

Dear TCGIS community,

As some questions have arisen about curriculum and the standardized tests TCGIS students take, we thought it would be helpful to provide some clarification.

TCGIS Curriculum, MN Standards and Standardized Tests

As a public school of the state of Minnesota, TCGIS is obligated to teach the [Minnesota state standards](#) for every grade level. The standards are accessible on the website of the Minnesota Department of Education, or MDE. Furthermore, as part of the [2012-2017 contract with our authorizer](#), the Germanic-American Institute, or GAI, TCGIS has goals of achieving the following proficiency levels each year: 85% reading, 80% math and 65% science (See Attachment 1).

MN Standardized Assessment	Grade Levels
Required MCAs in reading and math (Spring)	Grades 3-8
Optional diagnostic in reading and math (Fall)	Grades 3-8

TCGIS teaches the Minnesota standards using German curriculum K-2 in all areas except Sport and kindergarten social skills. In grades 3-4, German curriculum is used in all areas except Sport and English. Some written math materials used are in English so parents/guardians can assist students with homework and students learn the English math vocabulary for standardized tests given in English, but all instruction by classroom teachers is conducted in German. In grades 5-6 teachers strive for a 70% German language experience, and grades 7-8 have a 50% German language experience with Spanish added as a third language. Please see the [TCGIS Middle School Philosophy](#) Statement passed by the School Board governing these percentages and the [Middle School Brochure](#) describing the middle school courses.

As a public school, each spring TCGIS is required to give students the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments, or MCAs. These tests are given in the English language. Students take the math and reading tests every year in grades 3-8. Students take the MCA science tests in grade 5 and again in grade 8 (the latter being a comprehensive science assessment inclusive of standards grades 6 through 8). TCGIS teachers do not “teach to the tests”; rather, if teachers are teaching to the MN standards well, we can expect TCGIS students to do well on the MCA tests.

New this year, the Minnesota Department of Education offered districts the Optional Local Purpose Assessment (OLPA) for free. These are practice tests given in the fall in grades 3-8 in math and reading, and they are designed as diagnostic tests to see what standards students know at their current grade level. While some TCGIS students still need instruction in the current year to master

standards, other TCGIS students have shown they already know many of the grade level concepts. Thus, the OLPA tests enable teachers to differentiate to students, including providing enrichment. MDE provides materials accessible to both teachers and students on the MDE website, making targeted learning possible at home and at school. All of this material is completely free.

German Standardized Tests

TCGIS is also conscientious of delivering a high quality German immersion program. To measure our success, we use two different assessments: the Student Oral Proficiency Assessment in grade two (or SOPA), and the Common European Framework of Reference for Language in grades 3, 5 and 8, called the [Deutsches Sprachdiplom](#) (DSD).

The [SOPA tests](#) measure listening and oral production of students in immersion settings. The levels of measurement range from Jr. Novice (low, medium, high), to Jr. Intermediate (low, medium, high), to Jr. Advanced (low, medium, high). See the [assessment rubric here](#).

German Standardized Assessments (Optional)	Grade levels
SOPA (Spring)	2
European Reference A1, A2, DSD I (Spring)	3, 5 and 8

The Deutsches Sprachdiplom proficiency levels are measured as A1 level for grade 3, A2 level for grade 5 and B1 level for grade 8. Reaching the B1 level secures students the DSD level I certificate. The DSD level II certificate enables students to study in German universities and can be taken from the age of 16 and older.

TCGIS Curriculum and Testing Philosophy

The philosophy of the Twin Cities German Immersion School is to teach students the Minnesota standards **using German curriculum**. MCAs and OLPA tests ensure basic proficiency in reading, math and science so students are successful in grade level advancement at TCGIS and beyond. The SOPA and DSD exams are used to measure quality German language acquisition.

At the 2015 January School Board meeting, the Board discussed TCGIS's immersion program and MCA test scores, consulting Dr. Tara Fortune, Immersion Program Director for the University of Minnesota's Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, also known as CARLA. Dr. Fortune reviewed TCGIS's [2013-2014 Annual Report](#), which includes longitudinal testing data and concluded TCGIS has a strong immersion program. Specifically her email stated:

Hi Ann,

I have spent some time reviewing the 2013-2014 annual report. Congrats on all the terrific progress you have made thus far!! It is exciting to see how much the school has grown in size and the accomplishments are clearly many! Much to celebrate.

(Ann Jurewicz: I asked Tara to summarize her opinion of TCGIS's immersion program and our standardized test results)

Research has found that standardized test scores in strong immersion programs, specifically English Language Arts in grade 3, evidence a "lag" in performance as children's attention is highly focused on developing initial literacy in the L2. However, this "lag" typically disappears in 1-2 years once English Language Arts is introduced into the curriculum. Further, the development of bilingualism and biliteracy in an early total immersion program has been found to benefit students' language and literacy skills generally, positively impacting L1 development and laying a solid foundation for acquiring additional languages.

Ann Jurewicz emailed: I sent you the annual report for TCGIS for the 2013-2014 school year with our test scores located on page 15. It shows the lower MCA scores in reading in grades 3 and 4, which then aligns with the research of schools with strong immersion programs. Would you say this is correct?

YES. I think it is good to see that difference in performance between Grades 3 and 5. This would indicate that the focus truly is on early literacy and word knowledge development in German.

Hope this helps!

Tara

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Tara Fortune, Ph.D.

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If any parent or guardian wants to opt a student out of any of the assessments at TCGIS, he or she can fill out the [TCGIS Opt Out form found here](#).

If there are further questions or comments regarding standardized testing at TCGIS, please feel free to write the TCGIS Administration or School Board.

Vielen Dank,

TCGIS Administration and School Board