



What Does It Take to Graduate?

by Shari Prest, Ark Associates
for use by educational leaders in communications

Minnesota has a set of standards and assessments that were designed to ensure that students who graduate from Minnesota’s public schools have at least minimum competence to achieve success after they graduate. The purpose, consequences, and outcomes of these standards and assessments need to be better defined, understood and communicated.

History

Minnesota Academic Standards

Prior to 1990s

- Diplomas were awarded based on “Carnegie units,” or seat time, in the required courses.

1990s

- System was changed to a system based on Basic Skills Tests and the Profile of Learning.

2003

- Controversy about the Profile of Learning caused the legislature to repeal it.
- Profile of Learning was replaced with Minnesota Academic Standards (Laws of Minnesota 2003, Chapter 129).
- The law defined core academic content standards areas including, language arts, math, and arts.

2004

- The legislature adopted science and social studies standards.
- School districts had to create local elective standards for health and physical education, vocational and technical education, and world languages, as well as English language proficiency.

2007

- Legislation passed that changed the graduation requirements for Minnesota students to include:
 - 21.5 course credits
 - 7 elective credits.
- MN Comprehensive Assessments (**MCA-II**s); Graduation Required Assessment for Diploma (**GRAD**); and the Basic Skills Tests (**BST**s) – Students enrolled in grade 8 before the 2005-06 school year are required to pass the BST in reading, math and writing; students enrolled in grade 8 in the 2005-06 school year or later are required to pass the reading and mathematics MCA-II or GRAD and the writing GRAD.
- Students must also meet local requirements.

Benchmarks

2004

Each of the standards was accompanied by benchmarks which specified the academic knowledge and skills that students must achieve to complete a state standard.

2006/2007

It was established that the benchmarks will be reviewed every four years beginning this academic year.

Assessments

2005

Basic skills tests (BSTs) were replaced with Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA-IIs), beginning with students entering the eighth grade.

2007

MCA writing test began to be given to ninth-graders.

2008

MCA reading tests began to be given to tenth-graders.

2009

MCA-II math test began to be given to eleventh-graders.

2010

Students must pass these required state exams, successfully complete a required number of course credits, and meet any local graduation requirements to graduate from a Minnesota public high school. Research and Recommendations

Research and Recommendations

- “The trends are moving forward with little study or examination of their consequences for students, families, professionals, or schools systems. Several recommendations are made to help guide state and local district decision making when adopting state graduation requirements and alternative diploma options.”¹
 - Clarify the assumptions underlying state graduation requirements and diploma options.
 - Ensure students with disabilities will have an opportunity to learn the material they will be tested on in state and local assessments.
 - Make high school graduation decisions based on multiple indicators of students’ learning and skills.
 - Conduct on going research on the intended and unintended consequences of state graduation requirements and diploma options.
- “Because it is increasingly clear that some educational strategies are more successful than others, we must base students’ education on proven practices and solid evidence. We should expand what works and stop doing what doesn’t.”²

¹ Johnson, D. R., & Thurlow, M. L. (2003). *A national study on graduation requirements and diploma options for youth with disabilities* (Technical Report 36). University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.

² *Minnesota’s Promise, World-Class Schools, World-Class State, 2008*

Material is also taken from: Minnesota Legislative Reference Library and *Get Ready for College*, Office of higher Education.: