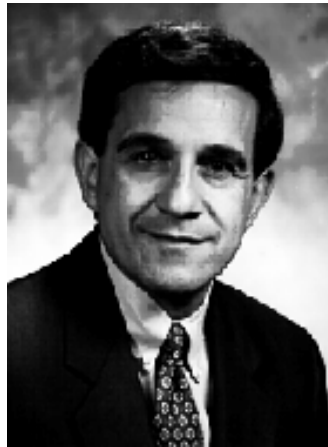


**Commissioner's Update Archive****Commissioner's Update**

February 12, 1998

Dear Superintendents and Charter School Leaders:

As you know, I will be leaving my position as Commissioner to take a position as President of ICS Learning Systems, a division of Harcourt General based in Scranton, Pennsylvania. It has been a wonderful opportunity for me to serve as Commissioner for the past six years. Working very closely with many of you, we accomplished a great deal. You may want to look at the [list of accomplishments and immediate priorities which I identified in my press conference last week](#). This is on our website at [www.doe.mass.edu](http://www.doe.mass.edu). As the Governor said this week, "The public schools have improved, and the foundation has been laid." I am confident that you will be in good hands when an Acting Commissioner is named, and when a new permanent Commissioner ultimately takes over. Keep up the good work, and you will continue to make a difference in strengthening our public schools.

I know that most of you are in the midst of budget preparations for next year. We expect to publicly release our preliminary estimates of FY 99 local contributions and net school spending before the end of the month. This year we will again post the estimates on the website as soon as they are released, to give you a head start while awaiting delivery of your packet in the regular mail.

Separate from this mailing, you already have received the [MCAS Guides for mathematics and for science and technology](#). You will receive the guide for English language arts within the next two weeks. These guides are not a substitute for the frameworks. They are a complement. The sample test questions contained in the guides, the breakdown of the test design by categories, and the section on frequently asked questions, should be especially helpful to you as you prepare for the May administration at grades 4, 8 and 10.

In this mailing, I have included a number of other items about testing, and additional materials as well:

1. [Videotape and Question and Answer guide on the statewide testing program](#). There is a great need for increasing public understanding of the test program, and we produced this short, informative tape and guide to answer questions. I am providing every superintendent and principal a copy of this 13 minute videotape. I urge you to show it to your teaching and support staff, and at school committee meetings, school council meetings, PTO meetings, or wherever you have an audience of people concerned about the testing program. I have enclosed 10 Q and A guides for each superintendent and five for each principal as well. If you need more tapes or guides, please let me know by email to [asafran@doe.mass.edu](mailto:asafran@doe.mass.edu) or by phone at 781-338-3000.
2. [Poster about the testing schedule this spring](#).
3. [Schedule of March MCAS workshops and invitation to participate](#).
4. [Board-in-Brief summary of February 10 State Board of Education meeting. Please note the action taken to set descriptors for the performance levels for MCAS](#).
5. "Education Report." This updates the report we published in May 1997 about statewide progress and challenges in implementing Education Reform.

[No Longer Available]

6. [One-page flyer announcing March public information meetings about the Massachusetts Teacher Tests.](#)
7. [High school dropout report for the 1996-1997 school year. This will be released publicly in about a week and I wanted to be sure you have it first.](#)
8. Survey from the federal government about TITLE VI expenditures. Please complete and return by April 9.
9. [\[No Longer Available\]](#)
9. [Invitation to March 3 early numeracy conference, and technology conferences \(March 24, March 26, April 1\).](#)
10. [Flyer about "World of Difference" week \(March 29-April 4\).](#)

Again, I want to thank you for your leadership and for your support on the many issues we faced over the years. There is much we have accomplished together, and much work to be done. Good luck, best wishes, and stay the course. I know I will be seeing and hearing from many of you in the months and years ahead, and I will look forward to it.

All the best, and

Sincerely,

Robert V. Antonucci  
Commissioner of Education

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- [Parent Information Hotline](#)  
1-866-MCAS220



Assessment/Accountability > [MCAS](#) >

## Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

Q&A  
Q&A  
Q&A

*Extra \* Extra \* Extra \* Extra \* Extra \* Extra \* Extra \* Extra*

# The *NEW* Massachusetts Test for Students

*Read all about it!*

February 1998

**Important Issue for:**  
Parents  
Kids  
Teachers  
Administrators  
You

Everything you want and need to know about the new state tests including:

- [Background](#)
- [Participation](#)
- [Content](#)
- [Results](#)
- [Sample Questions](#)
- [What YOU can be doing NOW!](#)



Dear Friends,

This spring, all of our efforts in Education Reform will come sharply into focus with the first administration of the new statewide testing program. All students in grades 4, 8, and 10 will be tested in English language arts, mathematics, and science and technology. In May 1999, history and social science will be added to the annual testing.



This marks an historic moment in our state. In the past, state tests were not based on rigorous statewide academic standards, and only schools and districts received scores on statewide tests. Now, for the first time, statewide tests will be administered based on common curriculum standards those contained within our own Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Individual students will receive scores on the statewide tests. In just a few years, each student, school, and school district will be measured based on the results of these tests. Ultimately, students will not be eligible for a high school diploma unless they can pass the 10th grade test.

The Chairman of the Board of Education, John Silber, and I realize that it will take a few years for school districts to align their curricula to the Curriculum Frameworks. What we want to see is progress each and every year.

