

K12 ACADEMICS — STATE EDUCATION SERIES



Minnesota Education Guide

A complete profile — schools, testing, graduation, accountability, school choice, teacher certification & financial aid, each in depth.



Find Your Community
2026 EDITION

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Everything about school in Minnesota.

This guide profiles **Minnesota's** education system in seven parts, each a two-page deep dive with the key facts, plain-English explanations, and a link to the full, regularly-updated guide online. From K12 Academics, the world's largest education resource, online since 2004.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Education Overview · State Testing · Graduation Requirements · Accountability & Report Cards · School Choice · Teacher Certification · Financial Aid

SEARCH 200+ DIRECTORIES

K-12 Schools · Colleges & Universities · Vendors · Summer Programs · International Programs · Performers

Education Overview

EDUCATION IN MINNESOTA

Minnesota educates roughly 870,000 public K–12 students across about 330 school districts , plus roughly 180 charter schools , overseen by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and coordinated with the Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board. Minnesota holds a special place in American education: it is the birthplace of...

WHO MUST ATTEND SCHOOL

- ✓ **Start age** — 7 (by September 1)
- ✓ **End of compulsory age** — 17
- ✓ **Districts** — ~330 districts + ~180 charters
- ✓ **Satisfying it** — Public, nonpublic, or homeschool

PRE-K IN MINNESOTA

Minnesota does not have a fully universal pre-K program. Publicly funded early education is provided through a mix of targeted programs: Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) and School Readiness Plus (free preschool seats in public schools), the School Readiness program, and income-based Early Learning Scholarships , alongside Head Start



AT A GLANCE

Compulsory	Ages 7–17
Districts	~330 + charters
Testing	MCA
Diploma	~21.5 credits
Choice	Open enrollment

DISTRICTS & CHARTERS

Minnesota's largest districts include Anoka-Hennepin (the state's largest), St. Paul , Minneapolis , Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan , and Osseo . Minnesota has a substantial charter-school sector — around 180 charters — and it is where charters began: Minnesota passed the nation's first charter-school law in 1991 . Minnesota charters are...

PRIVATE & INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN MINNESOTA

- ✓ **Independent schools** — Nonprofit, board-governed schools such as The Blake School , Breck School, St. Paul Academy and Summit School, and Mounds Park Academy — plus the...
- ✓ **Catholic & parochial schools** — A large network across the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis and dioceses statewide (such as Cretin-Derham Hall and Benilde-St. Margaret's)
- ✓ **Other religious schools** — A strong Lutheran network, plus Christian, Jewish, and other faith-based schools
- ✓ **Specialty schools** — Montessori, Waldorf, and schools for specific learning needs

READ MINNESOTA'S FULL EDUCATION OVERVIEW GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



State Testing

WHAT YOUR STATE TESTS

Minnesota uses the MCA (Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments): Reading (grades 3–8 and 10), Math (grades 3–8 and 11), and Science (grades 5, 8, and once in high school) . Run by the Minnesota Department of Education. Minnesota has no exit exam .

WHICH TESTS, WHICH GRADES

- ✓ **MCA Reading** — Grades 3–8 and grade 10
- ✓ **MCA Math** — Grades 3–8 and grade 11
- ✓ **MCA Science** — Grades 5, 8, and once in high school
- ✓ **MTAS** — Alternate assessment for eligible students

FORMAT & SUBJECTS

MCA is online (some grades are computer-adaptive) with varied item types.

IS PASSING REQUIRED TO GRADUATE?

No exit exam. Minnesota eliminated its graduation-test (GRAD) requirements; students graduate by meeting course and credit standards. Career/college-readiness benchmarks are reported but don't gate a diploma.

HOW IT'S SCORED

MCA reports achievement levels (Does Not Meet, Partially Meets, Meets, Exceeds).



AT A GLANCE

System	MCA
Reading	Grades 3–8 & 10
Math	Grades 3–8 & 11
Science	Gr 5, 8, HS
Grad requirement?	No exit exam
Format	Online

TESTING WINDOWS

MCA is given in a spring window (roughly March–May) set by each district.

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Practice tests** — MDE provides item samplers and practice tests matching the online format
- ✓ **Everyday classwork** — MCA is aligned to grade-level standards

PARTICIPATION & OPTING OUT

Minnesota law lets parents refuse to have their child participate in state assessments; ask your district about the process.

ACCOMMODATIONS & MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

Accommodations follow a student's IEP or 504 plan ; eligible students take the state's alternate assessment. Multilingual learners take an English proficiency test (WIDA ACCESS or the state equivalent) and may receive designated supports.

READ MINNESOTA'S FULL STATE TESTING GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Graduation Requirements

AT A GLANCE

Minnesota requires a state minimum of about 21.5 credits with no exit exam — the state removed passing-test graduation requirements. Students take the MCA assessments, but a passing score is not required to graduate.

CREDIT & COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Minnesota's minimum includes 4 English, 3 math (including intermediate algebra), 3 science (including biology), 3.5 social studies, 1 arts, and electives. Districts set the total and often require more.

