

Why Do We Test?

By Tim Lutz, Superintendent of Schools

Every year, in the spring, Minnesota standardized tests are administered in public schools. As a parent you may wonder why testing is so important in education. Minnesota gives the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA's) in Reading and Math to all students in grades 3-8. In addition, 10th graders are given the Reading MCA and 11th graders take the Math MCA tests. Students in grades 5 and 8 take the Science MCA's and somewhere during 9th and 12th grades, students are required to take the Science tests one more time before they graduate.

Why are these assessments important? We use data from the MCA's to see how well our schools have aligned our curriculum with state standards and how well our schools have taught students the standards that are required by the Minnesota Department of Education. Each student receives a score that falls into one of four achievement levels: Does Not Meet Standards, Partially Meets Standards, Meets Standards, or Exceeds Standards. The more we know about how well our schools, curricula and teachers are helping students meet or exceed standards, the better we become as schools and as a school district.

More importantly, in my opinion, we can use this data to identify gaps and weak spots in the education of each student, including your own children. I see testing as being very similar to a medical exam in that the results will allow us, as educators, to identify areas where we may need to improve our practices so that we can improve the educational health, well-being, growth, and strong knowledge base of every student so they may be successful later in life. The earlier we can identify areas where we need to improve, the better we can serve you and your children.

Looking back, I wish I had been able to take more tests as a student. That may sound a bit odd, but consider this proposition: Testing would have prepared me for a better education. Perhaps if I had received the benefit of the assessments we have today, I would have learned more about myself, my abilities, interests, and aptitudes, and wasted less time later in life trying to figure out what to do with my career. Assessment is a powerful tool that helps parents, teachers and students learn more about ways to guide and support students towards better educational outcomes.

Please make sure your children participate in the MCA assessments this year so that we can ensure that we are serving them, and you, as well as we can as a school district. In addition, please encourage your students to do their best, get plenty of rest, and eat well prior to taking their tests. Testing is one part of the overall formula for success along with good attendance, completing assignments, engaging in class discussion and work, participating in extra-curricular activities, and working hard. All of the components of this formula are important in developing a generation of students who will lead us, successfully, into the future.

Tim Lutz
Superintendent, Bemidji Area Schools