

Curriculum Communications Council

The Top 40...Questions and Answers

Topics:

Assessment

1. MCAs: Where is the data from last year's tests? What are the results? (#2)

Grade 3

Reading - Average Scale Score=1488
Increased from 1402 in 1998.
Increased 11 points from 2003.
47 points below the state score.

Math - Average Scale Score=1480
Increased from 1403 in 1998.
Increased 6 points from 2003.
43 points below the state score.

Grade 5

Reading - Average Scale Score=1541
Increased from 1416 in 1998.
Decreased 10 points from 2003.
38 points below the state score.

Math - Average Scale Score=1515
Increase from 1396 in 1998.
Decreased 7 points from 2003.
24 points below the state score.

Grade 7

Reading - Average Scale Score=1463
2 points above the state score.

Math - Average Scale Score=1451
1 point below the state score.

Grade 10

Reading - Average Scale Score=1583
3 points below the state score.

Grade 11

Math - Average Scale Score=1527
9 points below the state score.

2. Are Basic BSTs and MCAs becoming one test? Why give both in the future? (#4)

No, (Basic Skills Tests) BSTs and (Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments) MCAs are not currently becoming one test. Passing the BSTs is a STATE requirement for graduation from a Minnesota High School. BSTs are designed to determine basic proficiency in Reading, Mathematics and Written Composition. The MCAs are part of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) FEDERAL legislation. MCAs are accountability measures for schools, districts and states. There continues to be discussion at the state level about BSTs, especially since they are currently given at grade levels where NCLB now requires federal testing. Options for the state include continuing with current practices, discontinuing the BSTs, and attempting to combine the BST and MCA. This topic will probably receive legislative attention in the upcoming session.

3. Will other districts dump students at ALC a month before MCAs? (#28)

Mark Lindquist, Director of the ALC, stated on 11/1/04 that this has not been a problem in the past and that he does not anticipate it becoming a problem. The ALC staff are more likely to complain about students' not being referred to the ALC soon enough rather than being dumped at the ALC to avoid having to test students in their home district. There is a procedure that is followed when students enter the ALC.

Students are only considered in a school's AYP calculation if they have been in attendance at that school since October 1st of the school year the test is administered.

3. State science tests? (#36)

Science testing is part of the federal No Child Left Behind legislation. Science tests will be piloted in the spring of 2007 and become operational in 2008. Grade levels tested will be 5, 8 and high school. The grade 5 and 8 tests will measure the science standards and the high school test will cover life science and be an end of the course type test. The science tests are currently being developed.

Curriculum and Instruction

MATH

1. What flexibility do teachers have in teaching the elementary program? (#5)

The curriculum is aligned with the Minnesota Academic Standards, the "secure" skills are identified, and the main resource "Everyday Math" has been adopted.

Supplementary resources have also been identified and provided. As long as teachers deliver the curriculum outcomes they have as much flexibility as they are able to work into their schedule, while still meeting the minimum requirement of sixty minutes per day of math instruction.

2. What elementary math concepts are necessary for all kids? (#6)

At each grade level, Kindergarten through Grade Five, secure math skills are identified. These are the concepts and skills that are the focus for the grade level and the ones we would consider a student to have in order to be proficient at that level. They are aligned with the curriculum and the Minnesota Academic Standards. All teachers have been provided these lists and they can also be found on the district web page.

3. What are we doing about our students who don't have basic math skills? (#25)

Each building develops an intervention plan that varies by site, based on needs and resources. TITLE I and Special Education services are one component. Grade level math committees have identified resources for each grade level to use in addition to the regular curriculum. This has been done for grades Kindergarten through Grade Eight. The District Intervention Committee is reviewing all of these activities and will share ideas and strategies with principals.

4. How do we provide math classes in high school to cover math areas (Algebra, Geometry, Statistics, Trigonometry) so students have access to the ideas for the MCA test in 11th grade? (#26)

This has been a discussion for a few years as we implement the standards. Each school has reviewed the courses offered. As we go through the Vertical Team process, we will be analyzing the pathways students have to move through the required credits and meet the standards. Ongoing discussions will be held during the 2004-2005 school year.

5. How are we implementing chance and data at the high school level? (#29)

We have had some discussion with high school math teachers and some alignment was made. This is another area that we need to review. After the Vertical Team has had a chance to look at the pathways to graduation and the transition team has also reviewed how the standards have been placed, the high school math teachers need to review their classes to ensure we meet NCLB requirements.

