

Minnesota

Graduation Required Assessments for Diploma (GRAD)*

*This exam has undergone significant changes. The data here reflects the GRAD as well as the Basic Skills Tests (BSTs), which sunset with the graduating class of 2009.

Part I: Policy Trends

Type of test

The state considers the Graduation Required Assessments for Diploma (GRAD) tests to be comprehensive proficiency assessments of the skills and knowledge in mathematics, reading, and writing that are necessary for graduation. The Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments, Series II (MCA-II), into which the GRAD tests are embedded, measure competency on a larger set of Minnesota academic standards.

Purpose

The purpose of the exam is to determine the knowledge and skills of high school graduates relative to those needed for entry-level employment and to meet a state mandate.

Major changes in exit exam policy since the 2007-08 school year or any pending changes

In late 2008 and early 2009, a legislative task force was established to review the policy implications of the GRAD and its effect on high school graduation. This grew from a concern regarding a higher-than-anticipated failure rate on the GRAD. State legislation was considered that would provide a short-term remedy and a long-term direction. Included in the discussion for a long-term solution was the potential to move to end-of-course exams in high school.

On May 16, 2009, Governor Pawlenty signed House File 2 (<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/bin/bldbill.php?bill=ccrhf0002.html&session=ls86>), which provided for short-term relief of concerns regarding the GRAD. Related to this assessment in this bill were provisions allowing alternative measures to passing the Mathematics GRAD (see “alternative paths to graduation” section below).

Within this bill was also a work group to review the long-term solution for graduation tests in the state. It was coordinated with the state’s effort in the College and Career Readiness Policy Institute (<http://www.achieve.org/node/1033>). The work group presented its recommendation to the Commissioner of Education on March 1, 2010. The Commissioner subsequently made recommendations to the 2010 state legislature. The work group maintains its documents and proceedings on the Web at http://www.mnp16.org/working_groups/ccrpi.html. The Minnesota legislature did not pass an omnibus bill in education, and thus there were no changes to the current statutes as a result of the 2010 legislative session.

In 2009, the state continued its transition from the Basic Skills Tests (BSTs) to the GRAD tests. However, the state is still administering

the BST tests. The written composition BST was administered as a census test in 2007 for the final time to grade 10 students, and the mathematics and reading BSTs will be administered as retests until the class of 2009 has graduated and sufficient notice of retirement of the exam has been given.

In July 2007 the legislature gave MDE rule-making authority to formally establish the GRAD series as the official graduation tests. The rulemaking process is now complete. It is available online at <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/rules/?id=3501> (near the bottom of the page).

The 5-year window for alternative testing requirements in math described above is still in effect. Additionally, the push for end-of-course exams was unsuccessful because the education bills in which they were included did not pass.

Status of state’s decision regarding the Common Core State Standards and impact of that decision on exit exam policies

The state has adopted the Common Core State Standards in English language arts only. The state anticipates that a new performance level will need to be established on the high school reading graduation exam when the rest of the reading accountability assessments are launched in 2012-13. In the summer of 2013, new performance levels will be established for reading for system accountability. A new GRAD performance level is expected to be set at that time to match the revision of the tests to the new content standards.

Test used by colleges or universities for undergraduate admission?

No. The graduation tests are not currently used for such purposes in Minnesota. Students who do not receive a diploma because they did not pass the BST can still enroll in public community colleges by earning a GED.

Year first administered

The BSTs were first administered in math and reading in 1996 and in writing in 1998. The class of 2009 was the last class required to pass the BSTs for graduation.

The GRAD tests are being phased in. The written composition GRAD replaced the written composition BST in 2007; the reading MCA-II/GRAD replaced the reading BST in 2008; and the mathematics MCA-II/GRAD replaced the mathematics BST in 2009. The class of 2010 was the first class required to pass the GRAD tests.

Year diplomas first withheld

In 2000, diplomas were first withheld for students who did not pass the three BST tests. Beginning in 2010, diplomas were withheld for students who did not pass the reading and written composition GRAD tests. Student diplomas will not be withheld for not passing the math GRAD. (see “major changes in exit exam policy,” above.)

Since no legislation was passed in the 2010 session that affected the GRAD in math or any other subject area, the current statute remains. The statute states that students who enter grade 8 after the 2009-10 school year will be required to pass the GRAD math if no other legislation is passed.

Subjects tested

Mathematics, reading, and written composition

Types of questions

The reading and mathematics MCA-II/GRAD tests have multiple-choice and constructed-response items (the GRAD component has only multiple-choice items). The written composition GRAD is composed of a prompt to which the student writes an essay.

Grade first administered

The written composition GRAD is first given in grade 9. The reading MCA-II/GRAD is first given in grade 10 and the mathematics MCA-II/GRAD given in grade 11. Only the GRAD component of these tests is given for the retests.

Grade(s) exam aligned to

BSTs: 8th grade for reading and math, 10th grade for written composition.

GRAD/MCA-II tests: aligned to the high school standards for reading, mathematics, and written composition, as defined in the test specifications.

Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12

BSTs: 11 retake opportunities in reading and math, 8 in written composition.

GRAD tests: the written composition GRAD is given three times a year, in November, April, and July.

The GRAD component of the MCA-II/GRAD tests is available for students every other month starting in September 2008 for reading and July 2009 for mathematics.

Retakes after grade 12

Students who meet all other graduation requirements except passing the BSTs can retake an exam an unlimited number of times after 12th grade. The same rules apply for the GRAD test. The BST will be retired under legislation after the 2011-12 school year per revisions to M.S. 120B.30, subd 1.

Does the state have reciprocity with other states?

The BST has no reciprocity rule available. The GRAD does allow for reciprocity. The GRAD uses proficiency on another state's high school NCLB assessment as an acceptable score to be used in place of the GRAD. (Policy is adapted from that of Arizona.) The policy guidance can be found at http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Accountability_Programs/Assessment_and_Testing/Assessments/GRAD/General_Information/index.html.

Exit exam used for No Child Left Behind?

The BSTs are not aligned with state standards. They do not satisfy the NCLB requirements.

The reading MCA-II/GRAD was used for NCLB purposes in 2008, and the mathematics MCA-II/GRAD was used for NCLB in 2009. The GRAD writing test is not used for NCLB.

Students will take the complete reading and mathematics MCA-IIs only once as part of the graduation component for reading and mathematics. If students are proficient on the MCA-II (earning the achievement level of meets standards or exceeds standards), they will be considered as having met the graduation requirement regardless of their performance on the GRAD component of the test. Students who do not meet the graduation requirement on the first try, either by reaching proficiency on the MCA-II or by passing the GRAD component, will retake just the GRAD rather than the complete MCA-II.

Same cut score for graduation and NCLB?

No. For accountability in reading and mathematics under NCLB, students must reach the proficient level on the MCA-II. Students can meet the graduation requirement, however, by performing successfully on just the subset of questions on the MCA-II that makes up the GRAD component. A standard-setting session for establishing cut scores for the GRAD was conducted each year a new GRAD test was given (2008 for reading and 2009 for mathematics). Students can meet graduation requirements by scoring high enough on the GRAD, even when they do not achieve the proficient level on the MCA-II, which is needed for NCLB.

In the standards-setting activity for 2008, the cut score for reading was established at a level comparable to NCLB proficiency. The math GRAD cut score was established through a standard-setting activity in 2009. This GRAD cut score is a separate cut score, and is below the NCLB proficiency cut score.

See document at:

http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=015054&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary

Evaluations of the state exit exam

There has been no external evaluation of the GRAD. The technical manuals for the exam can be found at http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Accountability_Programs/Assessment_and_Testing/Assessments/GRAD/Technical_Reports/index.html

State test contractor

Pearson Educational Measurement, Inc.