This document was written to answer the most commonly asked questions about the new statewide testing program. It is also designed to be a companion piece to the video, "The New Massachusetts Statewide Test: Questions and Answers," produced this month.

We need parents, teachers, and the community working together to ensure the success of our students. There is nothing more crucial for the future of our children.

Sincerely,

Robert V. Antonucci  
Commissioner of Education

# Questions & Answers

## Background

### What is the new statewide testing program?

As mandated by the Education Reform Law of 1993, the new statewide testing program is designed to evaluate how well students are meeting the state's new learning standards in the curriculum frameworks. In 1998, students will be tested in English language arts, mathematics, and science and technology. A history and social science test will be added in 1999. A foreign languages test will be added later, in accordance with an amendment to the law.

### What are the new learning standards?

The learning standards are contained in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. The curriculum frameworks describe what students should know and be able to do in each subject for grade groupings Pre-Kindergarten-4, 5-8, 9-10, and 11-12. Schools and districts use the frameworks to develop their own curricula as they prepare students to meet the challenging new standards.

### Why was it necessary to set new, statewide standards?

Massachusetts students do very well on national tests when compared with students from other states. But we need to continue to strengthen our schools. The standards in the curriculum frameworks are rigorous and form the basis for the new state tests. Students who are taught to meet to these new standards should be well prepared for higher education or the world of work in the 21st century.

### Why should students at all grades take the tests seriously?

Schools must help students understand the purpose of the tests and encourage them to try their best. Students should understand that a report of their scores will be sent home to their families, and that their scores may become part of their permanent school record.



Grade 8  
Math Sample Question

Use the advertisement below to answer the question.

### Roxbury Bike Shop

*One Day Sale -- Saturday Only!*

**ALL BIKES MUST GO!!**

**9:00 a.m. -- 10% off originally-marked price**

**10:00 a.m. -- 10% off 9:00 price**

**11:00 a.m. -- 10% off 10:00 price**

**. . . and so on until ALL bikes are SOLD!!!**

Mr. Howard bought a bike with an originally-marked price of \$400. What was the price of the bike at 12:15 p.m.?

- A. \$262.44\*
- B. \$240.00
- C. \$291.60
- D. \$280.00



Mathematics Curriculum Framework Learning Standard 1.8 - Computation and Estimation: Students engage in problem solving, communicating, reasoning, and connecting to use computation, estimation and proportions to solve problems.

# Questions & Answers

# Participation

## Are all students required to take the new tests?

Yes. All 4th, 8th and 10th grade students in Massachusetts' public schools will take the tests every spring. This includes students in vocational schools and charter schools.

## Will students receiving special education services be required to take the test?

Yes. Virtually all students should have the opportunity to demonstrate their progress in learning the material covered by the curriculum frameworks. In addition, state and federal laws require that students with disabilities be included in all district and state assessments. Special education students will be allowed to use testing accommodations (such as taking the test in a small group) as appropriate.

## What about students whose primary language is not English?

Limited English Proficient (L.E.P.) students will take the tests if they have been going to school in the continental United States for more than three years. Spanish-speaking L.E.P. students who have been in the United States for three years or fewer may take a Spanish version of the mathematics and science and technology tests.

### Grade 8

#### Science and Technology Sample Question

You have a plastic block, a glass marble, and a golf ball. Design an experiment that would allow you to rank these materials in order of their densities.

Science and Technology Curriculum Framework Learning Standard - Physical Sciences/Properties of Matter: Students engage in problem solving, evaluating evidence, searching for connections, and the process of inquiry, in order to identify properties that allow materials to be distinguished from one another and often make them well suited to specific purposes.



# Questions & Answers

## Results

### What can we expect for results in the first year?

We expect scores for the first year to be lower than in following years. Why? Because these are the most challenging tests 4th, 8th, and 10th graders in Massachusetts have ever taken. Also, it will take time for school districts to match their curriculum with the state frameworks. After the first year, we expect to see improvement each year.

### How will answers to questions be scored?

Answers to multiple choice questions can be machine-scored, while responses to open ended questions must be scored by individuals who are trained to look objectively at answers. They will be given clear guidelines and procedures to ensure accuracy and consistency in scoring openended responses and writing samples. The scorers' work is continually monitored for accuracy.

### Will fourth or eighth graders be denied promotion to the next grade if they do poorly on the tests?

Beginning in May 1998, students in grades 4, 8, and 10 will be tested, and given individual scores. Promotion policies are local decisions. The statewide test should

## Who designed the tests?

The tests were designed by the Massachusetts Department of Education and Advanced Systems, the contractor hired to help design and administer the testing program. Committees of educators, including some of the best teachers in the state, assisted in writing the test questions.

## What kinds of questions are on the tests?

The tests will include both multiple choice questions and questions requiring a written response to demonstrate knowledge and skills.

## How much time will the tests take?

The tests will be administered in 45 minute sessions. The math and science & technology tests take 3 sessions at grades 4 & 8, and 4 sessions at grade 10. The English language arts test, which is both a reading and writing test, will take 7 sessions. Schools will be given three weeks over which to conduct the tests, so schools can budget about 2 sessions per day, and allow time for make-up sessions. This amount of testing time is necessary because (1) the test includes open-ended questions which require significant time; (2) enough questions need to be asked to produce reliable student level reports; and (3) ample time is built into each session for all students to complete and check their work.