LANGUAGE ARTS

1. Is the spelling curriculum for grades K-5 well identified, consistent, appropriate and effective? (#7)

GO TO STAFFNET: The K-6 spelling philosophy and programs are explained on pp. 37-42 of the District 742 Language Arts Handbook Grades K-6.

2. Where are the grade-level curriculum objectives listed in a clear manner? (#13)

All curriculum objectives are written in similar format and can be found on the District's Web Page (Click on "About Us," select curriculum, select curriculum again, and choose content area and grade level.

3. Is there a District Scope and Sequence for each grade level? (#21)

The Scope and Sequence for each grade level can be found on StaffNet, if available. Otherwise, grade-level curriculum objectives can be found on the District Web Site (see Question 3 for access route)

4. Are State Standards aligned with our curriculum? (#22)

As required last year, we reviewed the new state Academic Standards for Language Arts and Math and made curriculum changes as needed; the same will be done (as required this year) with the new Academic Standards for Science and Social Studies.

Additionally, secondary curriculum with the new state standards/credit requirements was reviewed. For example, the secondary Social Studies program alignment was revamped, curriculum revised and new resources purchased for this year. The progress made toward meeting the Social Studies requirements for this year's ninth grade class is too extensive to be included in this Q & A. A presentation to the whole communications committee would be appropriate.

5. Where do we stand with graduation standards and how is it aligned with our new state standards? (#24)

See answer for question 5.

6. Can elementary teachers still use class novels? (#40)

The district always follows best practice when providing classroom resources and/or instructional strategies. On occasion and depending on the goal, all students reading the same book could be an appropriate learning activity; however, research supports students reading text of interest at their level. Instead of one book for all, best practice suggests having students read leveled books of interest on the same theme. This practice provides opportunities for them to read independently and to participate in and personally respond to small or large group discussions about the concept or theme of focus.

In all curricular decisions, the bottom line is always: "What's best for the students?"

Staff Development

1. More training in curriculum areas, such as 6 Traits Writing, is needed to train new teachers at a District level or as a Building team. What is being done? (#10)

Each year, both elementary and secondary new teachers receive training opportunities in the 6 Traits of Writing. Sherry Nielsen provides 6 hours for all new elementary teachers; Sherry Nielsen and Rob Gardner provide training for all new secondary language arts teachers. This year, the **elementary trainings will be from 3:30 – 5:30 p.m. on Wednesday, November 29, January 26 and March 23. The secondary will be trained on November 23.** Sign-up is in progress; trainings listed on StaffNet.

Various Topics

1. Will we expand all day kindergarten to all learners? (#12)

There is wide consensus that all day, every day kindergarten would significantly benefit students in District 742. This broad support comes from all levels of the internal and external communities, and the positive results of all day, every day kindergarten are clearly supported with research as well. Unfortunately, funding is not currently available for this program at either the state or local levels. In District 742, we would need 17.5 additional teachers to implement all day, every day kindergarten programming. These monies are not available at this time.

2. There is a rumor that with the high school study, all secondary schools will be identical. Is it true? (#27)

The intent of the high school study, an administrative goal set by the School Board, was not to make both schools identical. The intent was to take an in-depth look at the current research on high schools and gather and analyze academic and program data from Tech and Apollo. Staff members from each school will be involved in determining if gaps exist between what the latest research says about structure, practices and results and what we are doing. The Board of Education implied no threat, no specific plan of action or any preference for an individual school.

Many high schools across the nation are attempting changes to better meet the needs of diverse populations of students. Educational organizations and corporations are also doing considerable high school research. The intent is to take advantage of current information to study our high schools.

3. How will we fund additional science requirements in the high schools? (three years required) (#32)

The Minnesota Legislature passed a law during its 2004 session that requires three (3) years of science in grades 9-12. Apollo and Tech currently require two (2). Therefore, students (starting with the current 9th grade) will need three (3) years of science credits to graduate from high school.

The state legislature did NOT provide additional funding for this mandate, and District 742 does not have additional money for this requirement. Therefore, some students will have to choose science over another elective they might have chosen. Currently, however, 74% of high school students in District 742 already take three years of science.

