PARENT PAGES NEWSLETTER

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Minnesota's Standardized Test – MCA-II: Use the Results to Help Your Child Succeed in School

The Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments – Series II (MCA-IIs) are the standardized tests in reading, math, and science that public schools in Minnesota give to students. The state uses the tests to see how well schools are teaching the state academic standards and grade-level benchmarks for the standards.

But what do these test results mean to your child and how can you use the information to help him or her? Your child's individual test results offer insight to how well your child is performing in these key academic areas. When your child is meeting the standards and benchmarks for Minnesota's public school children, you can affirm your child's success and progress. This helps your child stay on the right academic course through elementary and middle school. The MCA tests remain important to your child in high school, because the state uses them as part of the Minnesota requirements for high school graduation.

The score reports from April's testing are sent to parents in the summer. You can help your child start out on the right foot academically when September comes by understanding the results *before* a new school year begins. You can be the key to that strong start. How? Read on.

Terms to Know

Minnesota Academic Standards define what students are required to achieve within a school subject area. Each school subject has a set of academic standards in every grade level. They name the specific skills and knowledge base your child is expected to reach in school.

Strands and Sub Strands are the subcategories that make up a content area. You may hear them referred to as objectives. For example, *vocabulary expansion*, *comprehension*, and *literature* are the strands that make up the content area of "reading."

Benchmark is a specific skill students must learn to meet an academic standard.

Below is an example of how standards, strands and benchmarks work together:

GRADE	STANDARD	STRAND	SUB-STRAND	BENCHMARK
Kindergarten	The student will become familiar with the structure of printed material.	Speaking, viewing, and listening	Viewing and listening	1. Follow print (words and text) from left to right and top to bottom. 2. Turn pages sequentially from front to back.

Understanding the Report

Use the portion of the MCA report that details your child's performance on the test to see where your child is doing well and where academic help is needed. The section featured here is found on the inside of the report you receive. Pay attention to the overall math and reading scores as well as scores within each of the strands (see math score report example). For some grades, science scores are printed on another report.

Spring 2008

Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments - Series II

SAMANTHA CONTROL

1 **Mathematics** **4** ANTHA earned 29 out of 48 points. **2**

Strand	Points Earned	Points Possible	Averages School	Averages District	Averages State	**5** What was measured? **6**
Number Sense	12	18	13.7	13.7	14.4	Use numbers, computation, operations, and quantitative reasoning
3 Patterns, Functions & Algebra	4	8	5.7	5.7	5.6	Identify and use patterns, relationships, and algebraic reasoning (the use of symbols to represent real-world situations)
Data, Statistics, & Probability	4	6	4.4	4.4	4.4	Use statistics (collect, organize, and interpret data)
Spatial Sense, Geometry, & Measurement	9	16	10.5	10.5	11.0	Use measurement, geometry, and spatial reasoning (location of an object and the amount of space it occupies)

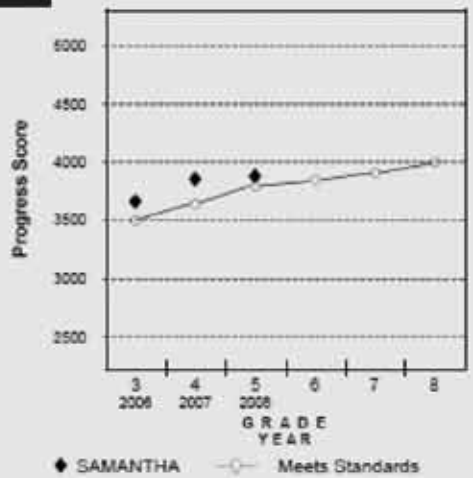
7

MEETS THE STANDARDS

Students at this level of mathematics meet the mathematics skills of the Minnesota Academic Standards. Some of the skills these students can demonstrate consistently include the following:

- **Mathematical reasoning skills** such as solving multi-step mathematical problems by breaking them into simple parts; supporting mathematical results using pictures, numbers, and words
- **Number sense and computation skills** such as comparing and using integers to solve problems when given a number line; identifying decimal place values; translating between equivalent forms of numbers; using estimation to solve problems
- **Pattern and algebraic thinking skills** such as recognizing multi-step representations of problems
- **Data and probability skills** such as using measures associated with data, like mean, median, mode
- **Spatial, geometry, and measurement skills** such as estimating the measurement of angles; determining surface area by counting units on a grid; recalling the sum of angles in triangles; recognizing regular polygons

8



Mathematics Progress

Grade	3	4	5	6	7	8
Testing Year	2006	2007	2008			
Achievement Level	E	E	M			
Scale Score	371	469	569			
State Percentile Rank	62	81	83			
Progress Score	3783	3891	3936			

The diamond on this graph shows the progress your child is making from grade to grade. The line shows the progress needed to be at the Meets the Standards achievement level.

If your child's scores are at or above the line, your child's performance is meeting or exceeding the standards. If your child's scores are below the line, your child's performance is not meeting the standards.