TESTING TO GRADUATE

No exit exam. Students take the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA), but a passing score is not required to graduate.

DIPLOMA TYPES & HONORS

Minnesota issues a standard diploma, with the Bilingual/Multilingual Seals available. Districts may add honors.

ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS

Dual enrollment (PSEO), AP/IB, and CTE offer accelerated and cost-saving pathways.



AT A GLANCE

Credits	21.5 (state minimum)
Exit exam?	No
Tests	MCA taken, not required to pass
Districts	Often require more
Confirm with	Your district

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **How many credits does Minnesota require?** — The state sets a minimum, but your district may require more — confirm locally.
- ✓ **Does Minnesota require a test to graduate?** — No — Minnesota has no exit exam; a passing test score is not required to graduate.
- ✓ **Are there different diploma types?** — Yes — plus honors designations and seals; see the diplomas section.
- ✓ **What if my student is behind on credits?** — Talk to the counselor about credit recovery and alternative pathways.
- ✓ **Where do I confirm the exact requirements?** — Your school counselor, district, and the state department of education.

READ MINNESOTA'S FULL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Accountability & Report Cards

AT A GLANCE

Minnesota uses the North Star accountability system, which identifies schools for support rather than assigning a single letter grade or star rating, and publishes the detailed Minnesota Report Card .

HOW THIS STATE RATES SCHOOLS

North Star measures achievement, progress (growth), graduation, English-learner progress, and consistent attendance , and uses them to identify schools for comprehensive or targeted support . Most schools carry no identification. There's no single grade — read the indicators and any support status .

WHAT GETS MEASURED

- ✓ **Academic achievement** — How students score on state tests (proficiency in reading/ELA and math)
- ✓ **Academic growth / progress** — How much students improve year to year — not just where they land
- ✓ **Graduation rate** — For high schools (the 4-year cohort rate)
- ✓ **English-learner progress** — How English learners are progressing toward proficiency
- ✓ **School quality / student success** — An extra indicator — often attendance/chronic absenteeism, college/career readiness, or similar

FINDING & READING THE REPORT CARD

Look up any school on the Minnesota Report Card (rc.education.mn.gov) . Read across the indicators (especially progress/growth and attendance) and the trend.



AT A GLANCE

Format	North Star (support identificati...
No	Single grade or stars
Identifies	Schools for comprehensive/target...
Tool	Minnesota Report Card
Look up at	rc.education.mn.gov

HOW FAMILIES SHOULD USE RATINGS

- ✓ **Read it in context** — A school's score reflects its students' circumstances too, not only its quality
- ✓ **Look at growth, not just scores** — Growth shows how much a school moves students — often more telling than raw proficiency
- ✓ **Check the trend** — Is the school improving over time?
- ✓ **Look past the summary** — Dig into the underlying data (subgroups, attendance, readiness)
- ✓ **Then visit** — Data raises questions; a visit answers them (see our guide on evaluating a school)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **How does Minnesota rate schools?** — Minnesota uses the North Star system to identify schools for support — not a letter grade or stars.
- ✓ **What do the ratings measure?** — Test scores, growth, graduation rate, English-learner progress, and a school-quality indicator.
- ✓ **Where do I look up my school?** — On the state's official report-card portal (see below).
- ✓ **Should I choose a school by its rating alone?** — No — use it as a starting point, weigh growth and context, and visit.
- ✓ **What are CSI and TSI?** — Federal labels for schools flagged for Comprehensive or Targeted Support and Improvement.

READ MINNESOTA'S FULL ACCOUNTABILITY & REPORT CARDS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



School Choice

AT A GLANCE

Minnesota does not have vouchers or ESAs, but it has the oldest education tax benefits in the country — the K-12 Education Subtraction (deduction) and the K-12 Education Credit — plus one of the earliest and strongest public open-enrollment systems and a large charter sector (Minnesota created the first charter school).

THIS STATE'S CHOICE PROGRAMS

Minnesota's Education Subtraction lets families deduct certain education expenses (the deduction can include private-school tuition), and the Education Credit gives lower-income families a credit for non-tuition education expenses. These are individual tax benefits , not vouchers or ESAs.

ELIGIBILITY

The deduction is broadly available (with expense rules); the credit is income-limited . Confirm current rules and limits with the Minnesota Department of Revenue.

APPLYING

Claim the deduction/credit on your Minnesota tax return (keep receipts for qualifying expenses). See the Department of Revenue for details.



