

## ACTION INFORMATION SHEET

# A Parents' Guide to School Testing: What You Need to Know

Students take many tests in school. Two of the “big” tests are the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs) and the Basic Skills Test. Here is why they are important and how you can help your child do well on them.

### Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments

These are reading and math tests. Minnesota schools give them every year to students in grades 3-8 and in high school. The tests measure how well students are meeting state academic standards.

Schools give the tests to see how well students have learned concepts and skills. After your child takes one of these tests, your school gives you a report that explains your child's progress. The report:

- Gives you information on your child's reading and math skills.
- Shows how well your child is doing compared to other students in the state.

The reading test includes both fiction and nonfiction such as poems, short stories, or informational passages. On the math test, students solve problems involving computations and other skills.

Students do not pass or fail the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments. Instead, parents and schools gain information on how students perform on reading and math. You can use the information to review the progress of your child in school. Schools can use the information to guide decisions about teaching and learning.

### Help Prepare Your Child for These Tests

There's a lot you can do to help your child do his or her best on a test.

### **General**

- Familiarize your child with the test direction and the format. You can ask your school for a sample of a test.
- Encourage your child to participate in practice sessions at school and home.
- Make sure your child has a good night's sleep and a nutritious breakfast before taking a test.

### **Reading**

- Read to your child and encourage him or her to read to you.
- Encourage your child to try crossword puzzles and news quizzes in your local newspaper.

### **Math**

- Encourage your child to use math every day. Have your child practice by creating a grocery budget, explaining charts and graphs from newspaper articles, and measuring a recipe.
- Play games that involve numbers or computation.

### Basic Skills and MCA-II/GRAD Tests

All students must pass a series of tests in reading, mathematics, and writing in order to graduate from a public school in Minnesota. Students graduating by 2009 will take the Basic Skills Tests. Students graduating later will take the MCA-II/GRAD test. Students can re-take any of these exams if they don't pass the first time. Parents receive their child's test results from their local school district.

The tests provide one common way for students to show their basic knowledge and skills. They are an important part of Minnesota's accountability system. The federal No Child Left Behind Act requires schools to meet certain goals. The results of these tests show if schools are meeting making progress toward those goals. (See “What is Adequate Yearly Progress?” on back.)

### Help Prepare Your Child for These Important Tests

As a parent, you can help your children prepare for these tests in many ways. For example, you can:

- 
- Provide your student with a study area
  - Encourage your child to practice good study habits. Students should set aside time every day for homework.
  - Encourage your child to read the daily newspaper and general interest magazines.
  - Encourage your child to use math every day.

**You also can encourage your child play a role. He or she can:**

- Become familiar with the directions and the test format.
- Take part in any school-provided test-taking practice.
- Have a good night's sleep and a good breakfast before taking a test.

## **Questions?**

---

Do you have questions about school testing? You can talk to your child's principal. You also can call the Minnesota Parent Center. The phone number is 952-838-9000 or 800-53-PACER (toll free in Greater Minnesota).

The Minnesota Parent Center helps parents be strong partners in their children's education. It also encourages community involvement to help all children be prepared for school and to succeed when they arrive there. The center's multicultural staff can answer questions about early childhood learning and school-related problems for all children. They also provide helpful written materials and offer workshops on topics such as the No Child Left Behind Act, parental involvement, and more. All services are free.

## **What is Adequate Yearly Progress?**

---

Every state, school district, and school is required by law to achieve some minimum academic standards. Adequate yearly progress (AYP) is a state's measure of progress toward that minimum goal. Progress is measured through annual tests, such as the basic skills test.

*Minnesota Parent Center, a project of PACER Center, Inc., is funded by the U.S. Department of Education.*

*PACER is a statewide nonprofit organization. It supports the educational rights of children with and without disabilities. It offers workshops, individual assistance, written information, and more.*

*This publication was produced in whole or in part with funds from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, Parental Information and Resource Center program, under Grant # 84.310A. The content herein does not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Education, any other agency of the U.S. government, or any other source.*