

## ACTION INFORMATION SHEET

### Help Your Child Meet Academic Standards

What do Minnesota’s academic standards and grade-level benchmarks mean to you and your child? When you make sure your child is meeting the standards and benchmarks for Minnesota’s public school children, you’re helping your child stay on the right academic course toward high school graduation.

What are academic standards? They 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. A benchmark is a specific skill students must learn to meet an academic standard.

Keeping track of the standards for each subject and every grade can be confusing, but it’s important for you to know that your child is meeting Minnesota’s academic standards each year. Why? Because meeting the state standards is part of what high school students need in order to graduate.

So how can you know if your child is meeting the standards? Two simple tools are already in place and will help you understand how well your child is doing. These tools are the grades on your child’s report card, and the scores your child receives on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment exam.

#### Grades

Public schools must choose curriculum based on Minnesota’s academic standards. The curriculum outlines what students are being taught and plans how to help them gain new skills and knowledge, including the standards’ benchmarks. So the grades on your child’s report card reflect her ability to master the specifics of a standard’s skills.

#### Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments

Another way to see if your child is learning the state standards in reading, math, writing, and science is by looking at

your child’s scores on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment exam. This standardized test is also known as the MCA-II. The test shows your child’s progress in achieving the grade-level benchmarks and the state academic standards. The score tells you if your child has reached the basic requirements for his grade level.

Students begin taking the MCA-IIs in third grade. They are tested in reading, math and writing. Students must pass the MCA-II writing test in ninth grade, the MCA-II reading test in 10th grade, and the MCA-II math test in 11th grade. Students must take science tests once during third to fifth grade and in grades sixth to ninth. They take a life science test once in between 10th and 12th grade. Students must pass all these tests as part of the requirements for graduating from high school.

#### How to help

You can help your child continue to meet required standards in several ways:

- Make homework a priority – homework 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 skills.
- Check your child’s homework and test grades regularly to see academic problems early.
- Attend conferences to discuss how your child is performing in school.

#### Stay on course for graduation

Passing the MCA-IIs is just one piece of what’s required in order to graduate from high school. In addition, all school districts require students to pass certain classes, and high schools also require students to successfully complete an

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overall number of course credits. A credit is a unit of measurement used to establish the value of a class taken. Students need to complete all three requirements to graduate from high school.

You can help your child stay on course to graduation by doing these things:

- Be certain your child is attending class every day.
- Follow your child's performance on homework, quizzes, and tests.
- Make sure your child takes and passes the required classes each year.

- Be certain your child is staying current with needed credits.
- Track your child's scores on the MCA-II's.
- Speak to an academic counselor to find out where he or she can get help if there are academic problems.
- Talk to your child. Let him or her know how important the points listed above are, and communicate your belief in his or her ability to succeed.

Call the MN PIRC if you have questions or want to discuss school issues: 952.838.9000 or 800.537.2237 (toll-free).