

**Commissioner's Update Archive****Commissioner's Update****November 16, 1999**

Dear Superintendents, and Leaders of Charter Schools and Collaboratives:

I want to remind you again that, beginning in January, these coordinated mailings will be dramatically reduced in size as we will post most of my bi-monthly correspondence on our website at www.doe.mass.edu. I have a few updates and items for you.

Financial Update

The Legislature has sent the FY2000 Budget to the Governor. By the time you read this, the final appropriations, including any vetoes and overrides, may be signed into law. Please monitor our school finance webpage for the revised Chapter 70 aid figures. They will be posted within days after the budget is signed and mailed to you by the end of next week. Also, by the end of next week we will have posted the updated school building assistance priority lists and information on applying for the foundation reserve ("pothole") program. In December, I will have information for you on new competitive grant opportunities.

MCAS Update

As you know, the statewide results released last week (mailed to you under separate cover) show mixed results. In this mailing, I have included an additional MCAS-related document, Guidelines for the Development of an Alternative Assessment to the MCAS, which provides important information on an alternative assessment and participation in MCAS by special needs students.

"Starting Now"

By now, all public schools should have received copies of the latest Starting Now brochure, produced by MassInsight with the support of the Department of Education. This booklet contains useful information on MCAS and statewide educational expectations for parents. For your information, a Spanish version of Starting Now has been printed, and copies are being sent to all public schools with 50 or more Hispanic students to take home to parents. Schools should receive these copies by Thanksgiving. For additional copies of Starting Now in English or Spanish, call MassInsight at 617-722-4160.

Y2K Contingency Plans

Once again, I want to urge you to review your Year 2000 readiness policies and take action now to ensure that all of your schools are compliant. For useful information on school and community preparedness, you can visit a webpage managed by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Division of Local Services at <http://www.magnet.state.ma.us/dls/Year2k.htm>. Additionally, for special cash draw-down instructions

and processing schedules for the month of December, please see our financial webpage.

In this mailing, I have enclosed the following 10 items:

1. [The Annual Department of Education Publication on Per-Pupil Expenditures for 1998](#)
2. [Guidelines for Alternative MCAS Assessment for Students with Special Needs](#)
3. A request from Secretary of Education Richard Riley urging local action to identify and insure children through the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)
[No longer available]
4. [A memo on the review process for the Massachusetts History/Social Science and English Language Arts Curriculum Frameworks](#)
5. Announcement by the Department of Fire Safety about upcoming classes on response to bomb threats in the schools
[No longer available]
6. Teacher of the Year information - a memo announcing the availability of the "Massachusetts Teacher of the Year 2000" to conduct local educational workshops, and a call for nominations for the Teacher of the Year 2001
[No longer available]
7. A call for nominations for the Massachusetts Christa McAuliffe Fellow for Year 2000
[No longer available]
8. An informative brochure promoting the annual US Savings Bonds Student Poster Contest for students in grades 4-6
[No longer available]
9. A booklet, "Our Irreplaceable Heritage," sponsored by the Executive Office for Environmental Affairs
[No longer available]
10. A pamphlet from the Massachusetts Alliance for Arts Education
[No longer available]

Finally, I want to take this opportunity to wish you and your families a relaxing and enjoyable Thanksgiving.

Sincerely,

David P. Driscoll
Commissioner of Education

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School Finance: Statistical Comparisons

FY98 Per Pupil Expenditures

November 9, 1999

Dear Colleagues and Interested Parties:

Enclosed is the annual "[Per Pupil Expenditures](#)" booklet, which includes the final FY98 Per Pupil Expenditure by Program tabulations and additional tables that provide various perspectives concerning spending that occurred during the 1997-1998 school year. The report includes the following measures:

- Integrated Operating Cost Per Pupil
- Summary of All Day Programs
- Regular Day Expenditures Per Pupil by Grade Level
- Special Education Expenditures Per Pupil, by Prototype
- Bilingual Program Expenditures Per Pupil, by Grade Level
- Functional Costs Per Pupil, Selected Instructional and Non-Instructional Areas

This information is based upon numbers submitted on the FY98 End-of-Year Pupil and Financial Report in the fall of 1998 as well as any final amendments that districts filed as a result of our review of the information, up through the amendment deadline of June 30, 1999.

