



**David P. Driscoll**  
Commissioner of Education

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## Commissioner's Updates

February 5, 2001

Dear Superintendents, Leaders of Charter Schools and Collaboratives:

In this letter, I have 4 announcements, and have 10 documents recently posted on our [website](#).

### "The MCAS: Expanding Opportunities for All Students"

In January, Lt. Governor Jane Swift released "The MCAS: Expanding Opportunities for All Students," a report summarizing hundreds of hours of discussions with superintendents, principals and teachers about the best ways to prepare students for success on the MCAS tests. I strongly urge you to read the Lt. Governor's report that contains important recommendations on expanding testing options for all students. Her proposals are being addressed by the Board of Education.

### Chapter 70 School Aid For FY2002

By now I am sure you have seen the Chapter 70 allocations for each district as proposed by the Governor and Lieutenant Governor in their House One Budget Request for FY2002. These allocations are based on a series of proposals to improve the Chapter 70 formula, and incorporate a \$170.8 million increase in the statewide funding level. The allocations and a description of the proposed formula changes are posted on the Department of Education's school finance webpage at (<http://finance1.doe.mass.edu>). The complete calculations for the proposed Chapter 70 distributions, including the net school spending and minimum local requirements for each district, have been sent to the House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means. By statute we are required to wait thirty days before releasing these estimates to the public. On February 26 they will be posted on the DOE website and a printed copy will be mailed to you.

### School Construction

I have two items related to school construction. First, several of you have been asking about the recent announcement of a new federal grant program for urgent school renovations. Approximately \$16 million has been earmarked for Massachusetts. The timetable for accessing these funds and making them available to local districts has not been determined, and we will keep you informed. Second, we are looking for school districts interested in participating in a pilot program aimed at improving the energy efficiency of school building design. If you anticipate initiating design work on a school building project during the next twelve to eighteen months and would like further information, please contact Jeff Wulfson, Chief Financial Officer at [jwulfson@doe.mass.edu](mailto:jwulfson@doe.mass.edu).

### Distribution of Revised Mathematics Curriculum Frameworks

The Mathematics Curriculum Framework has been sent to all superintendents, principals and math coordinators. At this time, 30,000 additional copies are being printed, and a box containing several frameworks is being shipped to every public school this month. Contact [cucurry@doe.mass.edu](mailto:cucurry@doe.mass.edu) if your shipment has not been received by early March. In the meantime, the revised framework and all others are posted at [www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/](http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/).

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Listed below are 10 items recently posted:

1. Lt. Governor Jane Swift's Report "*The MCAS: Expanding Opportunities for All Students*"  
[ [HTML](#) ]
2. Federal Ed-Flex Waiver Authority is Renewed for Massachusetts  
[ **No longer available** ]
3. A: Streamlined Grants Application Process for 2002  
[ [PDF](#) ]

B: Opportunity to Participate in Online Grant Application Pilot Project  
[ **No longer available** ]

4. March 3 is Date for Special Session of Massachusetts Educator Certification Test  
[ [HTML](#) ]
5. Form Available to Request Waiver to Employ a Retired Teacher  
[ [PDF](#) ]
6. Regional Technology Conferences in Wilmington on March 27, Sheffield on March 29, Upton on April 3 and Sandwich on April 4  
[ [PDF](#) ]
7. Expanding Student Training Opportunities in Technology/Business  
[ [HTML](#) ]
8. Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSR D) Grant Workshops in Auburn on February 12, and Waltham on February 13. CSR D Grant Application Due on April 2  
[ [HTML](#) ]
9. George Washington Scholars Institute; Five MA Teachers, Grades 4-12, Eligible for Weeklong Summer Program at Mt. Vernon. Postmark Deadline is March 15  
[ [HTML](#) ]
10. Nominations for Earth Day Environmental Education Awards, contact [melissa.griffths@state.ma.us](mailto:melissa.griffths@state.ma.us). Deadline is February 26

All the best, and

Sincerely,

David P. Driscoll  
Commissioner of Education

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## Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

### The MCAS: Expanding Opportunities for All Students

#### A Strategy for Ensuring Educational Excellence

January 4, 2001

#### A Report to Governor Argeo Paul Cellucci Presented by Lieutenant Governor Jane Swift

Massachusetts is at a critical time in our Education Reform initiative. On the eve of the implementation of the MCAS graduation requirement, we will either meet the challenge of providing a solid education for every child, or retreat from the challenge and accept failure for thousands of our Commonwealth's children. This year's sophomore class, the class of 2003, will be the first class to undertake the high stakes aspect of the Education Reform Act. They must pass the English and mathematics MCAS as one part of the requirements to receive a high school diploma. As 10th-grade students prepare to take the MCAS in the spring, the state, school districts, parents and the business community must recommit to adequately preparing these students to succeed and to surpass the high standards we have set. It is our responsibility to ensure that they have access to the tools necessary to achieve on the MCAS, in their future studies, and in their careers.

Education Reform is an issue that greatly affects all of the citizens of Massachusetts, and it is crucial to the prosperity of our children and our Commonwealth that we develop and implement strategies which meet the needs of our students. In response to these challenges, throughout the summer and fall, I met with educators, students, business leaders, government officials, and community leaders. I have listened to the opinions and suggestions of many of the most informed groups in the state and have taken all of their recommendations into great consideration. I appreciate all of the time and energy that went into these recommendations. As a result of these valuable contributions, I have developed a comprehensive strategy to help tackle the challenge of high standards in the year 2001 and beyond.