4. Our general labs are falling apart. What can be done? (#36)

The maintenance of physical facilities is supervised by the principals and by the District Buildings and Grounds Department. Concerns of this nature should be

reported to the principal for further action. The Teaching and Learning Office is unable to fund facility requests.

5. With the increasing number of schools on watch for AYP, what ways does the district assist schools to meet AYP requirements without funding at the secondary level? (#38)

Unfortunately, the Federal and State Governments have not funded the mandates they have made into law. Districts are expected to pick up these costs associated with AYP and the Needs Improvement list. District 742 has no additional money to deal with these issues. It is important, however, to study what we can do as a district and how we can work together, within existing resources, to improve scores in the AYP areas noted.

A first step is to focus the No Child Left Behind Committee on ways to support schools on the "watch list." We are beginning with the Special Needs concerns and plan to work to better align special education curriculum with state standards. This is very important since the MCAs assess state standards.

6. How does the Teaching and Learning Committee and this committee (CCC) interact, support one another and function? Will ideas from this group come to fruition? (#14)

The Teaching and Learning Committee is one of two administrative decision making committees in District 742. The other is the Operations Committee. The Teaching and Learning Committee makes final decisions or, in the case of a decision that can only be made by the Board of Education, makes recommendations to the Board on issues of curriculum, instruction and assessment.

Multiple committees function simultaneously at all levels throughout the district. Many decisions can be made at the building or program levels. Those decisions/recommendations, however, that are broader in scope and affect curriculum, instruction or assessment at a District level are discussed at the Teaching and Learning Committee.

The Curriculum Communications Council (CCC) is an attempt to have greater involvement and communication about Teaching and Learning items with the teaching staff. Administrative representatives from Teaching and Learning (Roger Ziemann, Diane Moeller, Marj Hawkins and Bernice Berns) also serve on the CCC, so they can hear feedback on current issues and concerns. The CCC is also designed to provide recommendations to the Teaching and Learning Committee.

Ideas from the CCC can definitely come to fruition. Some items may be out of the CCC's control because of funding, legal parameters, etc. The CCC will be as vibrant and as effective as members choose.

7. What happened with the suggestions from teachers regarding the new elementary report cards? (#17)

Approximately 75 elementary teachers responded to the on-line survey that was available to elementary teachers last spring. Of those that requested changes, "fewer

objectives to mark in the curricular areas” was a priority. In response, the number of objectives for Language Arts, Math and Social Studies were reviewed and changes have been made. In other areas, such as Phy. Ed., specialists met to review the suggestions and agreed as to what changes should be made.

8. What processes are used for communicating to all employees? How can we work to dispel rumors? (#31)

There are many forms of internal communication within our district, including IN THE LOOP, StaffNET, eNews and all-district emails. District employees have opportunities to send news items to Communications Team members for publication or to ask questions about rumors that are being circulated. Information or questions can be submitted to: <http://742info.org>

9. Many feel expectations of kindergarten students being too high when they enter and leave. Not consistent throughout the district. Teachers are required to have kids at a certain level at the end of the year. (#23)

- The expectations and standards for kindergarten students are indeed higher than in past years.
- District 742 Kindergarten expectations are based on the Minnesota Academic Standards and are reflective of recent early literacy research, which advocates providing developmentally appropriate experiences for young children.
 - Kindergarten teachers used a joint position statement from the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) as background on which to develop the kindergarten program. (See July 1998 Young Children journal article *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children.*)
 - Kindergarten teachers also used kindergarten reading standards from the New Standards Primary Literacy Committee as background on which to develop the kindergarten program. (See the *Reading and Writing grade by grade* document from New Standards.)
 - Kindergarten teachers then aligned the kindergarten curriculum with the Minnesota Academic Standards for reading, speaking, writing and math. (See the state and district documents dated May 19, 2003.)
- Expectations are the same for all-day kindergarten and half-day kindergarten students; for example, the same kindergarten report card is used for all students.

- Kindergarten students are at different levels; Kindergarten teachers recognize this fact and meet students at their need levels as they strive to assist students in achieving at their highest level.
 - A very low percentage of students are reading when entering kindergarten but, by the end of the year, most students are reading at or above Level B in the Guided Reading curriculum.
- Reports from kindergarten parent/teacher conferences are that children love school and parents appreciate what is currently happening in kindergarten.
- Grade 1-6 teachers are very supportive of the current kindergarten curriculum.