Does the state provide students

To help students pass the exam, the state allows general education

with alternate paths to graduation?

students under the BST to be eligible for any accommodation when they take the test in April of their senior year, or any time thereafter.

For more information, go to

<http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/groups/Assessment/documents/Manual/035664.pdf>

Chapter 5 of this document (beginning on page 39) describes the available accommodations and procedures for determination.

State statute defines alternate pathways for students with disabilities or those who are English language learners. That statute can be found at <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=120B.30>.

House File 2 establishes for five years an alternative to passing the mathematics GRAD (for students entering grade 8 from 2005-06 through 2009-10). Requirements for passing the alternative are as follows:

- Mathematics GRAD short-term solution: For the next five years, students in grade 11 who do not pass the high school mathematics exam can still graduate if they:
 1. Complete all coursework and credits required for graduation,
 2. Participate in district-prescribed academic remediation in math, and
 3. Participate in at least two retests of the mathematics GRAD or pass the mathematics GRAD, whichever happens first.
- Notation(s) on transcript: Districts must place on the transcript a student's highest assessment score for mathematics MCA, reading MCA, written composition GRAD, and if applicable, for mathematics and reading GRAD.
- Students are still required to pass the reading and written composition GRADs in order to graduate.

Alternate paths to graduation specifically for English language learners

For the BST: if a student has been in the country for less than three years before graduation, the district may choose to exempt the student from passing the BSTs. For the GRAD, English language learners may be exempt from passing the GRAD if they have been in the country for fewer than four consecutive years. See the rule at <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/rules/?id=3501> (near the bottom of the page).

For more information, go to

<http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/groups/Assessment/documents/Manual/035664.pdf>

Alternate paths to graduation specifically for students with disabilities

Chapter 5 of this document (beginning on page 39) describes the available accommodations and procedures for determination.

The individualized education program (IEP) team may set a different passing score on the BST, or the team may decide an alternate assessment is best for the student and set performance criteria appropriate for the student. In either case, students with disabilities who pass this way are given a Pass Individual notation on their record rather than a Pass State, but they still receive a regular diploma.

For the GRAD, Minnesota statute describes in part the alternate pathway available for students with disabilities. See <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=120B.30>

See also the rule at <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/rules/?id=3501> (near the bottom of the page).

For more information, go to <http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/groups/Assessment/documents/Manual/035664.pdf>

Chapter 5 of this document (beginning on page 31) describes the available accommodations and procedures for determination.

Who makes decisions on whether a student is eligible to use alternate paths?

Decisions for all students and alternate paths are made at the local level according to state policies described in the state's Procedures Manual. See <http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/groups/Assessment/documents/Manual/035664.pdf>

How are students identified as eligible for alternate paths to graduate?

The only application process currently at a state level is the demonstration of reciprocity on another state-level exam. For more information, go to http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=034599&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary and see Appendix C on page 32 of this document.

State standards are set in either Minnesota statute or rule. For the GRAD, Minnesota statute describes in part the alternate pathway available for students with disabilities. See <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=120B.30>

See also the rule at <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/rules/?id=3501> (almost all the way to the bottom of the page)

The Division of Research & Assessment within the Minnesota Department of Education communicates the decision regarding

reciprocity.

Starting in January 2010, school district staff began communicating the individual passing decisions for students with disabilities or the use of the ELL exemption to the state. This information is collected in the state database that tracks the status of graduation exams for all students.

When calculating the graduation rate for adequate yearly progress (AYP) purposes, does the state count students taking alternate paths together with graduates who passed the high school exit exams?

Those students are included in the count and are not addressed in any differentiated manner, since the alternate pathway is a state-only option for graduation and is not included in any AYP calculations

How many full-time equivalent staff in the State Department of Education are involved in implementing alternate paths?

To develop the online tracking system and to administer the policies related to this, the number would be approximately 1.5 FTE.

Types of assistance the state provides for all districts to raise initial pass rates for all students on the high school exit exam?