#### [Introduction: The Massachusetts Education Reform Act - Striving for Excellence](#)

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## Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

### The MCAS: Expanding Opportunities for All Students

#### Introduction: The Massachusetts Education Reform Act - Striving for Excellence

The early 1990s marked a new beginning for Education Reform across the United States. In October of 1991, Governor William Weld announced the administration's proposals to establish academic standards with periodic testing to ensure accountability. A month later, the legislature offered its vision of reform. A summit was convened as the Weld-Cellucci and legislative initiatives closely paralleled one another. In June of 1992, a bill was filed which served as the vehicle for the landmark legislation, the Education Reform Act of 1993, which was signed a year after the filing. The goal of the Education Reform Act was to provide an education system that would give all children the opportunity to reach their full potential and to be contributors in an increasingly global and knowledge-based society. Education Reform raised the stakes for all Massachusetts public schools by setting new, higher expectations for student performance and making high school graduation contingent on meeting the challenge of the next century.

#### Unprecedented Financial Commitment

The first phase of Education Reform was to provide adequate funding in our urban, suburban and rural school districts. Since 1993, the state has invested more than \$22 billion in public education. With one of the most aggressive funding efforts in the country, we have more than leveled the playing field - urban districts such as Lawrence and Holyoke now spend more than suburban districts such as Belmont and Milton. This year, state government is spending more than \$3.9 billion in local schools - that is nearly two and one-half times what was spent eight years ago.

#### Developing Standards

As part of the Education Reform effort, the Board of Education developed curriculum frameworks for the core subjects specified in the Act (English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Technology, History and Social Science, Foreign Languages, the Arts) and Comprehensive Health. The frameworks established the standards for what students should know at particular stages of their education.

#### What is the MCAS?

The second phase of the reform effort was to implement the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) to hold districts accountable for raising standards and improving educational achievement. The MCAS is a criterion-referenced test aligned with curriculum frameworks standards and was designed to test whether students have learned the content and skills established in the frameworks. The comprehensive assessment system challenges students in the core subject areas specified in the Act. Students graduating in the class of 2003 - this year's 10th-graders - must pass the mathematics and English tests to receive a diploma.

The test is designed to improve student achievement by setting a necessary standard of education for all Massachusetts students, improving teaching and learning by targeting areas of weakness for individual students and teachers, and strengthening accountability in schools. The tests also provide a means for parents to monitor their children's progress.

The MCAS tests English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science & Technology, and History & Social Science. The test uses multiple-choice questions, short-answer questions, open-response questions, and writing prompts. Results are reported for individual students, schools, and districts according to four performance levels defined by the Board of Education: Advanced, Proficient, Needs Improvement, and Failing.

The MCAS is different from other standardized tests in two major ways. First, the MCAS is aligned to state curriculum frameworks. Many other states' tests and those used in Massachusetts in past years, are generic and not designed specifically for the state's standards and curriculum. Second, the MCAS has a large proportion of open-ended questions, as opposed to relying on only multiple-choice questions.

Content specialists who are also professional item writers employed by the state's testing contractor develop MCAS test questions with input from committees of Massachusetts classroom teachers and oversight from the Department of Education. Moreover, scholars evaluate all questions in the various content areas for accuracy, and a bias review committee examines all questions to ensure that no particular group is placed at a disadvantage by the questions for non-educational reasons.

Designers of the test were extremely meticulous in creating a test that was a fair, accurate assessment of student achievement. They constructed the test with four types of questions: multiple-choice, short answer, open response, and writing prompt. This use of different test item types allows the exam to better assess each student's level of knowledge than a wholly multiple-choice exam would allow.

The Bias Review Committee was assigned to review the test and make recommendations to edit questions, which may have been biased, i.e., content that is irrelevant to the curriculum being assessed that creates differences in subgroups of students' ability to correctly answer the question. The Committee also addressed sensitivity issues by recommending items be removed that might offend or distract students. All of these recommendations were taken into consideration to ensure that the test was as fair as possible. Finally, a Technical Advisory Committee of nationally recognized experts, including Dr. Ronald Hambleton, University of Massachusetts, Amherst; Dr. Barbara Plake, University of Nebraska; Dr. George Madaus, Boston College; Dr. Douglas Rindone, Connecticut Department of Education; and Dr. Roger Trent, Ohio Department of Education was utilized to ensure the technical integrity of the MCAS.

## Scoring the MCAS

The standard scoring system was developed in August of 1998 when 200 panelists were asked to assess the students' tests and categorize the resultant scores into one of four categories: Failing, Needs Improvement, Proficient, or Advanced. The panelists, who were mainly educators, were not given quotas of the number of tests to be placed in each category. This allowed for the achievement levels to be determined in the absence of any type of relative scale. The four categories are absolute and therefore allow for each student to score above the failing category. In other words, there is no bell curve, thereby allowing every student who meets the standard to pass the exam.

## MCAS Performance Level Definitions

Performance Level	Scaled Score	Description
Advanced	260-280	Students at this level demonstrate a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of rigorous subject matter and provide sophisticated solutions to complex problems.
Proficient	240-259	Students at this level demonstrate a solid understanding of challenging subject matter and solve a wide variety of problems.
Needs Improvement	220-239	Students at this level demonstrate a partial understanding of subject matter and solve some simple problems.
Failing	200-219	Students at this level demonstrate a minimal understanding of subject matter and do not solve simple problems.

## MCAS Test Results - How Students Have Fared Thus Far

The Education Reform Law requires the participation of all public school students in the grades being tested. This law ensures that all students are given the opportunity to learn the material covered by the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks academic learning standards. The Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act - Amendments of 1997 (IDEA-97) requires the full participation of students with disabilities in state- and district-wide testing programs. The intent of the requirement is to ensure that disabled students have access to the general curriculum offered. Private schools receiving public funds for special education and students who have limited English proficiency are also required to take the MCAS.