### Grade 4

#### Science Sample Question:

If you wanted to know how tall a tree grew in one year, which of the following facts MUST you know about the tree?

1. the type of soil it is growing in
2. what kind of tree it is
3. the height of the tree at the beginning of the year\*
4. how many days it has rained during the year



Science and Technology Curriculum Framework Learning Standard - Inquiry: Students plan and conduct a simple investigation knowing what is to be looked for and compared.

### Will any special services or programs be offered to students who score poorly on the tests?

Support for students who score poorly on the tests will be a local responsibility. Schools will consider a range of approaches, from improving and supplementing instruction during the normal school to providing opportunities for intense assistance after school, during the summer and other times.

not be the only evaluation of a student's performance.

**What happens to tenth grade students who do not pass the tests?**

Beginning in the year 2001, students be required to pass the 10th grade test to graduate. Students will have multiple opportunities to retake any part of the test they do not pass.

**Will the tests place more attention on 4th, 8th and 10th grade teachers and students than those in other grades?**

The tests are cumulative. For example, fourth graders are tested on all content from Pre-Kindergarten through grade 4. Teachers across grades will have to work together in developing curriculum and classroom activities so that students can meet the new standards.

# Questions & Answers

**Will parents be informed of their children's results?**

Yes. Parents will receive their children's test scores.

**Will the state publish any of the test questions after each the test results are returned?**

Yes. After each administration of the state test, many of the questions will be made available to the public. In the case of openended questions, sample questions and answers illustrating a full range of responses (from low to high performance) will also be made available.

**How will the tests be evaluated with respect to the validity of the questions and question bias?**

Every effort is being made to ensure the tests are educationally sound, fair, without bias, and accurately scored. Teachers helped to develop the test questions. A question try-out has been administered in English Language Arts, Science and Technology, and Mathematics to determine if the questions would perform as expected. A question try-out for history/social sciences will be administered in the spring of 1998. A technical advisory committee, comprised of national experts, will review the tests.

**How do I find out more about the new learning standards, the curriculum frameworks, and the new tests?**

Every school and public library in the Commonwealth has copies of the learning standards and curriculum frameworks. In addition, you may visit the Department of Education's website at [www.doe.mass.edu](http://www.doe.mass.edu) to review the curriculum frameworks and find out more about the new testing program. Or write or call the Department of Education at 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148 (781-338-3000) and we will be happy to assist you.



**Grade 8  
English Language Arts Sample Writing Question**

Write a persuasive essay stating whether or not the students at your school should be required to wear uniforms to school. Give at least two reasons to support your position.

English Language Arts Curriculum Framework Learning Standard 19: Students will write coherent compositions with a clear focus and supporting ideas, drawing on strategies that are most helpful for developing and organizing their ideas.

**Grade 10  
Math Sample Question:**

Simon is conducting a probability experiment. He randomly selects a tag from a set of tags that are numbered from 1 to 100 and then returns the tag to the set. He is trying to draw a tag that matches his favorite number, 21. He has not matched his number after 99 draws. What are the chances he will match his number on the 100th draw?

- a. 1 out of 100\*
- b. 99 out of 100
- c. 1 out of 1
- d. 1 out of 2

Mathematics Curriculum Framework Learning Standard 4.5 - Probability: Determine the likelihood of outcomes using theoretical probability.

## What you can be doing NOW!

### Students:

- Take your education seriously!

### Parents:

- Know what the state standards are for your child's grade level;
- Find out about your district's local curriculum, and how it reflects the state's curriculum frameworks;

### School Year

1997 - 1998

### Subject & Grade

English Language Arts, Mathematics,  
Science & Technology  
Grades 4, 8, & 10

### Test Dates

May, 1998

### School Year

1998 - 1999

- Monitor your child's homework and progress in school;
- Maintain regular communication with teachers;
- Find out how teachers are being trained to help students meet the new standards;
- Join a local parent-teacher organization, and work to develop after school and community student support programs.

## Teachers:

- Continue to become familiar with the learning standards in the curriculum frameworks and use them to prepare your lesson plans;
- Explain the testing program to your students and their parents;
- Schedule team meetings to identify accommodations for students with disabilities.

## Administrators:

- Familiarize faculty with the curriculum frameworks and the purpose of the tests;
- Meet with faculty to plan how to create a positive and orderly atmosphere during the testing period;
- Keep parents informed about testing through regular newsletters teacher conferences, and meetings

## Subject & Grade

English Language Arts,  
History &  
Social Science,  
Mathematics,  
Science & Technology  
Grades 4, 8, & 10

## Test Dates

May, 1999

## School Year

1999 - 2000

## Subject & Grade

English Language Arts,  
History & Social Science,  
Mathematics,  
Science & Technology  
Grades 4, 8, & 10  
World Languages  
Grade 10

## Test Dates

May, 2000



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## Commissioner's Column

This spring, all of our efforts in Education Reform will come sharply into focus with the first administration of the new statewide testing program. All students in grades 4, 8 and 10 will take tests in English language arts, mathematics, and science and technology. This will be the beginning of the MCAS, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System.

The May testing period will mark an historic moment in our state. For the first time, statewide tests will be administered based on rigorous state curriculum standards - those contained within the curriculum frameworks. It will also be the first time that individual student scores will be reported on a statewide test.

This is a challenging time for all of us. We will be helping school districts in their efforts to prepare for a smooth test administration.

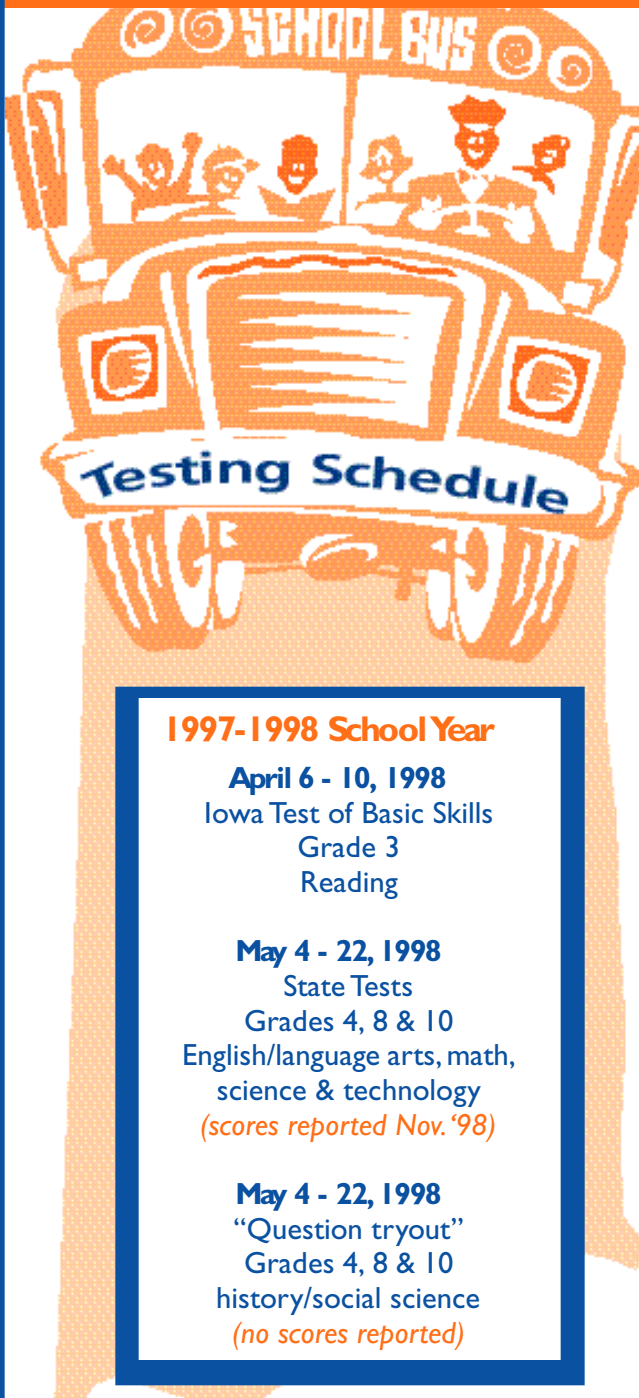
At the local level, school officials and teachers will need to take the steps necessary to prepare their students for this first round of testing. This is a joint effort.

There is considerable interest in the publication of technical assistance documents which will provide examples of how the learning standards will be assessed on the statewide test. We anticipate that the math, science and technology, and the English language arts documents will be ready early in the year. While these documents will be very useful for schools, I would like to stress that the frameworks themselves contain the learning standards and other important information on how to help your students reach those standards.

In closing, I would like to thank the many educators who have helped to shape our frameworks and our tests. I also want to thank all the state's teachers for their hard work in the classroom every day. We have set our expectations high - now we must do everything we can to help every student reach these goals.

Commissioner of Education

# Massachusetts Student Testing Update



### 1997-1998 School Year

**April 6 - 10, 1998**

Iowa Test of Basic Skills  
Grade 3  
Reading

**May 4 - 22, 1998**

State Tests  
Grades 4, 8 & 10  
English/language arts, math,  
science & technology  
(scores reported Nov. '98)

**May 4 - 22, 1998**

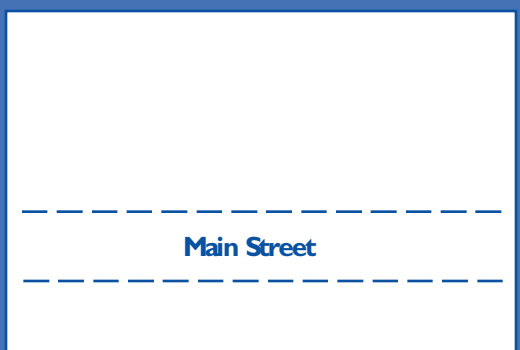
"Question tryout"  
Grades 4, 8 & 10  
history/social science  
(no scores reported)

## SAMPLE 4TH GRADE MATH QUESTION

(based on the pK-4 Learning Standards 3.1 and 3.2 in Geometry & Measurement)

Use the map below to complete the following:

- Draw Broadway Street **PARALLEL** to Main Street. Write **BROADWAY** on this street.
- Draw Birch Street **PERPENDICULAR** to Main Street. Write **BIRCH** on this street.
- Draw Walnut Street so that it **INTERSECTS** Main Street, but is **NOT** perpendicular to Main Street. Write **WALNUT** on this street.
- Mark one **OBTUSE** angle on your drawing with an **O**. (*obtuse angle: an angle greater than a right angle*)
- Mark one **ACUTE** angle on your drawing with an **A**. (*acute angle: an angle less than a right angle*)