It is recommended that you work with the school staff to help your child continue to learn and make progress.

Achievement Levels:
E = Exceeds the Standards
M = Meets the Standards
P = Partially Meets the Standards
D = Does Not Meet the Standards

1. **Subject**- The subject being reported
2. **Total Points Earned** –The total points earned out of the total number possible on the test.
3. **Sub-scores** – The strands or sub-strands from the Minnesota Academic Standards
4. **Points Earned and Points Possible** - The points earned and the number of possible points for each strand and sub-strand.
5. **Averages** – The average number of points for all students tested in the school, district, and state.
6. **What was measured?** - A brief description of what is being assessed as each of the strands or sub-strands of the Minnesota Academic standards.
7. **Achievement Level Description** – A summary of the expected knowledge and skills of the typical Minnesota student scoring at the achievement level identified. These descriptors are different for each grade, subject, and achievement level.
8. **Progress for Mathematics and Reading** – Your student's progress from grade to grade is shown on a graph. Scores at or above the line indicate that your child is meeting or exceeding standards. Scores below the line show that your child's performance is not meeting standards. Your child's progress in science from grade to grade is not shown on a graph.

What do I do with this information?

Make sure your child understands school is about ongoing learning and skill building, and that the MCA-II test is simply a picture of where he or she is at during the time the test is taken. It's important to remember that students do not pass or fail these tests. The test results show you where your child is succeeding academically and where additional support can help. You can:

Use it in the classroom

The sub-scores on the report point to how you child is progressing in specific content areas. This is important information for your child's teacher to know at the beginning of the school year. Bring the report to your child's first parent-teacher conference in the fall. The scores help your child's teacher know what particular support your child may need. Together, you and the teacher can decide which areas to address, how that will happen, and how you will communicate with each other about your child's progress. You can also ask the teacher to show you ways to help at home on these skills. As the year progresses, continue to use homework, grades, and tests to see how your child is progressing, and don't forget to check in with the teacher from time to time.

Use it at Home

You can find additional help for your child via the Internet. If you do not have a computer at home, you can access the internet for free through your public library or many community centers. Support your child by using the Pearson Perspectives Web site to find additional learning resources. Pearson is the developer of the MCA-II tests. The front page of the MCA report has a small box labeled "Learning Locator." It can be found beneath your child's scores. Inside the box is a number. This number is your child's personal number. It is unique to your child.

The goal of the Learning Locator is to provide you with resources that are matched specifically with Minnesota's Academic Standards and your child's achievement level. The learning resources provide targeted practice on specific standards. This lets your child work at his or her current achievement level and move on to the next achievement level. Find the learning resources at: perspective.pearsonaccess.com/perspective/appmanager/mn/family. Even if you don't have your child's Learning Locator number handy, you can still browse through the learning resources to find enrichment materials, additional self-study, or family-guided activities. You can search for individual resources as well.

You can also help improve your child's test performance on the MCAs by providing support at home throughout the school year. Encourage your child through conversations about his or her school work. Talk about the content in your child's daily curriculum, make sure your child completes homework and quiz your child before tests. Let your child know you have talked to the teacher to discuss academic progress. How can this make a difference? The connection is simple.

Remember, the MCA-IIs are based on the Minnesota Academic Standards. Public school districts in Minnesota choose curriculum meant to teach the state standards, so teacher's assignments, projects, and tests are based on the standards. When you support your child's day-to-day learning efforts you are helping your child learn Minnesota's academic standards and improve on the next MCA-II test.

How to Help

You can help your child do well on the MCA-IIs by taking these additional steps:

- Make homework a priority. Homework usually reinforces skills being taught.
- Monitor your child's successful completion of assignments.
- Encourage your child to study for classroom quizzes and tests.
- Have your child read or do activities that support a particular academic skill.
- Ask your child's teacher for ideas and strategies to help you work with your child on those areas that impact his or her MCA scores.
- Check your child's homework and test grades regularly to find academic problems early.
- Attend conferences to discuss how your child is performing in school.
- Contact the school to learn if any additional resources or support are available.
- Invite family members or friends who may be able to work with your child to help.

Frequently Asked Questions

Parent's Question: "What if my child is not meeting the standards?"

There are many different ways you can help your child. Bring the MCA report along with you to conferences and let the teacher know what it says. Ask the teacher for tips on what to do and how to lend support. Together, you can come up with ideas to help your child at school and at home. Know what your child is doing in school, and keep an eye on individual assignments. Let your child know homework and studying come first, and help your child in those day-to-day efforts.

If you have other questions about your child's education, the Minnesota Parent Center is here to help. Call (952) 838-9000 or (800) 838-2237 toll free to speak to a parent involvement specialist.

MINNESOTA PARENT CENTER | MN PIRC

MN Parental Information and Resource Center, a project of PACER

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The Minnesota Parent Center is a unique statewide project that helps families and schools build stronger ties to benefit students. It provides free training, individual assistance, and information to families and schools.

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