**1998-2000 Statewide MCAS Results: Grade 4***Average Scaled Score and Percentage of Students at Each Performance Level*

	<b>Year</b>	<b>Scaled Score</b>	<b>Advanced</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Needs Improvement</b>	<b>Failing</b>
English Language Arts	2000	231	1%	19%	67%	13%
	1999	231	0%	21%	67%	12%
	1998	230	1%	19%	66%	15%
Mathematics	2000	235	12%	28%	42%	18%
	1999	235	12%	24%	44%	19%
	1998	234	11%	23%	44%	23%
Science / Technology	2000	241	11%	51%	30%	8%
	1999	240	10%	46%	36%	9%
	1998	238	6%	42%	40%	12%

**1998-2000 Statewide MCAS Results: Grade 8***Average Scaled Score and Percentage of Students at Each Performance Level*

	<b>Year</b>	<b>Scaled Score</b>	<b>Advanced</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Needs Improvement</b>	<b>Failing</b>
English Language Arts	2000	240	5%	57%	27%	11%
	1999	238	3%	53%	31%	13%
	1998	237	3%	52%	31%	14%
Mathematics	2000	228	10%	24%	27%	39%
	1999	226	6%	22%	31%	40%
	1998	227	8%	23%	26%	42%
Science / Technology	2000	228	6%	29%	27%	37%
	1999	224	5%	23%	27%	45%
	1998	225	2%	26%	31%	41%
History / Social Science	2000	221	1%	10%	45%	45%
	1999	221	1%	10%	40%	49%
	1998	-	-	-	-	-

**1998-2000 Statewide MCAS Results: Grade 10***Average Scaled Score and Percentage of Students at Each Performance Level*

	<b>Year</b>	<b>Scaled Score</b>	<b>Advanced</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Needs Improvement</b>	<b>Failing</b>
English Language Arts	2000	229	7%	29%	30%	34%
	1999	229	4%	30%	34%	32%
	1998	230	5%	33%	34%	28%
Mathematics	2000	228	15%	18%	22%	45%
	1999	222	9%	15%	23%	53%
	1998	222	7%	17%	24%	52%
Science / Technology	2000	226	3%	23%	37%	37%
	1999	226	3%	21%	39%	38%
	1998	225	1%	21%	42%	36%



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# Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

## The MCAS: Expanding Opportunities for All Students

### Looking to the Future

More must be done to continue the Education Reform effort and to ensure that children are prepared to succeed in a knowledge-based world. This report contains findings and recommendations that examine issues concerning the MCAS test, and it offers ways to help school districts raise student performance.

### MCAS Myths: Eliminating Test Misconceptions

Myth 1 - The MCAS requires 15 to 20 hours of student examination time for each grade tested. False. The Department of Education has made substantial testing accommodations based on suggestions from educators that the testing time is excessive in the 4th, 8th and 10th grades. To continue to ensure that the test is comprehensive, many testing sections were not eliminated, but rather spread out over different grade levels. This year, students will be tested in the 3rd through 10th grades. Total testing times for each grade range from 2 hours and 10 minutes in the 3rd grade to 9 hours and 45 minutes in the 8th grade. For the younger grades, the Department of Education recommends that no more than two test sessions be administered in one day.

### Testing Time Blocks - Number and Length of Testing Sections for 2001 MCAS

Grade	Subject	Number of Sessions	Recommended Length of Sessions
3	ELA/Reading	3	50 minutes - 1 session 40 minutes - 2 sessions
4	ELA Composition	2	45 minutes per session
4	ELA Language and Literature	3	60 minutes per session
4	Math	2	60 minutes per session
5	History and Social Science	2	60 minutes per session
5	Science and Technology/Engineering	2	60 minutes per session
6	Math	3	45 minutes per session
7	ELA Composition	2	45 minutes per session
7	ELA Language and Literature	3	45 minutes per session
8	ELA Composition	2	45 minutes per session
8	ELA Language and Literature	2	45 minutes per session
8	Math	3	45 minutes per session
8	Science and Technology/Engineering	3	45 minutes per session

8	History and Social Science	3	45 minutes per session
9	Science and Technology/Engineering Tryouts	1	45 minutes per session
10	ELA Composition	2	45 minutes per session
10	ELA Language and Literature	3	45 minutes per session
10	Math	3	45 minutes per session
10	Science and Technology/Engineering Tryouts	1	45 minutes per session
10	History and Social Science	2	60 minutes per session

## Total Number of Sessions and Anticipated Length of Time by Grade for 2001 MCAS

Grade	Number of Sessions	Total Length of Test Time
3	3	2 hr. 10 min.
4	7	6 hr. 30 min.
5	4	4 hr.
6	3	2 hr. 15 min.
7	5	3 hr. 45 min.
8	13	9 hr. 45 min.
9	1	45 min.
10	11	8 hr. 45 min.

*Myth 2 - The MCAS is a strictly timed exam.*

False. The MCAS is not a strictly timed exam. The test times given by the Department of Education are suggested times necessary for test- planning purposes. The tests are designed to take place within the suggested time frames, and it is expected that most students will complete the test within the suggested time. However, schools may allow students to continue working if they have not completed the test within the suggested time frame.

*Myth 3 - The MCAS is the sole graduation requirement for Massachusetts students.*

False. Local school committees have many graduation requirements in place, including course, attendance and credit requirements.

*Myth 4 - Students have one chance to pass the MCAS exam in order to graduate.*

False. Students in the class of 2003 and beyond who fail the mathematics or the English language arts portion of the MCAS will have four additional opportunities before the end of 12th grade to retake the subject portion failed.

## Findings and Recommended Action - A Meaningful MCAS

### Finding 1

School districts are not receiving MCAS scores as quickly as they would like to ensure students receive the help they need.

### Recommended Action

The Department of Education must ensure that the MCAS test results are returned quickly so that identification and skill acceleration can happen immediately. The Department of Education is working on a plan to see if it will be possible for school districts to receive the multiple-choice test results before the end of the school year in which the test was administered. This would allow student assistance to begin before the next school year, beginning with this year's 10th-graders. This data must be provided in electronic format so that it is most useful for school districts.

### Finding 2

In 2003, students will be required to pass the mathematics and the English language arts portions of the MCAS to graduate. Students and parents are worried that those who do not pass the mathematics and the English MCAS in the 10th-grade will fall through the cracks of the education system.

#### **Recommended Action**

As announced in the Governor's State of Education Address, the Department of Education will provide multiple test opportunities for students who do not pass the mathematics or English portions of the MCAS on the first try in 10th-grade. Students will have four additional opportunities to retake the test prior to the end of 12th-grade. Students will only be required to retake the subject test that they do not pass.

At our request, the Board of Education will require schools to develop individual Student Success Plans for every student who fails the mathematics or English portion of the MCAS. These plans will identify the student's specific educational weaknesses and will provide a remediation plan to strengthen those academic areas. Schools will share the Student Success Plans with parents.

In addition, the Department of Education should update its Web page to include an interactive sample MCAS test accessible to students, parents and educators. The state is providing \$40 million this fiscal year for programs designed to accelerate students' skills. The state will also help to link tutors, mentors and other volunteers with schools and students who can use the involvement of a caring individual in students' lives.

If after the additional testing and skill acceleration opportunities some students are still unable to pass the English or mathematics MCAS by the end of 12th grade, the state public higher education system, at our direction, has committed to provide additional opportunities for students to improve their literacy and computation skills through the community colleges (see page 16 for more information on this initiative). No child will be abandoned, and no child will be given the disservice of a meaningless diploma without the knowledge and skills needed to lead a full and successful life.

#### **Finding 3**

Parents need to have easy access to information on the MCAS, the basis for the test, and the goal of the test to expand every child's opportunities.

#### **Recommended Action**

As announced in the State of Education Address, we are establishing regional Parent Resource Centers to support students and parents. Parent Resource Centers will be opened in several communities in February 2001. The first set of centers will open in existing Parent Information Centers in cities and towns across the state. The purpose of the centers is to provide resources for parents on how they can be involved with improving student achievement in the classroom by working with their students at home. Additional centers will follow in easily accessible locations, including local businesses and libraries, where parents will be able to pick up information. The Resource Centers will provide helpful information on the test, including sample questions and information on the curriculum frameworks. Parents can also receive information on where they can access additional help for their children.

In October, we communicated directly with the parents of 75,000 10th-grade students across the state through an informational letter. The letter provided information on the test, test preparation tips and where additional information and help could be accessed. This informational letter is also posted on the Department of Education's and the Governor's Office Web pages. The letter is also posted in Spanish, and a Spanish version of the letter was mailed to all principals.

#### **Finding 4**

As exists for other high stakes exams, there should be a technical appeals process for students who score within a couple of points of passing who believe that their exams may have been incorrectly scored.

#### **Recommended Action**

The Board of Education should institute a technical appeals process for students who score within one standard of error deviation (4 points) of the passing level on the 10th-grade MCAS and believe that their exams were mis-scored. Such reviews should be approved by the Commissioner on the basis of a written request submitted by the student's superintendent and principal. Reviews should be conducted by a trained panel of scorers, following the same guidelines and rubrics governing the original scoring process. The process would include a re-read of the exam in question by the technical appeals panel.

#### **Finding 5**

There are over 20 test accommodations for special education students. These special education

accommodations have not been widely publicized and are still largely unknown to parents and to some educators.

#### **Recommended Action**

Special education accommodations include changes in the timing or scheduling of the test, the test setting, test presentation and how the student responds to test questions. The Department of Education hosted a series of workshops and informational sessions this fall for special education teachers to explain both special education accommodations and alternative assessment practices. In addition, the Department of Education should continue to be flexible with the list of accommodations used and continue to expand the list as appropriate.

#### **Finding 6**

There are three potential issues that may arise with the granting of special education testing accommodations. First, a school may not provide or be able to provide an allowable accommodation to a special education student. Second, the Individual Education Plan (IEP) TEAM may identify an accommodation for a student that is not allowed by the Department. Third, some non-special education students may request testing accommodations.

#### **Recommended Action**

The Department of Education should review and expand the list of allowable testing accommodations for special needs students to ensure that each student is given a fair opportunity to demonstrate whether he or she can meet the standard of knowledge and skill necessary for high school graduation. In addition, the Board of Education should establish a regional appeals process to review whether special needs students who failed to meet the graduation standard were given adequate accommodations by their district.

In order to ensure equity and to avoid creating new incentives to refer students unnecessarily into special education, the Board of Education should establish a similar appeals process for non-special needs students. Such a process would allow non-special needs students who fail to meet the MCAS passing standard in English and/or mathematics by their senior year to request accommodations comparable to those available to special needs students. The Department of Education should work with teams of practicing educators and assessment specialists to develop guidelines for evaluating such appeals, defining criteria for approving specific accommodations and modifying rubrics for assessing performance, where necessary.

#### **Finding 7**

Some special education students may not be capable, due to a specific disability, to achieve a passing score on the Mathematics and English Language Arts MCAS, but they may achieve the goals of their special education Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

#### **Recommended Action**

The Board of Education should recognize these students for their accomplishments with a state-endorsed certificate of IEP completion. To achieve the certificate, the students must be able to demonstrate to the satisfaction of local or regional evaluators that they have substantially achieved the educational goals of their IEPs. The certificate would not be a diploma and therefore would not automatically enable students' admittance to college.

#### **Finding 8**

The science MCAS covers multiple subjects, some of which students will not study by the 10th-grade. The science test assesses an integrated science curriculum for 9th and 10th-grade. Many districts continue to teach science by discrete subject rather than in an integrated manner. In addition, there is little agreement on the sequence of science subjects taught in high school.

#### **Recommended Action**

The Department of Education should develop end-of-course science MCAS exams for school districts that choose to use them. The revised Science and Technology/Engineering curriculum framework includes learning standards for each of the science disciplines (physics, chemistry, earth science, and biology) and engineering/technology, in separate sections, and a section with standards from all four science disciplines designating a two-year integrated science sequence for grades 9-10. High schools should have the option of using the integrated test or the discipline-specific tests. The Board of Education should work to implement the science test changes over the next three years to continue to allow school districts to focus on the educational building blocks - English and mathematics during the early years of high stakes testing.

**Finding 9**

The History and Social Science exam has been criticized as overly expansive. The 10th-grade History and Social Science test emphasizes world history from 500 A.D. to present.

**Recommended Action**

The Department of Education should continue to administer the history exam but will only report item analysis results. Scaled scores and student performance levels should not be reported until we are confident that schools have had enough time to align their curricula to the framework. This approach would provide data to schools to evaluate curriculum and instruction. However, because no performance level scores are reported, it allows schools to focus on preparing students for the English Language Arts and Mathematics tests, which beginning this spring will count towards earning a competency determination.

Although students beginning with the class of 2003 need to pass only the English and Mathematics MCAS exams and fulfill their local school district requirements to graduate, the Education Reform Act requires that additional subjects be included in the graduation requirement. Over the next few years, the Board of Education will determine when these additional subject tests will be required for graduation. In this process, the Board of Education should redefine the future 10th-grade history graduation requirement to one that is focused on American history and civics rather than on world history from 500 A.D. to present. Although a comprehensive knowledge of world history is important, it must be our first priority for every student to leave high school with an understanding of our nation's history and government so that they may be informed participants in our democracy. A narrower history requirement based on American history and civics should be administered as an end-of-course exam to students upon completion of a high school American history class.

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## Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

### The MCAS: Expanding Opportunities for All Students

#### Conclusion

MCAS is a powerful tool to measure student achievement and to raise the standard of learning for children across the Commonwealth. With high standards and the accountability inherent in MCAS, for the first time, there is a uniform standard of achievement. We know what each and every child must learn. We also know which children are struggling, and we have developed a variety of resources - remediation programs, student success plans, and other tools - to help them to achieve.

We have seen pockets of improvement on the MCAS test, but the results have been far below our ultimate goals. During the most difficult phase of Education Reform, when we see schools underperforming, it is imperative that we persevere and focus our efforts on ensuring that children get over the bar.

I designed the recommendations in this report to help ensure that every child has a fair chance to learn and to excel on the MCAS, has the support necessary to achieve, and through achievement, will have greater opportunities to continue his or her education or enter the working world.

We will help ensure fairness with several of these recommendations, such as by offering 10th-graders multiple chances to retake the MCAS, promoting greater awareness of accommodations for special education students, creating a technical appeals and accommodations appeals process and focusing on narrowing the achievement gap of minority students.

We will support students in need by allowing the flexible use of MCAS remediation money in exchange for district improvement, providing continuing pathways for students who need additional time to achieve, and by continuing to empower parents to become more involved in their children's education with regional resource centers. We are also creating ten pilot tutoring programs in the state, which will help build on the many successful mentoring and tutoring initiatives that are providing children with positive individuals who will take an interest in their lives and their education.

In 1993, the Commonwealth and school districts made a pact - the Commonwealth would provide billions of additional dollars in education aid and school districts would use the funding to improve education. To measure that improvement, the Commonwealth would implement a test for all students to ensure that they were receiving the education they need and deserve. The Commonwealth has held up its end of the bargain. It is now time to ensure that students receive the education they deserve.

We would like to thank the following individuals for meeting with us. It should be noted that these individuals voiced a wide variety of opinions and nothing in this report should be viewed as their endorsement of these recommendations.

- Representative Lida Harkins
- Jeff Nellhaus and Kit Viator, Department of Education
- Superintendent Russell Dever and Assistant Superintendent Andre Ravenelle of Barnstable
- Maura Banta, Doreen Bilezikian, Ralph Bradburd, Katharine Bradbury, Alan Day, Thomas Hollister, Gary Klencheski, Carmel Shields, Steven Sullivan, and Karyn Wilson of the Workforce

- Development Committee of the Governor's Economic Development Council
- Chairman James Peyser, Board of Education
  - Senator Robert Antonioni
  - Commissioner David Driscoll, Department of Education
  - Superintendent William Travis, Principal Lee Steele, and Deputy Superintendent Mike Zapantis, Pittsfield
  - Richard Couch, Chair of the Education Department, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts
  - Superintendent Basan Nembirkow, Greenfield
  - Senator Dianne Wilkerson
  - South Shore Chamber of Commerce Education Committee
  - Superintendent James Caradonio, Worcester
  - Ross Edminster, Superintendent Irene Kaplan and the Hanson Middle School Camp PLUS students, Whitman-Hanson Regional School District
  - Superintendent Robert Neely and Marge Condon, Fall River
  - Chairman Stephen Tocco, Board of Higher Education
  - Joanne Blum and Edward Sullivan, Massachusetts Teachers Association
  - Bill Guenther and Andy Calkins, Mass Insight
  - Theresa Benedetti and the students of Project Advance at Elms College
  - Eileen Kirk and the students of Step Ahead and Step Forward at Elms College
  - Superintendent Charles Lyons, Assistant Superintendent John McDermott, Frank Hallice, and the students of Shawsheen Vocational Technical School's summer program
  - James Coats, Kids Energy.net
  - Cathy Minehan, Federal Reserve Bank
  - Neil Sullivan, Boston Private Industry Council
  - Eugene Thayer and Superintendent Wilfredo Laboy of Lawrence
  - Gloria Larson and John Rennie, Co-chairs of the Coalition for Higher Standards
  - Tripp Jones, MassInc
  - Massachusetts Secondary School Association
  - Ann Southworth, Principal of Putnam Vocational Technical School, Springfield
  - Mayor Dean Mazzarella of Leominster, Mayor Mary Whitney of Fitchburg, Mayor Edward Lambert of Fall River, Mayor Thomas Menino of Boston, and Mayor William Scanlon of Beverly
  - Joseph Bevilacqua, President of the Massachusetts Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives
  - Nancy Stinger, President, Lynn Ryan, Past President, Glenn Koocher, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees
  - Paul Abraham, Chair of the Department of Education and Human Services at Simmons College
  - Mary Brabeck, Dean of the School of Education at Boston College
  - George Madaus, Arnold Shore, and Marguerite Clarke of the Center for the Study of Testing, Evaluation, and Education Policy at Boston College
  - Stephen Gorrie, President of the Massachusetts Teachers Association
  - Rick Lord, President and Andre Mayer of the Associated Industries of Massachusetts
  - Harold Lane, Executive Director and Paul Reville of the Alliance for Education
  - Chris Martes, Executive Director, Phillip Devaux, President, and Gerry Croteau of the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents
  - Bill Ederly, Founder of the Partnership for Better Schools
  - Tom Payzant, Superintendent, Boston
  - Steve Wilson, Founder and President of Advantage Schools
  - George Bachrach, Strategic Alliance and Marketing Consultant for Tutor.com
  - Clare Cotton, President, and Roger Sullivan, VP of Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Massachusetts
  - Jerry Goldberg, Superintendent, Natick
  - Tyler Fairbank, President of Mass Excellence
  - Paul Livingston, Superintendent, Walpole
  - Peter Koch, VP of the National Business Alliance
  - Howard Horton, President, Sylvia Reisler, Academic Dean, and Susan Heffron, Marketing Director of Bay State College
  - Andre John, Counselor at Ella J. Baker House
  - Ann Noble-Kiley, Executive Director and Chris Esmonde, Board Member, Boston
  - Partners in Education
  - Faculty and students of Putnam Vocational Technical School in Springfield
  - Alfred Skrocki, Superintendent, Adams/Cheshire Public Schools
  - Superintendent Philip Fallon, Principal Bernard Welsh and the students and faculty of Fitchburg High School
  - Principal Joseph Ruscio and the students and faculty of Newton Elementary School in Greenfield
  - Superintendent Mark Smith, Principal Ralph Olsen, Math Department Head Paul Maiorano, and the students and faculty of Framingham High School
  - Principal Thomas Petray and Pixie Hollbrook and the students of the Robert K. Finn School in Northampton
  - Lowell School Committee, and Superintendent Karla Brooks Baehr of Lowell