AT A GLANCE

Programs	Education deduction & credit
Type	Individual tax benefits (not vou...
Oldest	Tax deduction dates to 1955
Plus	Strong public open enrollment +...
Confirm with	MN Dept. of Revenue

PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE, TOO

- ✓ **Open enrollment / transfers** — Attend a public school outside your zone, where allowed (see our finding-your-school guide)
- ✓ **Charter schools** — Tuition-free public schools of choice (where available)
- ✓ **Magnet schools** — Tuition-free public schools with a specialized focus
- ✓ **Homeschooling** — Legal in all 50 states (rules vary)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **Does Minnesota have a private-school-choice program?** — Yes (tax benefits) — Minnesota has the country's oldest education deduction and credit (not vouchers), plus strong public choice.
- ✓ **What's the difference between an ESA and a voucher?** — A voucher pays a private school directly; an ESA is a flexible parent-managed account for many approved expenses.
- ✓ **What is a tax-credit scholarship?** — Donors get a tax credit for giving to organizations that fund private-school scholarships.
- ✓ **Is there public school choice too?** — Yes — open enrollment, charters, and magnets (plus homeschooling).
- ✓ **Where do I confirm the details?** — On the official state program site (see below).

READ MINNESOTA'S FULL SCHOOL CHOICE GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Teacher Certification

HOW LICENSURE WORKS HERE

Minnesota licenses teachers through the Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) . You complete an approved program, pass the required MTLE exams, and earn a tiered license (Minnesota uses a Tier 1–4 system).

WHICH TESTS THIS STATE USES

- ✓ **MTLE Basic Skills** — Reading, writing, and math — often waivable with qualifying ACT/SAT/other scores
- ✓ **MTLE Pedagogy** — A pedagogy exam for your grade band
- ✓ **MTLE Subject test(s)** — Content test(s) for your license field
- ✓ **Note** — Requirements vary by tier and field — confirm your specific tests

WHAT YOU NEED TO GET LICENSED

- ✓ **A bachelor's degree** — From an accredited college or university
- ✓ **A state-approved teacher-preparation program** — Completed at a college or through an approved alternative route
- ✓ **Student teaching / clinical practice** — Supervised classroom experience
- ✓ **Pass the required exams** — See the exams section above
- ✓ **A background check** — Fingerprint-based criminal background check
- ✓ **Apply to the state** — Submit your application and documents to the licensing agency



AT A GLANCE

Agency	Minnesota PELSB
Basic skills	MTLE Basic Skills (often waivable)
Pedagogy	MTLE Pedagogy
Content	MTLE Subject test(s)

OTHER PATHS INTO TEACHING

Most states offer alternative routes for career-changers and those with a degree in another field. In Minnesota, these typically let you start teaching while completing licensure requirements — through district or university alternative-certification programs, residencies, or emergency/provisional permits. Requirements (and the exams)...

RECIPROCITY & OUT-OF-STATE LICENSES

- ✓ **Interstate agreements** — Most states participate in the NASDTEC Interstate Agreement, which eases (but doesn't guarantee) recognition of an out-of-state license
- ✓ **You may still owe exams** — States often require you to meet their own testing (or coursework) requirements, sometimes within a grace period
- ✓ **Check both states** — Confirm the specific steps with Minnesotas agency and your current state

READ MINNESOTA'S FULL TEACHER CERTIFICATION GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Financial Aid

THE STATE AID PICTURE

Minnesota administers state aid through the Office of Higher Education (OHE) , and in 2024 launched the North Star Promise — free college tuition for residents under an income threshold. Undocumented students apply via the Minnesota Dream Act Application .

NEED-BASED STATE GRANTS

- ✓ **Minnesota State Grant** — The state's main need-based grant, using a shared-responsibility model between the student, family, and state.
- ✓ **Minnesota Indian Scholarship** — Aid for eligible American Indian students.

PROMISE & FREE-COLLEGE PROGRAMS

North Star Promise provides free tuition and required fees at all Minnesota public colleges/universities and Tribal Colleges for residents with a family AGI under \$80,000 . It's a last-dollar award (covering what's left after other gift aid), and the only application is the FAFSA or Minnesota Dream Act Application .

COLLEGE SAVINGS (529 PLAN)

Minnesota's MNSAVES 529 plan offers tax-advantaged saving with a state tax credit or deduction.



AT A GLANCE

Free tuition	North Star Promise (AGI < \$80...
Need-based	Minnesota State Grant
529 plan	MNSAVES
Agency	MN Office of Higher Education
Apply by	FAFSA or MN Dream Act

APPLYING & THE STATE AGENCY

- ✓ **File the FAFSA early** — It's the trigger for state grants and many scholarships
- ✓ **Register with Minnesota Office of Higher Education** — Create the state agency's student account to track and claim awards
- ✓ **Confirm your details** — Verify residency, GPA, and enrollment as required
- ✓ **Meet any extra requirements** — Some programs need a separate form, GPA, or service commitment
- ✓ **Reapply every year** — State aid is awarded annually

DEADLINES & TIMING

State deadlines are typically much earlier than the federal FAFSA deadline , and some aid is first-come, first-served until funds run out. File the FAFSA as soon as it opens (in the fall) and confirm the state's specific priority date.

READ MINNESOTA'S FULL FINANCIAL AID GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



KEEP EXPLORING

Find Your Community.

One of 51 state guides in the largest education resource online. Explore **1,297 free guides** plus directories of schools, colleges & more in your community.

tools.k12academics.com →

