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| DESE logo | **MCAS-Alt Update** December 1, 2023 |

This newsletter is published by DESE to provide Massachusetts educators with information, guidance, and support as they teach students with significant cognitive disabilities and conduct the MCAS Alternate Assessment (the MCAS-Alt).

**Stand for something or you will fall for anything. Today's mighty oak is yesterday's nut that held its ground.**

*Rosa Parks, civil rights activist*

1. **Recordings of the MCAS-Alt Trainings Available Now**

Thank you to the **1,900** teachers and administrators who attended the Fall 2023 MCAS-Alt virtual training sessions.

For those who were unable to attend a training session, recordings with closed captioning are now available:

### **Introduction to the MCAS-Alt: Core Concepts**

### [Part A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yW-Sz1TIqbA&t=9s)

* + [Part B](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9r_TkkMOg9Q)
* [ELA–Writing](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GkRWxXYB7Nc)

### [Science and Tech/Eng (STE)forGrades 5, 8, and High School](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvuCjw4crQc)

* [Access Skills](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0dSBQ0pVpcg)
* [Access Skills | ELA–Writing](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Liah13d-kE&t=63s)

### [2024 MCAS-Alt Update](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQgzaNRDFRc)

1. **MCAS-Alt Review Sessions and Competency and Grade-Level Portfolio Review Sessions – *January 2024***

Review sessions for the MCAS-Alt and for Competency and Grade-Level Portfolios will be taking place both in person and virtually in January; see the table below for dates, times, and locations.

[Onlineregistration](https://profile.measuredprogress.org/MCAS-Alt/Materials/Register.aspx) opens December 1. For assistance, contact the MCAS Service Center at 800-737-5103. If an ASL interpreter is needed, request one by emailing MCASevents@cognia.org no later than December 15 to ensure the availability of an interpreter.

1. **In-Person MCAS-Alt and Competency and Grade-Level Portfolio Review Sessions**

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| Date  | Time | Location |
| Tuesday, January 9  | 8:30 a.m.–12:00 p.m.  | Best Western, Marlborough |
| Wednesday, January 10  | 8:30 a.m.–12:00 p.m. |  Clarion, Taunton  |
| Thursday, January 11  | 8:30 a.m.–12:00 p.m. | Mass Mutual Center, Springfield |

For **MCAS-Alt review sessions**, educators are encouraged to bring their students’ in-progress assessments and a tablet or laptop. State-trained reviewers will answer questions and give feedback in an informal setting.

For **Competency and Grade-Level Portfolio review sessions,** participants are invited to bring student work for grades 3-8 grade-level and high school competency portfolios to receive feedback. A science specialist will be available at most sites to provide content expertise.

1. **Virtual MCAS-Alt and Competency and Grade-Level Portfolio Review Sessions**

For participants unable to attend the in-person review sessions, DESE will host two virtual ones. Participants may sign up for a one-hour time block and are encouraged to prepare questions in advance. The number of educators in each session will be limited to allow participants and reviewers sufficient time to discuss their questions.

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| Review Session | Date | Timeframe (For the MCAS-Alt sessions, register for a 1-hour block.) |
| MCAS-Alt | Tuesday, January 16 | 8:30 a.m.–2:50 p.m. |
| MCAS-Alt | Friday, January 19  | 8:30 a.m.–2:50 p.m. |
| Competency & grade-level portfolios | Thursday, January 18 | 9:00 – 10:00 a.m. |

1. **Administrators’ Corner**
2. **Recordings of Administrator Trainings Available Now**

Recordings of the Administrator’s Overview and Competency Grade-Level trainings are available with closed captioning:

## [Administrators Overview](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7bKjXB81GQ)

## [MCAS Competency and Grade-Level Assessments](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHT1krwWVkk)

1. **How Administrators Can Support Teachers**

In anticipation of the time it will take teachers to input the data for their students’ alternate assessments, DESE requests that principals support teachers by doing the following:

* facilitating flexible scheduling, planning time, and classroom coverage where possible for teachers to work on documenting data
* reviewing the MCAS-Alt recommended timeline, found in the [*Educator’s Manual*](https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/edmanual.docx)
* encouraging collaboration among general education, special education, related services staff, and paraprofessionals to collect data and evidence for assessments
* enabling teachers to attend a virtual or in-person DESE-sponsored winter review session in January and again in February/March
* reviewing assessments periodically to ensure that they are on schedule to be completed by the submission deadline of March 28

**Reminder:**  Administrators or their designee will need time to review the assessments prior to shipment. The Principal’s Certification of Proper Administration (PCPA) form must be signed by the principal to verify the authenticity of students’ portfolios.

1. **MCAS-Alt Participation Tool:** If an IEP team determines a student is eligible to participate in the alternate assessment based on the criteria for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, they must complete and upload the Participation Tool to the MCAS-Alt File Exchange found in the DropBox on DESE’s [Security Portal](https://gateway.edu.state.ma.us/). The Participation Tool and a sample can be found on the [ESSA website](https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/essa/).
2. **MCAS-Alt Registration: *January 2–14, 2024***

MCAS-Alt submission materials can be ordered from January 2 to January 14, 2024. Ordering these materials is separate from the student registration process for MCAS testing. Principals should check with teachers in your school to verify the number of students taking the MCAS-Alt in each grade.

Beginning on **January 2**, principals can order MCAS-Alt submission materials for their school by following these steps:

* Log in to the [MCAS Service Center](http://www.mcasservicecenter.com/) and select **MCAS Alternate Assessment**.
* Click on **Enrollment Verification**.
* Log in with your **2024 MCAS password**, which will be posted in the [DESE Security Portal](https://gateway.edu.state.ma.us/) by January 2.
* Confirm your contact and school information by following the onscreen prompts.
* Order materials for students in each grade who are taking the MCAS-Alt.
* Click the Submit button.

After submission, a confirmation page will be available to print for your records.

1. **MCAS-Alt Reminders for Educators**
2. Remember to conduct the **MCAS-Alt Skills Survey** before selecting entry points or access skills for your students! Fall is the ideal time to get a baseline of your students’ skills.
	* A completed MCAS-Alt Skills Survey must be completed and included for each strand submitted in the 2024 MCAS-Alt binders.
	* For the **STE** skills survey, complete all eight science practices **once** for the entire content area.
3. Educators who want to explore or use the new high-quality **STE units** need to register their name and email on the site in order to access the material. The units are free.
4. Where should educators be in the MCAS-Alt process? Check the suggested timeline on page 2 of the [*Educator’s Manual*](https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/edmanual.docx).

**Where to find important information on the MCAS-Alt:**

* [Principal’s Manual for the 2024 MCAS-Alt](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/PAM.docx)
* [Student Assessment Updates](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/updates.html) (subscribe on the site)
* [MCAS-Alt Newsletter](https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/resources.html)
* [Department’s MCAS-Alt website](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/resources.html)
* [Participation Guidelines, Participation Tool, Parent Notification, and Districtwide Percentage of Students Taking the MCAS-Alt](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/essa/)

**We'd love to hear from you.**
Please let us know if there is a topic you’d like us to address in a future MCAS-Alt newsletter.

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