The entire booklet can be obtained in electronic format on our school finance web site (<http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/>). If you have questions or comments, I encourage you to contact Phyllis Rogers in our School Finance office at 781-338-6534 (progers@doe.mass.edu)

Sincerely,

David P. Driscoll
Commissioner of Education

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Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

MCAS Participation Guidelines for Students with Disabilities and an update on MCAS Alternate Assessment

Memorandum

TO: Superintendents, Principals, Special Education Directors, Charter School Principals, and Directors of Educational Collaboratives and Chapter 766 Schools

FROM: David P. Driscoll, Commissioner of Education

DATE: November 1, 1999

RE: MCAS Participation Guidelines for Students with Disabilities and an update on MCAS Alternate Assessment

As you know, the Massachusetts Education Reform Law and the federal Individuals with Disabilities Act - Amendments of 1997 (IDEA-97) both require all students in grades 4, 8 and 10 who attend publicly-funded schools to participate in the MCAS testing. In response, the Department of Education is working steadfastly to develop options for students with special needs to participate in MCAS.

I am sending you the following documents to provide you with detailed information about MCAS testing participation guidelines for students with disabilities, and on alternate assessment in particular. I encourage you to share this information with educators, parents, students with disabilities, and others interested in the educational achievement of students with disabilities. These and other resources are available on our website (www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/publications.html):

- [Participation Guidelines](#) for Students with Disabilities - a FOCUS on MCAS Alternate Assessment which describes options for the participation of students with disabilities in MCAS;
 - a [newsletter](#) updating the Department's progress in developing the MCAS Alternate Assessment for those students with disabilities who are unable to access the on-demand MCAS tests; and
 - an information packet Statewide Assessment for Students with Disabilities that may be used by your staff as handouts or overhead transparencies in order to present this information to colleagues.
- [Download the Full PowerPoint Presentation](#)
[View/Print PDF](#)

[Help for Viewing PowerPoint Presentation](#)

In the spring of 2001, the MCAS Alternate Assessment will be conducted for the first time. In spring 2000, we intend to field test components of this new model at pilot sites. In the meantime, principals should coordinate the development of alternate assessments for students who are scheduled to participate in the MCAS tests during spring 2000 and for whom an alternate assessment is necessary.

Should you have any questions regarding these matters, please contact Dan Wiener at 781-338-6264.

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Review Process for the Massachusetts History and Social Science and English Language Arts Curriculum Frameworks

Memorandum

To: Superintendents and Principals
From: David P. Driscoll, Commissioner of Education
Date: November 8, 1999

This year we will be convening review panels of eight to twelve members to review the English Language Arts and History and Social Science Curriculum Frameworks, both of which were published in 1997. A memorandum was sent to the Board of Education in October outlining the steps we anticipate. A summary of this memorandum appears below.

History and Social Science

We assume that the general sequence of standards and courses will remain the same (i.e., both world and United States history in PreK-5, and grades 6-8; world history for grades 9 and 10; United States history in grade 11, electives in grade 12) and that the Core Knowledge items for American and world history will remain intact. A tentative delineation of the scope of this revision encompasses:

- Addition of elementary school standards to clarify what should be studied from PreK-5 by grade level (this is especially important because the MCAS in history and social science will be moved to grade 5)
- Examination of current Core Knowledge items to see if any changes in wording might be useful; possible placement of Subtopics in an appendix
- Analysis of some current standards to see if they can be transformed into intellectual processes and inserted in the text as such
- Attempt to integrate the strands more effectively
- Creation of a bibliography
- Strengthening of geography standards
- Removal of repetitious material
- Redesign to conform to the second edition format of Frameworks (used in Foreign Languages and Arts)

English Language Arts

We anticipate that this revision will encompass:

- Addition of an informational reading strand (with relevant standards removed from their current placement in the literature strand)
- Addition of a research strand; expansion of the existing standard on the research process
- Expansion of the standards into the primary grades in order to address grade 3 assessments
- Improvement of literature standards for better sequencing across grade levels
- Examination of each standard to see what could be eliminated, refined, or put elsewhere

- Redesign to conform to the second edition format of Frameworks (used in Foreign Languages and Arts)

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