- Senator Steven Panagiotakos
- Representative David Nangle
- Representative Thomas Golden
- Representative Kevin Murphy
- Principal Pamela Simpkins, Assistant Principal Marianne Bond, and the students and faculty of the S. Christa McAuliffe Elementary School in Lowell
- Principal Kerry Gillis and the students and faculty of the Varnum School in Lowell
- Principal Patricia Graves, School Committee Member Karen McDonald, and the students and faculty of Barnstable High School
- Interim Superintendent Carol Kelly, Mayor Daniel Kelly, Principal Margaret Doyle, and the faculty and students of the Helen Mae Sauter Elementary School in Gardner
- Mayor Michael Sullivan, Principal Jeffrey Ferreira, and the students and faculty of Kelly Elementary School in Holyoke
- Principal Mary Russo, Milken Educator Elaine Swain, and the students and faculty of Murphy Elementary School in Dorchester
- Principal and Milken Educator Mary Meade-Montague and the students and faculty of Roosevelt Elementary School in Worcester
- Principal Stephen Fortin, Milken Educator Holli Armstrong, and the students and faculty of Old Post Road Elementary School in Walpole
- Superintendent Charles Littlefield, Assistant Superintendent Arthur Nicholson, Principal Richard Raiche, and the students and faculty of Methuen Comprehensive Grammar School
- Principal Paula Mullen, Brad Simpson, and the students and faculty of Galvin Middle School in Wakefield
- Superintendent Edward Costa and Principal Kathleen Hill of Birchland Park Middle School in East Longmeadow
- Superintendent Jo Ann Austin, Principal Brian Abdallah, School Committee Chairman Scott Lazo, and the students and faculty of Mary E. Wells Junior High in Southbridge
- Superintendent Marilyn Fratturelli, Principal Diane Carreiro, and the students and faculty of the Northwest School in Leominster
- Dean Krishna Vedula of the Francis College of Engineering at UMASS Lowell and Founder, Engineering in Mass Collaborative
- Chris Anderson, Massachusetts High Tech Council
- Chairman Ray Stata, Analog Devices, Inc.
- Commissioner Robert Gittens, Department of Youth Services
- James Stakenas, VP for Administration & Finance, John Frazee, VP for Academic Affairs, Thomas Aceto, President, Scott Kalicki, Dean of Students, and Ellen Kennedy, Chief Advancement Officer of Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts
- Principal Mary Murphy and the students and faculty of Henry Whittemore School in Waltham
- Mayor Peter Torigian, Acting Superintendent Michael Ippolito, Principal Helen Apostolidis, Mrs. Casella, and the students and faculty of the William E. Welch Elementary School in Peabody
- Leo Klagholtz, Former Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Education
- Superintendent Michael Janelli, Principal Albert Gibbons, Principal Thomas Lynch, Mrs. Rush, School
- Committee Members, and the students and faculty of Delaney School, Roderick School, and Vogel School in Wrentham
- Principal Manual Narciso and the students and faculty of the Hugo A. Dubuque Elementary School in Fall River
- Principal Allan Osborne, Assistant Principal Bob Limoncelli, Literacy Coordinator Margaret MacNeil, and the students and faculty of Snug Harbor Community School in Quincy
- Mayor Richard Kos, Superintendent Barbara Cove, Principal Stanley Kozikowski, Mr. Stefan Czaporowski, and the students and faculty of Chicopee Comprehensive High School in Chicopee
- Mayor Frederick Kalisz Jr., Principal Arthur Dutra, and the students and faculty of John Hannigan School in New Bedford
- Several Members of the Massachusetts Legislature
- Superintendent Mike Smith of South Hadley
- President John DiBiaggio and Jack Brennan of Tufts University
- Superintendent Donald Nicoletti, Principal Nancy Bouthilette, and the students and faculty of Russell Elementary School
- Principal Rose Marie Di Resta and the students and faculty of the Riverside School in Danvers
- Dave Cappellucci, President & CEO and Laurie Burke, VP of Marketing for the Classwell Learning Group
- Sean Curran, Senior Director, and Anne Murphy, Vice President of GPC/O'Neill & Associates

I would like to especially thank Jill Reynolds, Michael Sentance, James Peyser, David Driscoll, Alan Safran, Jeffrey Nellhaus, Judith Gill and all of the other Governor's Office, Department of Education and Board of Education staff who worked so hard over the past months to complete this report.



