



## Association of Metropolitan School Districts

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# AMSD Position on Assessment

**State policymakers should take advantage of the flexibility provided under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to design a state accountability system focused on improving student learning. As allowed under the ESSA, the new system should reduce the number of required standardized tests and provide more flexibility so school districts can offer assessments that more accurately measure student college or career readiness. The state should provide the necessary funding for all students to take a college entrance exam in grade 11 or grade 12.**

### AMSD BELIEVES

- The primary purpose of assessments should be to improve student learning.
- The assessment system should be transparent, allow for multiple measures to determine proficiency and growth and provide timely results to support instructional and curricular needs.
- The State should provide funding for all students to take a college entrance exam as well as assessments critical to achieving the goals outlined in the World's Best Workforce law.
- The Innovation Zone legislation should be expanded to allow more school districts to pursue innovative, local assessments as is allowed under the ESSA.

### BACKGROUND

Minnesota's accountability and assessment system has been revised numerous times since the adoption of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2002. Significant changes were adopted following the release of a report from the Education Commissioner's Assessment and Accountability Working Group in 2012. Further changes were implemented after Minnesota was granted a waiver from some

NCLB requirements by the United States Department of Education.

In December of 2015, the President signed into law a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act — now known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The ESSA repeals the NCLB adequate yearly progress framework and replaces it with a comprehensive state-designed system. The ESSA maintains annual, statewide assessments in reading and math for students in grades 3 to 8 and once in high school as well as science tests given three times between grades 3 to 12. However, the ESSA offers states flexibility to implement innovative assessments through a pilot program and the ability to offer a nationally recognized high school assessment. Several states use a nationally recognized college entrance exam for accountability purposes at the high school level, including Wisconsin (ACT), North Dakota (ACT) and Oklahoma (SAT).

A 2017 report on standardized student testing from the Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor offers several findings that state policymakers should take into consideration:

- The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) spent more than \$20 million on standardized tests in Fiscal Year 2017 with

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federal sources contributing more than one-third of the funding.

- Administering state-required standardized tests strains the resources of many school districts and charter schools. MDE does not systematically measure the local costs and impacts of state testing requirements.
- Most school districts and charter schools administer other standardized tests in addition to the MCAs and ACCESS tests. Local educators often find their locally adopted tests more useful than the state-mandated tests.

Legislation passed during the 2017 session repealed the graduation requirement that students be given an opportunity to participate on a nationally normed college entrance exam in grade 11 or grade 12. School districts must still offer students the opportunity to take a college entrance exam at the student's high school during the school day. However, state funding is now provided only for students eligible for free or reduced-price meals to take the exam.

The Minnesota Department of Education's Assessment Advisory Committee included several of the recommendations from the Office of the Legislative Auditor's report in the report they released in December of 2017. The Assessment Advisory Committee's recommendations include:

- Eliminating the specificity in state law requiring career and college readiness trajectory for grades 3-8, requiring above and below grade level test items and eliminating the growth formula details.
- Increasing MDE's outreach and support to school districts.
- Using the ACT for the statewide high school assessments.
- Providing state funding for all high school students to take the ACT.
- Reducing the length of the academic assessments.