



Association of Metropolitan School Districts

2 Pine Tree Drive, Suite 380, Arden Hills, MN 55112 • 612-430-7750 • www.amsd.org

Position on State Accountability Assessments

State policymakers should take advantage of the flexibility provided under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to design a state accountability system that improves instruction for all students. Assessment data should be used to help schools evaluate their teaching and learning practices with a focus on how well grade-level standards are being taught to all students in their system.

AMSD BELIEVES

- Schools, not students, should be accountable for the results on assessments.
- Integrated with education research, data from a sound assessment system can be a powerful vehicle for growing educators, systems, and students. More importantly, the system will help schools address Minnesota's persistent racial and socioeconomic opportunity gap.
- The primary purpose of state accountability assessments should be to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools.
- The system should be transparent, allow for multiple measures to determine proficiency and growth and provide timely results to support instructional and curricular needs.
- The Innovation Zone legislation should be expanded to allow more school districts to pursue innovative, local assessments as is allowed under the ESSA.
- Student Level Test Results should not be sent home or shared with individual students/families.
- Student Level Test Results should never be used to determine a student's educational plan.
- Given Minnesota's persistent opportunity gap, assessment data should always be disaggregated by federal ethnicity, socioeconomic status and other demographic categories.⁽¹⁾ Analysis of disaggregated assessment data should inform schools how well all students are served in their system.

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.

In December of 2015, President Obama signed into law a bipartisan reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act — known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The ESSA repealed the NCLB adequate yearly progress framework and replaced it with a comprehensive state-designed system.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 ability to offer a nationally recognized high school assessment. Several states use nationally recognized college entrance exams 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 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. Schools use local assessments and standardized assessments for different reasons. Whereas local tests provide educators with timely information about how well students have learned the content that was taught to them, so that teachers can

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plan for next steps in their instruction, MCAs and other standardized assessments provide schools with evaluative information about their system. Unlike local tests, standardized data reflects other variables that contribute to students' learning environment. Consequently, MCA, ACCESS and other standardized data points should never be used as a single metric to determine an individual student's learning or growth.

It is also important to consider that participation in statewide assessments is optional for students and families, which often can skew statewide results. Since 2018, 11th grade student participation on the MCA math has dropped 20 percent, and only 70 percent of Minnesota 11th graders took the MCA math assessment in 2022. Only 20 percent of high school students took the statewide MCA science assessment in 2022.²

In line with the Minnesota Department of Education's Assessment Advisory Committee's recommendations, following the Office of the Legislative Auditor's report that was released in December of 2017, AMSD offers the following recommendations:

- Develop a state-of-the-art assessment system. The Minnesota Department of Education should work collaboratively with Minnesota stakeholders and begin negotiations with the U.S. department of Education to develop this system. The system should be grounded in Minnesota's academic standards and provide data to help schools grow instructional delivery models. The assessments should also provide educators with information about student growth as a result of current systems and practices.³
- Align assessments from elementary through high school consistent with Minnesota's academic standards.
- Increase transparency and provide multiple measures. The assessment system should be transparent, easy for teachers, students, parents and the public to understand. The system should underscore how the data should and should not be used. MDE should train schools on ways the misuse of these data points have harmed racially and linguistically underrepresented communities historically.⁴ MDE should increase their efforts to train systems on how to properly use these data points to improve instruction for all students. Assessments should allow for multiple measures and provide timely results to support instructional and curricular needs.
- Given the extremely low student participation rate, the high school science MCA assessment results should not be reported publicly.
- Administer the MCA high school Math Assessment only after students complete Algebra II coursework as required by state statute.
- Increase MDE's outreach and support to school districts. MDE should provide more direct support to school districts that continue to under-serve school dependent students. School dependent students are defined as students that "have been dependent on school to provide the enrichment needed to achieve on the standardized tests" (Jackson, 2011, p. 21). For these students, "remedial programs and prescriptive practices instituted in the 1970s [still exclude] such enrichment in order to make time for remedial drills" (Jackson, 2011, p. 21). Support from MDE should be grounded in research-based strategies. Support should dissuade schools from adopting remedial practices that have been shown to perpetuate low (or zero) growth among historically marginalized student groups.⁵
- MDE should explore transitioning assessments towards more competency based models.

References

Delpit, L. (2012). *"Multiplication is for white people": Raising expectations for other people's children*. The New Press, New York.

Grunewald, R., & Nath, A. (2019). *A statewide crisis: Minnesota's education achievement gaps*. Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis. <https://www.minneapolisfed.org/~media/assets/pages/education-achievement-gaps/achievement-gaps-mn-report.pdf?la=en>

Jackson, Y. (2011). *The pedagogy of confidence: Inspiring high intellectual performance in urban schools*. Teachers College, Columbia University.

Koretz, D. (2017). *The Testing Charade: Pretending to make schools better*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

¹ See Grunewald & Nath (2019) for more information about Minnesota's persistent achievement gap crisis.

² Minnesota Department of Education Report Card

³ See Koretz (2017) for more information about the purpose of testing in schools.

⁴ See Delpit (2012) for more information about how the misuse of standardized tests have historically harmed students of color.

⁵ See Jackson (2011) for more information about ways that standardized testing has resulted in practices that perpetuate low (or zero) growth for students of color.