The state does not provide technical assistance to all districts to raise initial pass rates for all students on the high school exit exams. However, the state does provide test items from prior years.

Types of assistance or remediation the state provides for all districts to help students who have failed to pass the exit exam

The state does not provide assistance or remediation to all districts to help students who have failed in their initial attempt to pass the exit exam.

Does the state provide funding for remediation?

There is no funding identified that is specifically tied to remediation toward the graduation exam.

Are districts mandated by law to provide remediation?

Minnesota requires school districts to provide remediation and establish a remediation plan for any student who has not passed the BST in reading by the end of 10th grade. The district is also required to provide students who fail an exit exam with information to help them prepare for future administrations.

For the GRAD, districts must establish a remediation plan for students who have not passed the GRAD after two retest attempts. See the rule at <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/rules/?id=3501> (near the bottom of the page).

2009 state legislation requires any student who does not pass the initial administration of the math test to participate in remediation. (see “alternate paths to graduate,” above.)

Are students required to participate in remediation?

Not for reading and writing. However, they are required for mathematics. (see “alternate paths to graduate,” above).

Part II: Student Performance

Initial pass rates, 2008-09

Percentage of Students Passing on the First Try, 2008-09			
Student Group	Reading	Writing	Math
All students	78%	89%	57%
White	84%	93%	63%
African American	48%	72%	21%
Latino	52%	75%	31%
Asian	62%	83%	52%
Native American	57%	77%	30%
English language learners	31%	58%	26%
Migrant	52%	65%	27%
Students with disabilities	37%	60%	14%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	57%	79%	34%
Passing score (scale of 0-6)	Proficiency on MCA-II or 50 SS on GRAD (scale of 15-85)	3 on GRAD (scale of 0-6)	Proficiency on MCA-II or 50 SS on GRAD (scale of 15-85)

Note: Data retrieved from state department of education Web site at <http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/groups/Assessment/documents/Presentation/017533.pdf> on June 21, 2010. FULL TABLE can be obtained through data at www.education.state.mn.us >>> [Home](#)>> [Academic Excellence](#)>> [School Report Card](#)>> [State of Minnesota](#)

Denominator used when calculating these rates: Number of tests administered in original census administration

Initial pass rates, 2009-10

Percentage of Students Passing on the First Try, 2009-10			
Student Group	Reading	Writing	Math
All students	78%	90%	58%
White	84%	94%	64%
African American	50%	74%	23%
Latino	54%	78%	29%
Asian	64%	82%	54%
Native American	58%	79%	27%
English language learners	29%	58%	16%
Migrant	36%	66%	23%
Students with disabilities	39%	62%	15%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	60%	81%	35%
Passing score (scale of 0-6)	Proficiency on MCA-II or 50 SS on GRAD	3 on GRAD (scale of 0-6)	Proficiency on MCA-II or 50 SS on GRAD

(scale of 15-85)

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Note: Data retrieved from state department of education Web site at

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Denominator used when calculating these rates: Number of tests administered in original census administration

Student Group	State Graduation Rates	
	2008-09	2009-10
All students	91.83	NA
White	94.60	NA
African American	77.72	NA
Latino	75.59	NA
Asian	91.31	NA
Native American	68.76	NA
English language learners	64.87	NA
Students with disabilities	85.32	NA
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	84.41	NA

Note: The 2009-10 AYP grad rates won't be available until next year (estimating February 2011).

The 2008-09 rates used for AYP purposes are on the NCLB data report located under section links at:

http://education.state.mn.us/ReportCard2005/schoolDistrictInfo.do;jsessionid=MrNBjptWy7xwJ7ZJFR1c4W17hKlHxgH9F1T2SkGTBr9vxGylMSlv!394621171?SCHOOL_NUM=000&DISTRICT_NUM=9999&DISTRICT_TYPE=99

Current state graduation rate calculation formula for AYP purposes

Minnesota uses the Leaver Rate, but will be changing to the Adjusted Cohort Rate beginning in 2012.