# Grants and Other Financial Assistance Programs: FY2001

## FY02 Grants Update

### Memorandum

**To:** Superintendents and Other Interested Parties  
**From:** David P. Driscoll, Commissioner of Education  
**Date:** February 1, 2001

In response to your recommendations to improve our grant procedures, I am pleased to let you know that we are making substantial improvements to our grants application process. Beginning with the upcoming grant cycle we plan to:

- Issue the main **entitlement/allocation** grant book in late February rather than late April, providing more time to review and coordinate program activities across the district. We also hope to provide districts with preliminary grant allocation amounts at that time. Estimates are subject to change.
- Send **continuation and other non-competitive** grant applications directly to the eligible applicants instead of including them in the grant package that goes to all districts. All continuation and other non-competitive grant RFPs will be posted on our [Website](#), as usual.
- Permit a "rolling submission" period for **entitlement/allocation/continuation/other non-competitive grants**. By setting start and end dates for submitting applications throughout the spring, we hope to relax the traditional deadline rush in June.
- Establish "staggered" submission dates for **competitive grants** to allow districts some time relief if applying for several grant opportunities. We will also review grants to see if some can be combined in order to reduce the number of proposals districts must develop. Where possible, awards will be multi-year, subject to annual appropriation. We anticipate beginning to issue competitive grant RFPs in early April.
- Review application information requirements and reduce them where possible. We will also review restrictions on the use of funding, in particular for grant programs with small funding amounts.
- Have all applications returned directly to the specific program units instead of to one central address. This will allow for a quicker distribution of grant applications to readers and a quicker turnaround of grant approvals.
- Set up a pilot project for *online* submissions via e-mail to dedicated mailboxes that will be established for each Department unit awarding grants.

## Online Grant Application Pilot Project

We are seeking 15-20 districts to participate in the Online Grant Application Pilot Project. The selected districts will submit their entitlement, allocation, continuation and other non-competitive grant applications to the Department via email. The Pilot will not include applications for competitive grants. We would like to include large and small districts from throughout the state. We also would like to include districts using MACs and those using PCs.

If you are interested in participating in the Pilot, please return the attached form [ [PDF](#) ] or [ [WORD](#) ] by March 1, 2001. Depending on the results of this Pilot Project, we will consider expanding this filing option to all districts for FY03.

If you have questions about any of these procedures, please contact Carole Thomson, Associate Commissioner for Education Program Services, at 781-338-6201.

[Commissioner's Update Archive](#)

## Massachusetts Educator Certification Test Special March 3, 2001 Session

**To:** Superintendents, and Leaders of Charter Schools and Collaboratives

**From:** David P. Driscoll

**Date:** February 1, 2001

A special session of the Massachusetts Educator Certification Test will be held for Finalists for the Massachusetts Signing Bonus Program for New Teachers. Additional seats may be available for certification candidates whom superintendents want to hire before the start of school in September. **The date of the special administration of the certification test is Saturday, March 3, 2001 at Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School, and the deadline for registration begins on February 5, 2001 and ends on February 23, 2001.**

Candidates for certification may take this special March 3 test only on the recommendation of their superintendents. A referral letter including candidates' names and telephone numbers, as well as what subject the candidate will become certified in to teach in September needs to be faxed to the attention of Minerva Rodriguez, MECT, (781)338-3391 before instructions on how to register can be given to the candidate. Scores will be sent on or about March 23, 2001.

Please contact Minerva Rodriguez at (781) 338-6668 for more information.

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# Request for Waiver

Of Certification Requirements  
For Purposes of Employing a Retired Teacher  
*Regulation 603 CMR 7.03 (2)(b)*

<i>School District</i>	<i>Proposed Effective Date of Employment</i>
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*The above school district seeks to employ a retired teacher due to a critical shortage of certified teachers.*

Please indicate the Field(s) and Grade Level(s) for this teacher:	This request is (please check one):  <input type="checkbox"/> Initial Waiver <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal
---	---

Teacher Information
Last Name: _____ First Name: _____
Social Security #: _____ - _____ - _____      Date of Birth: ____ / ____ / ____
Address (street, city or town, state, zip): _____
Effective Date of Retirement: ____ / ____ / ____
<i>NOTE: In the first two years immediately following the effective date of retirement, the teacher's earnings, including pension or retirement allowance, cannot exceed the salary that is being paid for the position from which he was retired or in which his employment was terminated.</i>

District Information
School(s): _____
Contact Person: _____ Title: _____
Mailing Address (street, state, zip): _____
e-mail address: _____
Telephone: (    ) _____ - _____      FAX#: (    ) _____ - _____

### Evidence of Critical Shortage

The district must demonstrate that a good faith effort was made to hire certified personnel who have not retired. For this purpose, please attach any and all documentation of actions to recruit a certified and qualified person for this position. Such documentation should include, where applicable:

- 1) Promotional materials, such as internal postings, newspaper advertisements, internet postings, mailings to placement offices, etc.
- 2) List of certified candidates who declined this position AND documentation as to why any certified applicants were not qualified to perform the duties of this position.

NOTE: The period of critical shortage cannot exceed one year. If the district seeks to renew the request, new evidence must be provided with each request.

### Superintendent's Request

I certify by my signature below that I have made a good-faith effort to hire personnel who have not retired and have been unable to find qualified applicants for this position. Based on the evidence attached, I request that my district be deemed to have a critical shortage of certified teachers in this field.

