



Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

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What are academic standards?

The Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards are the statewide expectations for student learning in K-12 public schools. The standards and benchmarks identify the knowledge and skills that all students must achieve in a content area by the end of a grade level or grade band.

According to [Minnesota Statutes 2022, section 120B.018, subdivision 2](#), "academic standard" means a summary description of student learning in a required content area under [Minnesota Statutes 2022, section 120B.021](#), or elective content area under [Minnesota Statutes 2022, section 120B.022](#).

According to [Minnesota Statutes 2022, section 120B.018, subdivision 3](#), "benchmark" means specific knowledge or skill that a student must master to complete part of an academic standard by the end of the grade level or grade band.

School districts determine how their students will meet the standards and benchmarks by developing courses and curriculum and choosing teaching methods.

Which content areas have standards?

Per [Minnesota Statutes 2022, section 120B.021](#), Minnesota has state standards for these content areas:

- English language arts
- Mathematics
- Science
- Social studies
- Physical education
- The Arts

School districts must develop their own district standards for these content areas:

- Health
- World Languages, using current world languages standards developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages
- Career and Technical Education

Why do the standards matter?

The academic standards are important because they help:

- Prepare students for success in careers, college, and civic life.
- Work toward equity: they describe the knowledge and skills that all students across the state should learn, and support a well-rounded education for all.
- Define credit requirements for graduation.
- Guide school districts' adoption and design of curricula.
- Describe how learning progresses from kindergarten to high school

All students—including students with unique learning needs—must meet the credit requirements and satisfactorily complete all state and local standards in order to graduate.

How are credits, graduation requirements, and standards connected?

Students must complete two requirements in order to graduate. Students must:

- Satisfactorily complete all state academic standards or local academic standards where state standards do not apply.
- Satisfactorily complete the state course credit requirements under [Minnesota Statutes 2022, section 120B.024](#).
- Students complete the academic standards by taking a course of study that equips them with the knowledge and skills they need for success in postsecondary education, highly skilled work, and civic life. In order to graduate, a student’s high school coursework must include at least the minimum state course credit requirements. "Credit" means the determination by the local school district that a student has successfully completed an academic year of study or mastered the applicable subject matter. ([Minnesota Statutes 2022, section 120B.018, subdivision 4](#)) A credit is designed to align with the equivalent of one year of study.

Students must complete a minimum of 21.5 course credits. Some of those credits must be in specific content areas, including the arts, English language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science. For more detail, [see MDE’s Graduation Requirements page](#).

What is the relationship between curriculum, instruction, and standards?

Minnesota’s academic standards identify the knowledge and skills that all students must achieve in a content area by the end of a grade level or grade band. This can be thought of as the “what” students must learn. Standards guide instruction and assessment, but are substantive enough to require more than one class period to be taught, and are broad enough to allow for educator decisions on instructional and assessment practices.

Educators make the decisions on the “how” to deliver instruction on the standards. Curriculum is the resources and plans that educators may use to present the content to students. By statute (Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.21, subdivision 2(b), Minnesota academic standards do not require a specific curriculum. Districts, schools, and educators make curriculum and instruction decisions to support the teaching and student mastery of standards. Further, standards are not limiting and students may benefit from opportunities for additional challenge.

What is the relationship between academic standards and equity in education?

One of the purposes of academic standards is to help our state work toward an equitable education, by articulating the learning to which all students should have access, regardless of background or zip code. In practice, as with many aspects of education, the degree to which academic standards further equity relies in

how they are implemented and taught. The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) has a robust process for the review and revision of standards that involve many Minnesota people with diverse perspectives and professional expertise. Since 2017, MDE is working to reduce bias making the process more inclusive and the standards increasingly reflective of diverse perspectives.