## What YOU Can Be Doing NOW

### ADMINISTRATORS:

- ▶ Familiarize faculty with the purpose of the tests
- ▶ Meet with faculty to discuss scheduling issues and how to create a positive and orderly atmosphere
- ▶ Inform parents of the testing period and its purpose through newsletters and other means

### TEACHERS:

- ▶ Continue to become familiar with the learning standards in the frameworks
- ▶ Explain the testing program to students - why they will be tested, how long the tests will be, what they will cover
- ▶ Identify accommodations for special needs students

## RESOURCES the Department of Education will be providing in the future:

- ▶ a video describing the testing program for use with school councils and school committees, community groups, and parents
- ▶ regular testing updates, with samples of test questions
- ▶ more information at our web site, ([www.doe.mass.edu](http://www.doe.mass.edu)) including actual classroom examples using the new Learning Standards
- ▶ an advisory on participation of students with special needs
- ▶ a pamphlet with test scheduling suggestions sent to the principal
- ▶ a statewide effort beginning in January, 1998 to inform parents about the testing program
- ▶ statewide workshops on how to use good tests to improve teaching and learning
- ▶ performance level descriptions

[Commissioner's Update Archive](#)

## Regional Workshops on Preparing for MCAS and Implementing Standards-Based Classroom Environments

March 1998

Dear Fellow Educators:

The Department of Education is pleased to invite you to participate in one of these regional workshops in March to help you prepare for the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System.

The purpose of these workshops is to provide participants with an understanding of the design of the new statewide standards-based test, and how school personnel can build stronger instructional programs by aligning curriculum and conducting local ongoing assessment based on the state standards. In early April we will make available specific information on the administration of the MCAS test this May.

We look forward to your participation in these workshops.

Sincerely,

Robert V. Antonucci  
Commissioner of Education

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### Program Design:

In each of 6 regions, both workshops described below will be offered from 9:00-12:00 and again from 1:30-4:30. Please note that space is limited to 50 in each workshop.

### Registration:

Due to limited space, we regretfully must limit attendance to one person per school, and we will not be able to accommodate "walk-ins." Workshops are expected to fill quickly, so please return the attached registration form early.

### Locations:

Specific locations and directions will be sent with confirmation on a first come, first served basis.

---

### Workshop A - Preparing for MCAS

This workshop is provided to help local education leaders understand how the design of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System can help them know what to do, now, to help teachers and students prepare for the test. It will involve information about standards-based instruction and assessment, and involve participants in developing strategies for working with faculties to align curriculum and conduct local ongoing assessment.

### Workshop B - Preparing to Teach in a Standards-based Environment

This workshop is designed for teachers and other instructional personnel. The purpose of the session is to examine how a standards-based assessment system requires changing the way teachers think about and plan instruction, and to explore some classroom applications. Activities will focus on using the Curriculum Frameworks and assessment expectations to plan instructional activities, and how to use open-response questions to gather information about what students know and can do. While participants will work with specific examples from different grade levels and content areas, the workshop will be general in nature and should be useful to teachers without regard to content specialty.

---

### MCAS Regional Workshops: Registration Form

**Note: Due to limited space, we regretfully must limit registration one person per school.** If you have already had the opportunity to attend one of these workshops, please give someone else from your building a chance to participate.

Please detach this registration form for faxing or self-contained mailing. **For faster processing, no envelope is required.** Registration must be received **no later than two weeks prior to the workshop you wish to attend**.

**For fastest processing, FAX TO: (502) 587-8873, or use the mailing address on the reverse side. To mail: detach and fold this form so that the address on the reverse side shows, staple or tape it closed and mail it to the pre-printed address shown. Please DO NOT mail**

**this form to the Department of Education.** If you receive a photocopy of this form, the correct return address is: Pam Steiger, Advanced Systems in Measurement and Evaluation, 332 West Broadway, Suite 815, Louisville, KY 40202.

Participant's Name:	Daytime Phone:
School Name:	District Name:
Participant's Mailing Address:	Fax No:

Which Region?					
Please indicate First Choice with a <i>1</i> , Second Choice with a <i>2</i> , etc. We will try to accommodate your first choice if possible.					
<b>March 13</b> Greater Boston	<b>March 16</b> Pittsfield	<b>March 17</b> Amherst	<b>March 24</b> Lowell -Lawrence Area	<b>March 26</b> Worcester	<b>March 30</b> Fall River-New Bedford Area
(Registration Deadline: February 27)	(Registration Deadline: March 2)	(Registration Deadline: March 3)	(Registration Deadline: March 10)	(Registration Deadline: March 12)	(Registration Deadline: March 16)
<b>Which Workshop / Which Time?</b> Please indicate First Choice with a <i>1</i> , Second Choice with a <i>2</i> , etc.				<b>Morning Session</b> (9:00-noon)	<b>Afternoon Session</b> (1:30-4:30)
Workshop A: <i>Preparing for MCAS</i>					
Workshop B: <i>Preparing to Teach in a Standards-based Environment</i>					

If you have questions about these workshops, or about the status of your registration, please call 1-800-753-2324

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## Board in Brief

### February 10, 1998

This is "[Board in Brief](#)," issued at the request of Commissioner Bob Antonucci, to bring you up to date on Massachusetts [Board of Education](#) matters. The following is a report on the meeting held Tuesday, February 10, 1998, at the Massachusetts Department of Education in Malden.

