Some students handle test situations better than others, regardless of knowledge. Such differences tend to be amplified when the test has an unfamiliar format. In view of the fact that MCA’s are such high-stakes tests, I think it is important for sample tests to be distributed in advance in order that students can practice on tests having the same format, instructions, and other features as the actual MCA. The actual questions on the real MCA could be quite different from those on the sample MCA: the purpose of the sample test would not be to enable students to study to a specific actual MCA, but rather to enable students to become familiar with the procedures for the actual MCA. [Of course, there might be a few questions on the real MCA that are quite similar to questions on the sample test—but it should always be the case that if one does a large number of problems appropriate to clear standards, then a few of these problems will turn out to be quite similar to those on a test aligned with those same standards.]

The above comments take on added weight because of the fact that the Federal ‘No Child Left Behind’ legislation requires data for various identifiable groups of students, and it might well be that the ability to adapt to unfamiliar test settings correlates to some degree with the group with which one is identified.

Here is an example that illustrates terminology issues for the MCA’s. In some books the term ‘angle’ refers to a geometrical configuration consisting of two rays emanating from a common point. Then ‘angular measure’ or ‘measure of the angle’ is then used for its size—$30^\circ$, for instance. In other books ‘angle’ is used for both the geometrical configuration and its size, with context being used to distinguish which meaning is intended. There are good reasons for either approach, but it is important that prior information be distributed for Grade 11 MCA’s concerning usage for that MCA. There are issues of this sort for all levels of MCA’s in mathematics, and it is important that prior information be distributed to teachers.

The views and opinions expressed in this link are strictly those of the Bert Fristedt. The contents have been neither reviewed nor approved by the University of Minnesota.