In standards-based education, culturally responsive and sustaining teaching and learning beliefs and practices is critical. If standards are the learning destination, then districts, schools, and educators determine the way students get there through curriculum and instruction. If there is a situation where an educator sees bias in an academic standard, MDE would encourage the educator to investigate the bias with an MDE content specialist and continue to reduce the bias while ensuring the student learns the knowledge or skill. Additionally, MDE asks that educators work with students and the community to craft lessons that utilize the experiences and expertise of students, families and the community to help students think critically about the standards as a part of meeting them.

What is the relationship of educator licensure to courses and standards?

Each educator license varies with regard to the specific content area(s) courses that can be taught, as well as which grade levels the teacher may teach. The Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) [aligns licensure areas with content areas and types of courses](#). For more information on educator licensing, and who can teach what content area courses, please [see PELSB's website](#). Additionally, the [MDE arts webpage](#) and [MDE science webpage](#) provide additional content-specific resources and information.

Are all standards required?

Districts are required to offer all standards. Most of the state standards are achieved through the benchmarks. Schools must offer and students must achieve all benchmarks for an academic standard to satisfactorily complete that standard. Districts are required to have plans for instruction and achievement for all students ([Minn. Stat. 120B.011, subd. 2\(b\)](#)).

- For Art - Public elementary and middle schools **must offer at least three and require at least two** of the following four arts areas: dance; music; theater; and visual arts. Public high schools must **offer at least three and require at least one** of the following five arts areas: media arts; dance; music; theater; and visual arts.
- For Science - The schools **must offer** a combination of credits under this clause must be sufficient to satisfy (i) Public high schools **require** all of the academic standards in either chemistry or physics and (ii) all other academic standards in science; [Minnesota Statutes 2022, section 120b.024](#).

For courses in a content area for which there are locally developed standards, schools must offer all benchmarks in order for students to satisfactorily complete those standards.

Who is responsible for ensuring students meet the standards?

Teachers and administrators are responsible for providing standards-based curriculum and instruction, and assessing students' achievement of standards. School boards are the local authority responsible to ensure all students in their district are meeting all required standards and benchmarks for all content areas. In rare cases, after all other local avenues have been explored, MDE may work together with a district to ensure it offers all required standards.

Should districts use power/priority standards?

No. MDE advises against the process of power or priority standards. Minnesota K-12 academic standards are summary descriptions of student learning, and benchmarks are the set of basic skills and knowledge that each student in the state must master by the end of each grade level or grade band. Integration or bundling of standards and benchmarks is one way to gain efficiency of time and learning. Bundling¹ is the incorporation of multiple related benchmarks into a single unit of study. Within and across content areas, the curriculum can be arranged in bundles so that units of instruction can be built using approaches such as themes, authentic processes, problem-based learning, essential questions, or big ideas. Done well, integrated or bundled instruction and curriculum supports students in developing knowledge and skills in more than one standard at the same time.

A related aspect of integration is finding efficiencies and opportunities in approaches to assessment. For example, performance assessments could be designed to measure multiple benchmarks in one product or task. An additional benefit is that the student is engaged in synthesis of multiple concepts and skills, leading to authentic and relevant learning.

How often are standards reviewed? When will they be reviewed next?

State standards are reviewed and revised on a schedule approved by the Minnesota State Legislature on a 10-year cycle. The implementation year for each content area's new standards is identified during the rulemaking process, and takes into account multiple considerations, including the degree of revisions and whether complimentary statewide assessment must be developed.

Minnesota's K-12 academic standards are reviewed and revised on a schedule approved by the Minnesota legislature, in one content area per year, following the schedule specified in [Minnesota Statutes 2022, section 120B.021, subdivision 4](#). The schedule is as follows:

¹ Bundling has been described by the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) as the "iterative process of developing a bundle of [standards and benchmarks] for purposes of both instruction and assessment" and defines a bundle as "a group of performance expectations that have been brought together to organize instruction" for which documentation "identifies an underlying rationale and assumptions about the relationships between the performance expectations that have been grouped together." (NGSS Lead States, 2016, Page 2)

This table provides an overview of the current standards review, implementation, and assessment cycle’s schedule. Because 2023–24 is the implementation year for both the arts and physical education, you can find more information about those two content areas below.

