > Reporting Resources > Additional Reporting Resources)
<a href="#">Using Assessment Results During Transition to New Academic Standards: Science</a>	View the Using Assessment Results During Transition to New Academic Standards: Science on the District Resources page. (MDE > Districts, Schools and Educators > Teaching and Learning > Statewide Testing > District Resources > Test Score Interpretation Resources)

## Contact Information

MDE

General inquiries

[mde.testing@state.mn.us](mailto:mde.testing@state.mn.us)

651-582-8674

Pearson

Submit a **[Pearson help desk request](#)**

(PearsonAccess Next > Support)

888-817-8659

Contact your District Assessment Coordinator for information on accessing these reports. District Assessment Coordinators can contact Pearson for help accessing reports in PearsonAccess Next. Contact MDE for questions about scoring and the data presented in these reports.