#### Report of the Chairman

Chairman John Silber, remarking on Commissioner Antonucci's resignation as Commissioner to become president of ICS, a subsidiary of Harcourt Brace, said, "Commissioner Antonucci has provided distinguished leadership, and he will be missed. Best wishes on this splendid offer, and for an exciting new adventure."

Silber said he hopes the Board will name an interim commissioner before Antonucci departs. A national search for a permanent replacement will be underway with publication of advertisements beginning this weekend in Education Week, the Chronicle of Higher Education, the New York Times, and The Boston Globe.

On other matters, the Chairman noted his deep concern that the Legislature has failed to revise the special education law. He urged members of the Board to contact the Legislature to reconsider the matter.

#### Report of the Commissioner

Commissioner Antonucci thanked the Board, noting his gratitude to this Board and Governor Cellucci, the former Board Chairman Martin Kaplan and Governor Weld, and everyone involved in advocating for education reform. He said, "We have done much, and we have much more to do. I hope the good work we have begun will be carried forward."

Antonucci reported on three charter school hearings which were held in January to take public comment on the applications that have been filed for new Commonwealth charter schools and Horace Mann charter schools. A special meeting of the Board is scheduled for late February, when new charters will be awarded.

Commissioner Antonucci noted his disappointment that it appears the Legislature will not enact special education reform this year. He is hopeful that the Legislature will reconsider, and move the bill forward.

#### Governor Cellucci Addresses the Board

Governor Paul Cellucci joined the Board to discuss his initiative on character education and other educational issues. Commenting on Commissioner Antonucci's departure, Cellucci said, "Bob, you have shown exceptional leadership, and you have been a model of dedication and innovative approaches, including support for charter schools. The public schools have improved as a result of your work. You have skillfully guided the implementation of the [Education Reform Act](#), and the foundation has been laid. Neither you nor the Board has flinched when making the tough decisions. I respect and admire all you have done. Best wishes."

Governor Cellucci addressed the issue of character education, asking the Board to ensure that all schools incorporate character education throughout the school day. He stated, "Our children need to be prepared for the performance of their social and civic duties. Reading, writing and arithmetic are important, but values need to be reinforced as well. We need good citizens for a tolerant and civil society, and I urge the Board to assist by encouraging the use of literature to instruct students in courage, honesty, compassion, loyalty, perseverance,

respectfulness, responsibility and self discipline."

On other educational matters, the Governor reaffirmed his commitment to full funding of Education Reform, he said that testing and accountability are crucial to success and that low standards are unacceptable, and he urged the Board to move swiftly and thoroughly in their search to find a permanent education commissioner.

Regarding his proposed \$270 million increase in the [FY 99 budget for education](#), the Governor said 90% of the new education money should go directly to classrooms. He said that one-half of that amount would be ample to hire 4,000 new teachers, and the other half could go toward new textbooks and materials. Further, he agreed with Chairman Silber that this money could be used for after-school tutoring programs and summer school.

### **Performance Standards for the MCAS Revised**

At the January 1998 meeting the Board voted to establish general descriptors for four levels of student performance for the statewide testing program, the [Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System](#) (MCAS). The levels voted on in January were Level IV Advanced, Level III Proficient, Level II Deficient and Level I Failing. A proposal by Board member Roberta Schaefer to change the descriptions was approved by a unanimous 9-0 vote. The new levels will be:

**Level 4--Advanced** (Student performance at this level consists of a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of rigorous subject matter, and an ability to provide sophisticated solutions to complex problems);

**Level 3--Proficient** (Student performance at this level consists of solid understanding of challenging subject matter and the ability to solve a wide variety of problems);

**Level 2--Needs Improvement** (Student performance at this level consists of partial understanding of subject area knowledge and skills, and the ability to solve some simple problems); and

**Level 1--Failing** (Student performance at this level consists of minimal understanding of subject area knowledge and skills, and an inability to solve simple problems).

### **Lawrence Public Schools Memorandum of Agreement Ratified**

Commissioner Antonucci reported that the Department has moved rapidly to implement the Memorandum of Agreement signed by Dr. Silber, Mayor Dowling and him on January 27, 1998. On a unanimous vote, the Board formally ratified the Agreement.

Antonucci has assigned Deputy Commissioner David Driscoll as his representative in the Lawrence Public Schools, and Driscoll reported on his activities to date. He noted three critical ingredients needed for success in the schools: a focus on improving student achievement; the need for the Lawrence education community to work together toward that goal; and a commitment by all parties to assume responsibility to improve the system.

Driscoll reported that there appears to be a positive change in attitude among Lawrence officials and educators, which he credits to the signing of the Agreement. Asked if the High School will gain accreditation soon, Driscoll responded that accreditation "is a long way off." He presented to the Board his Action Plan for the Lawrence Public Schools, which outlines key activities and benchmarks.

### **School Building Assistance Rates Proposed**

The Board voted to seek public comment on proposed annual school building construction cost standards. The new rates represent an increase of approximately 3.5% over the current cost standards. Board member Jim Peyser stated his concern that Massachusetts school building costs are high, and he recommended an analysis comparing them to the costs of non-public construction in state and the costs of school building construction in other, comparable states.