Content Area	Most Recent Review	Implementation Year
Physical Education	2016–17	2023–24* Physical Education Standards Implementation resources
Arts	2017–18	2023–24 Arts Standards Implementation resources
Science	2018–19	2024–25* Science Standards Implementation resources
English Language Arts (ELA)	2019–20	2025–26
Social Studies	2020–21	2026–27 (anticipated) Currently in Rulemaking.
Mathematics	2021–22	2027–28 (anticipated) Version 3 is currently under preparation for Commissioner Review

* Delayed by legislature or rulemaking in 2021

What does Minnesota standards review process entail

In accordance with Minnesota Statutes, Minnesota’s academic standards are reviewed and revised on a 10-year cycle. The standards are revised for Minnesota public schools, by Minnesotans. The Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards review and revision is conducted by a committee that includes members with varying perspectives and backgrounds from across Minnesota. Minnesota Statutes outline who must be represented on the committee, including parents, currently licensed and in the classroom teachers, licensed school administrators, school board members, post-secondary institution faculty teaching core subjects, and business community members. This committee meets to review the current standards, examine research, solicit feedback, and propose needed revisions. The committee proposes three drafts and then public feedback at the time each draft is posted.

How are standards adopted into rule?

After the posting of the third draft, the rule-making may take up to 24 months. The first step of the statutory rulemaking process for the K-12 academic standards is publishing the **Request for Comments in the State Register**.

A 60-day public comment period on the proposed standards followed the publishing of this document. Per [Minnesota Statutes 2022, section 120B.023, subd. 1\(d\)](#), the statutory rulemaking process does not apply to the supporting benchmarks and thus the 60-day public comment period was only open for the proposed standards language.

The next step of the statutory rulemaking process is that MDE will review the public comments submitted to the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH) during the 60-day statutory public comment period.

The next step of the statutory rulemaking process is that MDE will draft the Statement of Need and Reasonableness (SONAR), which has traditionally taken 14-17 months. The full statutory rulemaking process can take up to 24 months.

The statutory rulemaking process for the Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards is not complete until the Notice of Adoption is published in the State Register. Each content areas includes an implementation date in the adopted rule language.

How do teachers measure the implementation of standards?

A teacher needs more fine-grained, curricular-specific information for differentiating and informing instruction that can only come from formative and summative classroom assessments. Formative and summative classroom assessments are designed to provide teachers with actionable data they can use for planning and adjusting instruction, and to monitor and communicate progress of student mastery of the academic standards. The methods used for assessing student learning of the standards and benchmarks at the classroom and district level is determined locally by districts and charter schools to ensure that all students meet the standards in all required content areas.

How does the Minnesota Department of Education measure implementation of the academic standards?

In order to evaluate equitable implementation of the academic standards across districts and schools, two standards-based accountability assessments are administered statewide: The Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) and Minnesota Test of Academic Skills (MTAS). [Questions and Answers about the MCA in Reading, Mathematics, and Science](#) and [Questions and Answers about the MTAS in Reading, Mathematics, and Science \(MTAS Parent Fact Sheet\)](#) These assessments are criterion-referenced, which means they are designed to measure progress of learning concepts and skills: the Minnesota Academic Standards. As academic standards are revised, a new series of assessments is developed to align with the updated standards. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and [Minnesota Statutes 2022, section 120B.30](#), require that public school students be assessed in reading, mathematics, and science.

While the statewide assessments are a critical component to evaluating equitable implementation of the standards across the state, they are designed to provide one data point of student learning that should be

considered in the context of additional evidence of student learning / mastery of the academic standards based on what all students are expected to learn in school by the end of the grade they are enrolled. School districts are required to put standards in place so all students have access to high-quality content and instruction.