Superintendent Signature

Date

*NOTE: The Commissioner will notify the Teachers' Retirement Board of each determination of a critical shortage.*

Please return this request, along with all supporting documentation to:

The Office of Educator Quality  
Massachusetts Department of Education  
350 Main Street  
Malden, MA 02148  
FAX: 781-338-3391

For assistance, please contact Tricia Federico at 781-338-3235  
or Tfederico@doe.mass.edu



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# Regional Technology Conferences

**To:** Superintendents, Principals, Technology Directors, Curriculum Directors, and other Interested Parties

**From:** David P. Driscoll, Commissioner of Education

**Date:** February 1, 2001

The Massachusetts Department of Education is sponsoring four free [regional technology conferences](#) to provide an opportunity for educators to learn from each other about educational technology.

The purpose of these conferences is to showcase effective models of teaching by Massachusetts classroom teachers. Participants will have an opportunity to attend exhibits and presentations of statewide initiatives and classroom projects using technology. They will be able to:

- learn about using technology to meet the Standards of the Curriculum Frameworks
- discover new Internet resources
- network with their peers
- take home new ideas and projects about technology integration
- obtain valuable information about Technology Grants for 2001

Four [conferences](#) will be held across the state:

- Tuesday, March 27 - Wilmington Middle School, Wilmington
- Thursday, March 29 - Mt. Everett Regional High School, Sheffield
- Tuesday, April 3 - Nipmuc Regional Middle/High School, Upton
- Wednesday, April 4 - Sandwich High School, Sandwich

Please help us publicize these conferences by posting the [enclosed poster](#) in an area or room of your school that educators gather regularly. If you need additional posters, please contact Kim Arevalo at 781-338-6886.

[Register Now](#)

[Commissioner's Update Archive](#)

## Training Students in Advanced Technology and Business Skills

### Memorandum

**To:** Superintendents of Schools and other Interested Parties

**From:** David P. Driscoll, Commissioner of Education

**Date:** February 1, 2001

This memorandum is about new services available to districts that are interested in training students in advanced technology and business skills through service projects that support schools' technology needs. The Department of Education recognizes that high school students, when properly trained and supervised, provide valuable technology services to districts. Students can troubleshoot computers and networks, design websites, and provide individual support to teachers in how to use the technology in their classrooms. By providing such opportunities, schools help prepare students for careers in the 21st century and improve their computer support staff to computer ratio in the process.

In December 2000, the Massachusetts Department of Education awarded a contract to Youth Tech Entrepreneurs (YTE) to address additional school districts' needs in developing programs where students provide technology services for their schools. YTE is expanding its portfolio of services to include professional development and onsite consulting. YTE's integrated services help districts expand their IT course offerings and improve their computer support staff to computer ratio.

Founded in 1997, YTE builds community leaders by developing students' academic, business, and information technology skills. YTE currently works with eight school districts across Massachusetts to help them develop programs that focus on academic skills-building, preparation for industry certification exams, and hands-on business experience through community-focused computer projects.

Students take YTE as an academic class every day as well as provide up to 50 hours a year of after-school service learning related to information technology. In four school districts during 1999-2000, YTE students taught computer skills to over 300 people, fixed hundreds of computers, designed five websites, and built seven computer labs.

YTE is currently expanding to several select districts throughout the state. For more information about these services, consult the YTE website at <http://www.yte.org> or contact Dee Blake, YTE Director of School Services, at [dblake@yte.org](mailto:dBlake@yte.org) or 781-526-1320.

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## Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) Program

### Memorandum

**To:** Superintendents, Charter School Leaders, Title I Directors in Districts with Low Performing Title I Schools

**From:** David P. Driscoll, Commissioner of Education

**Date:** January 30, 2001

We are pleased to announce that Massachusetts will again be receiving federal funds to support the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program (CSRD). These funds will be distributed on a competitive basis, with priority given to high poverty schools exhibiting low student achievement. Although all public school districts are eligible to apply, the greatest portion of CSRD funding must be directed to Title I eligible schools. Based on this year's estimated allocation, we expect to be able to fund approximately 60 new CSRD schools that will each receive a minimum of \$50,000 a year for a maximum of three years.

If you need any additional information, please call David Buchanan, CSRD Grant Coordinator at (781) 338-6235.

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## Announcement of the George Washington Scholars Institute

### Memorandum

**To:** Superintendents, Principals, and Teachers  
**From:** David P. Driscoll, Commissioner of Education  
**Date:** January 31, 2001

I am pleased to announce an exciting opportunity for five Massachusetts teachers from public and non-public schools, teaching in grade four through twelve. George Washington's Mount Vernon is hosting an educational program for teachers, the George Washington Scholars Institute. The Institute will provide a one-week study program at George Washington's home, Mount Vernon, in northern Virginia.

The Institute's weeklong program will provide an intensive immersion study of George Washington and his world. The curriculum includes discussions led by noted Washington scholars and hands-on workshops exploring Washington's life and interests at Mount Vernon. Participating teachers will have full access to Mount Vernon's extensive library collection, will meet with Mount Vernon's historians, curators, and educators, as will visit related sites in Washington D.C. and Washington's hometown of Alexandria, Virginia. Through study, discussion, tours, and projects, participants will gain a new and deeper understanding of the life and character of George Washington and his unique legacy in creating and shaping the principles of America's democracy.

The requirements and application for the Institute are [attached](#). These materials can also be found on our website. Please make multiple copies of the application and related materials, distribute them throughout your system, and use any other methods that will help to make this institute material accessible to the teachers in your district. Completed applications need to be postmarked by March 15, 2001. I urge you to encourage the teachers in your school system to apply for this unique opportunity.

The George Washington Scholars Institute is made possible thanks to the generous support of a Massachusetts foundation in cooperation with George Washington's Mount Vernon and the Massachusetts Department of Education.

If you have questions regarding the application process, please call Deborah Walker at 781-338-3347 or email [djwalker@doe.mass.edu](mailto:djwalker@doe.mass.edu).

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