Two additional amendments to the regulations were discussed, one to clarify which provision of the state building code applies to expansion and renovation of existing buildings, and the other to address capacity in school buildings to support new technology. Noting the importance of technology in the schools, member Stanley Koplik said, "You cannot build a building today without that wiring capacity." On a unanimous vote, the Board voted to solicit public comment on these changes, and will vote on the amendments later this spring.

### **"House One" Budget for Education Reviewed**

The Board reviewed Governor Cellucci's FY 99 budget proposal for education, which is generally very positive for public elementary and secondary education. The Governor's proposed increase for early childhood education is not at the level the Board proposed, and Commissioner Antonucci and Chairman Silber will advocate a \$165 million increase for early childhood education when the House Ways and Means Committee meets in Springfield on February 24 for a hearing on the FY 99 budget.

### **Grants for Safe Schools Approved**

The Board approved 27 grants to school districts totaling \$39,764 for the Safe Schools Program for Gay and Lesbian Students.

### **Next Meeting**

There will be a special meeting of the Board in the last week of February to vote on charter school applications. The next regular meeting of the Board of Education will be held on Tuesday, March 10, at 9:00 a.m., in Malden.

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## Massachusetts Teacher Tests

### Schedule of Public Information Meetings

The Department of Education has scheduled four public information meetings on the Massachusetts Teacher Tests. You are invited to attend a meeting at a location convenient for you to learn about:

- program requirements
- test design
- test administration policies
- score reporting activities

The meetings will be held at the following times and places:

MEETING SITE	DATE	TIME
Westfield State College Dever Auditorium in Parenzo Hall Westfield, MA	Monday March 2, 1998	10:00 - 12 noon
Stonehill College Alumni Hall Easton, MA	Wednesday March 4, 1998	10:00 - 12 noon
Worcester State College Administration Building Theater Worcester, MA	Wednesday March 4, 1998	4:00 - 6:00 PM
<a href="#">University of Massachusetts at Boston</a> Small Science Auditorium Boston, MA	Friday March 6, 1998	2:30 - 4:30 PM

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## Dropout Rates 1996 - 1997

February, 1998

Dear Friends,

I am pleased to issue our annual publication, Dropout Rates in Massachusetts Public Schools: 1996-97. This report provides information on students who dropped out of Massachusetts public schools during the 1996-97 reporting year. I hope that this information will contribute to ongoing local and state efforts to strengthen dropout prevention programs.

The completion of high school is a crucial basis for a productive life of citizenship and work. The high school dropout rate, therefore, is an important indicator of performance. It will be one indicator in a system we are developing to evaluate schools and districts in accordance with the Education Reform Act.

### Summary of Key Findings

- **Annual Dropout Rate** The 1996-97 annual dropout rate was 3.4 percent, a rate unchanged from the previous year. A total of 8,453 students enrolled in grades nine through twelve dropped out of Massachusetts public schools in the 1996-97 school year and did not return to school by October 1, 1997.
- **Rate Over Time** The annual statewide dropout rate has declined from 3.7 percent in 1994 to 3.6 percent in 1995 to 3.4 percent in 1996 and 1997.
- **Distribution of Rates for Individual Schools** The annual dropout rate varied widely among individual schools, ranging from zero percent to 64 percent. Over half of the schools (54 percent) had a dropout rate of 2.5 percent or less. Approximately five percent of the schools had a rate higher than 10 percent.
- **Grade** Students in grade eleven dropped out at a higher rate, 4.0 percent, than did students in other grades. The 1996-97 dropout rate was 3.8 percent for tenth-graders, 3.2 percent for twelfth-graders and 2.8 percent for ninth-graders. These differences according to grade level are consistent with data from previous years.
- **Gender** The 1996-97 dropout rate was 3.9 percent for males and 3.0 percent for females. Males have dropped out at a higher rate than females for the past several year.
- **Race/Ethnicity** Dropout rates varied widely by race/ethnicity. Hispanic students had the highest annual dropout rate at 8.2 percent. The dropout rate was 6.0 percent for Native American students and 5.6 percent for African-American students. Asian students and white students shared the lowest dropout rate, 2.7 percent. Relative to the prior year, the dropout rate declined for African-American students, increased for Native American, Hispanic, and Asian students, and remained constant for white students.
- **Vocational-Technical Schools** The annual dropout rate for students enrolled in vocational-technical schools was 3.2 percent, slightly lower than the statewide rate. The rate for city/town vocational-technical schools was 6.1 percent, and the rate for regional, independent and county vocational-technical schools was 2.6 percent.

If you have any questions or suggestions about the report, please contact:

- Massachusetts Department of Education
- Accountability and Evaluation Services
- 350 Main Street
- Malden, MA 02148
- (781) 338-3000

Thank you for your interest in this report.

