

The Problems with the Current GRAD Rule and Testing System

The current GRAD rule and required GRAD tests will reach a crisis in 2015 when the waiver exempting students from achieving a passing cut score on the math GRAD will expire. This will significantly affect the current sophomores in HS. Commissioner Cassellius assembled a Working Group to address this and they issued their [report in December](#).

[MREA's platform](#) adopted at the Annual Conference in November addressed assessment and called for:

- Assessments to be useful to parents, families, students and teachers,
- Minnesota moving to a system of assessments that look forward to where a student is going, is efficient and provides information in real time.

The Working Group identified four critical problems with the current system of “autopsy” tests at the secondary level:

- Too Much Testing:
Now it takes seven or eight major standardized tests (two per year) for a student to move from 8th-12th grade, to graduate and enter college because they take MN MCA's and GRAD tests and a college entrance suite. It can take many more tests should a student do poorly on any of these tests.
- System Misalignment:
Two reports from the Minnesota business community (*Higher Education Partnerships for Prosperity*, by The Itasca Project based on research and analysis by McKinsey and Company and *How to Make Minnesota the Skilled Workforce State* by the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce) identify system misalignment as a major economic development issue in Minnesota. The Chamber states it most directly in their 2012 report,
A 'skilled workforce state' requires effective education and workforce development at every point in the pipeline. Minnesota's education-to-workforce pipeline, spanning pre-K to post-secondary education, needs repairs to remedy the misalignment.
This misalignment is critical as it is estimated that 70% of Minnesota jobs will require some form of post-secondary education by 2018, but currently only 47% of Minnesota college students complete a degree within eight years.
- Single Point Testing with Arbitrary Cut Scores
This is too thin a reed upon which to base graduation and the granting of a diploma. Too many students who would be eligible for graduation based on course work will not graduate in Minnesota's current GRAD tests and cut scores. In a detailed study, Bloomington documented that 19% of their seniors would be ineligible for a diploma when the current math GRAD waiver expires in 2015 but would be “college eligible.”
- The Substantial Remedial Costs
These costs are incurred and lessened likelihood of degree completion by students who are not fully ready to take college level courses. 40% of recent high school graduates who enrolled in a Minnesota public higher education institution currently take at least one non-credit bearing developmental course, creating a significant fiscal burden for students, and significantly decreasing their likelihood of completing a degree or certificate.

Learn about the Solution in HF 1151 and SF 978 on the next page and urge your legislator to support this change.

The Solution to move Minnesota to a System of Assessments that Look Forward to Where a Student is Going

The House and Senate Education Policy Committees addressed this issue head on. House Chief Author Rep. Kathy Brynaert, and Senate Chief Author Sen. Kevin Dahle were in close communication in bill drafting. The committees took testimony on the Working Group report and others with concern on Minnesota's system of assessments.

The resulting bills and change are dramatic and necessary.

HF 1151 and SF 978 as called for in MREA's Platform "move to a system of assessments that look forward to where a student is going and is efficient in the use of students' time," in five steps (summarized from House Research):

- **Transition:**
Allows students entering grade 9 before the 2013-2014 school year who have not demonstrated proficiency on the MCAs, the GRAD tests, or the basic skills tests to satisfy state high school graduation requirements in reading, math, and writing by taking the ACT assessment for college admission before high school graduation, directs the state to pay the test costs for school districts and charter schools to participate in these assessments and makes this section effective immediately and through the 2015-2016 school year.
- **College Recognized Exams:**
Directs the education commissioner, after consulting with the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities chancellor and using a request for proposal process, to contract for a series of assessments that are consistent with this subdivision, are aligned with state academic standards, and include career and college benchmarks. Requires math, reading, and writing assessments for students in grades 8 and 10 and 11 or 12 to be predictive of and nationally normed for career and college readiness, nationally recognized as a college entrance exam, include a college placement diagnostic exam, and contain career exploration elements.
- **Graduation Based on Credit Achievement, Standards Achievement Recorded :**
For 9th graders entering HS in 2013/14 and beyond to graduate from high school requires students to complete state and locally-required credits and demonstrate attainment of required academic standards and college readiness benchmarks on a nationally normed college entrance exam, have that attainment recorded on their transcript, and use the benchmarks so students, their parents, and teachers know how well students must perform to have a reasonable chance to succeed in a career or college without need for post-secondary remediation.
- **Career Planning Required:**
Directs districts and schools to annually use the career exploration elements in the assessments to help students, beginning no later than grade 9, and their families explore and plan for postsecondary education or careers based on the students' interests, aptitudes, aspirations and timely regional labor market information, thereby and deepening students' understanding of career pathways leading to an industry-recognized credential, an associate's, or bachelor's degree.

(Note: Fred Nolan, Exec Director of MREA has had email communications with Chief Author Rep. Kathy Brynaert on this topic. In response to Fred's email "I can report that MREA districts with which I have checked agree with you philosophically and most do many of the planning steps in the bill. They do have concerns about the size and extent of these plans now that they would be required by the state;" Rep. Brynaert responded, "[This] would be a subject for the Task Force then possible follow-up legislation. At this point it would just be a matter either of continuing what you're already doing (as many districts are doing some type of career planning process) or what is locally possible.")

- Career Pathways Advisory and Technical Education Task Force.
Establishes an advisory task force to recommend to the legislature how to structurally redesign secondary and postsecondary education to improve the secondary and postsecondary outcomes for students and adult learners, align secondary and postsecondary programs and Minnesota's workforce needs, and measure and evaluate the combined efficacy of public K-12 and postsecondary education programs.

[For more information and the bill summary](#)

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