At which grades do statewide assessments take place?

- Students enrolled in grades 3–8 and 10 take a reading test.
- Students enrolled in grades 3–8 and 11 take a mathematics test.
- Students enrolled in grades 5 and 8 take a science test. High school students also take a science test when they complete their life science instruction (usually a biology course).

Most students take the MCA, but students who receive special education services and meet the [Minnesota Test of Academic Skills \(MTAS\) eligibility requirements](#) may take the MTAS. Students take one test in each subject.

Standards-Based Accountability Assessments Overview

Test	Subject	Administered in Grades	Academic Standards Alignment
MCA-III	Reading MCA	grades 3–8, 10	2010 Standards
MCA-III	Mathematics MCA	grades 3–8, 11	2007 Standards
MCA-III	Science MCA	grades 5, 8, once in high school*	2009 Standards
MTAS-III	Reading MTAS	grades 3–8, 10	2010 Standards
MTAS-III	Mathematics MTAS	grades 3–8, 11	2007 Standards
MTAS-III	Science MTAS	grades 5, 8, once in high school*	2009 Standards

*Students in grades 9–12 take the Science MCA or Science MTAS once in high school.

How should MCA and MTAS results be used?

Since these assessments are criterion-referenced assessments (meaning they measure performance against a fixed set of criteria, the Minnesota Academic Standards) and summative assessments (meaning they provide data about student performance from one point in time and is important to consider along with other important

measures of student learning). The results are designed to be used as a “system check” at a school, district, and/or student group level:

- These assessments provide one data point that should be considered in context when making decisions. While data on statewide assessment results provides a useful starting point, the most robust evaluations of district and school performance occur when this information is paired with information from local, district, and classroom assessments.
- Districts can use summary assessment data provided by MDE to look at overall student proficiency or gaps in learning for a given year and over time.
- Examining changes in overall proficiency between student groups can lead to important considerations for district, school, and classroom-level decision-making, including evaluation of the overall alignment of course curriculum to the standards being measured.
- Examining the percent of students by achievement level within a subject or grade level can provide additional evidence when districts and/or schools evaluate the rigor of curriculum and classroom assessments, as well as the alignment of skills across grade levels.
- At an individual student level, these assessments are not designed to provide the same fine-grained information about student learning that classroom assessments can give. Classroom assessments provide the very specific information teachers need to adjust and differentiate instruction for their students.
- [Statewide Assessments: What Families Need to Know about Using MCA and MTAS Results](#)
- [Appropriate and Inappropriate Uses of Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment \(MCA\) Results](#)

How are Minnesota’s statewide tests developed?

Are there any other required statewide assessments?

According to state statute, the commissioner is forbidden to develop statewide assessments for academic standards in social studies, health and physical education, and the arts ([Minnesota Statutes 2022, section 120B.30, subd. 1a](#)).

ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS results are an additional measure of English Learner progress in learning academic English, as described by WIDA’s English Language Development Standards. The language domains assessed include listening, reading, writing, and speaking to ensure all EL’s are developing the English language skills needed to participate fully in the classroom. More information about the WIDA English Language Development Standards can be found on the [WIDA website](#).

If I have more questions about a specific content area, who do I contact?

Who do I contact if:	Contact information:
I want to know about the content of the standards and the review process?	MDE content area webpages and implementation pages
I want to know if my child is being taught the standards?	Teacher, administrator, school district, school board
I want to support my child in learning the standards?	Teacher, administrator, school district, MDE
I want to give feedback on the standards?	Look for public feedback opportunities in the standards review cycle via the MDE content area webpages.
I have questions about licensure?	Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (https://mn.gov/pelsb/)
I have questions about statewide assessments?	MDE Statewide Assessment (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/test/) Testing 123 site (https://testing123.education.mn.gov/TEST/index.htm)