Sincerely,

Robert V. Antonucci  
Commissioner of Education

- [Dropout Rates in Massachusetts Public Schools: 1996-97](#)
- [Annual Dropout Rates by School and District](#)
- [Projected Four-Year Dropout Rates by District](#)

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## Early Numeracy Conference

March 3, 1998  
Worcester Holiday Inn

*Dear Early Childhood Educators,*

*The Department of Education is pleased to invite you to the Early Numeracy Conference, which will focus on how mathematical thinking and reasoning develop in the early years, preschool through grade 3. We are committed to making this day valuable for you in your work in helping the early learners.*

*Robert Antonucci  
Commissioner of Education*

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### Massachusetts Early Numeracy Conference

**Keynote Address:**  
*The "Tot"ering Mathematicians*

Carol Greenes, Ed.D.  
Associate Dean and Professor Mathematics Education, Boston University

### Conference Schedule

8:00-8:30 Registration & Breakfast

8:30-8:45 Welcome & Introductions

8:45-9:30 Keynote Address

9:40-11:10 Session 1 Workshops

11:10-11:25 Break

11:25-12:55 Session 2 Workshops

### Session 1

**1A. Mathematics and Literature:** *Helen KingMcGah and Eleanor Demont, Wheelock College and Arlington and Brookline Schools.*

Mathematics is embedded in rich children's literature. Discover how to use literature as a vehicle to further mathematical reasoning and inventive strategies.

**2A Technology: Internet in the Classroom:** *Kathy Good and Judi Zaino, Haverhill Public Schools.*

An introduction to use of the Internet in the classroom. Web sites and addresses will be shared.

**Toys and Technology:** *David Bouvier, Statewide Coordinator for Technology.*

A reflection on the toys children play with and some basic connections to technology education.

**3A. It's Not Just Play, It's Math:** *Mary Grinavic, Early Childhood Coordinator Walpole Public Schools; Lisa VanThiel, Director Beginning Years Child Development Center, Medfield.*

A focus on the role of play in fostering mathematical learning in classrooms and at home.

**4A. New Preschool Standards for Guiding Mathematical Learning:** *Sandy-Putnam Franklin & Min-hua Chen, Early Learning Services, DOE; Jane Taylor Early Childhood Coordinator, Old Rochester RSD; Mielina Magazzu, student teacher, Curry College.* A sneak preview of some "teachable moments" from the curriculum standards being developed by the Early Childhood Advisory Council as a resource for preschools.

**5A. Bridging the Gap:** *Kathleen Healey Project Coordinator, School Links, Worcester.* Discussion on how technology can open doors and opportunities for diverse students.

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## **Session 2**

**1B. Number Sense in the Second Grade:** *Ann Goodrow, Tufts University.*

How do children make sense of addition and subtraction using traditional and open-ended methods?

**2B. Math Isn't Always 2+2=4:** *Eleanor Grater Lewis, New England Resource Access Project, Educational Development Center, Newton.*

Explore a variety of materials and experiences that develop mathematical thinking...some you might not expect.

**3B. Kaleidoscopes . . . The Art and Science of Mirrored Magic:** *Diana Gillet and Michael Eramo, Worcester Public Schools.*

Nature is filled with color, symmetry, and light, so are the images you will create with your kaleidoscope. One look at the mesmerizing designs will pull you into an incredible world that fuses math, science, technology and the arts. (limit 15 people)

**4B. Why Should We and How Can We?** *Judy Sparrow, Consultant and Co-Chair, Training to MA Parent Involvement Project.*

Participants will learn reasons for and some practical ways to engage young children in math and science learning activities.

**5B. "Where to Begin . . . Numbers and Constructed Play."** *Rosemary Corley, Hudson Public Schools.* Look at mathematics in Pre-K and Kindergarten.

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## **Directions to the Worcester Holiday Inn 500 Lincoln Street Worcester, MA Exit 20, I-290**

### **From the west:**

Take Mass Pike East (Rte.90) to (Exit 10) Rte. 290 East. Take Rte. 290 East to Exit 20, Burncoat/ Lincoln St. Go through first set of lights. At second set of lights, take a left onto Rte. 70, Lincoln St. Holiday Inn is \_ mile on left.

### **From the east (Boston/Framingham):**

Take Mass Pike West (Rte. 90) to Rte. 495 North to Rte. 290 West. Take Exit 20, Burncoat/Lincoln St. Bear right onto Lincoln St. Holiday Inn is \_ mile on left.

### **From the north ( Maine and New Hampshire):**

Take Rtes. 95,93 or 3 South to Rte. 495. Take Rte. 495 to Rte. 290 West to Exit 20, Burncoat/Lincoln St. Bear right off the exit. Holiday Inn is \_ mile on left.

### **From the south (NY/CT):**

Take best route to Mass Pike East and follow directions above from the west.

### **From the Leominster/Fitchburg Area:**

Take Rte. 190 South to Worcester. Take exit for Rte 70, Burncoat/Lincoln St. Stay towards the right and continue through first set of lights at end of off-ramp. Take a left at the next set of lights. Holiday Inn is \_ mile on the left.

**In case of severe weather conditions, the conference will be canceled if the city of Worcester cancels school for the day.**

***Contact Peg Helgaard (781/338-3000) or Sandy Putnam-Franklin (x.374) with questions about the***

# *Conference.*

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## A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Week

It's almost here!

March 29th through April 4th is A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Week. Sponsored by the Anti-Defamation League's A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute, A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Week commemorates the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and celebrates his work by reaching out to schools, religious communities and local organizations, asking them to engage in activities that promote inter-group harmony and respect for diversity.

Do you need 101 Ways to Fight Prejudice? Please call 1-800063-Unity or e-mail [AWODWeek@rendonbos.com](mailto:AWODWeek@rendonbos.com) for more information.

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