



David P. Driscoll  
Commissioner of Education

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## Commissioner's Update

December 6, 2004








Dear Superintendents, and Leaders of Charter Schools and Collaboratives:

I have just 1 announcement and 6 items in this update for your review at [www.doe.mass.edu](http://www.doe.mass.edu).

### "Do Not Resuscitate" Orders

In response to requests from several Massachusetts school districts, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health has issued guidelines for the care of students with Comfort Care/Do Not Resuscitate orders. The guidelines are included in the attached [memo from the Department of Public Health](#) to school nurses and school physicians, dated November 30, 2004. We hope these health care guidelines will assist you and your school staff in dealing with these difficult situations. For more information, please contact the Department of Public Health.

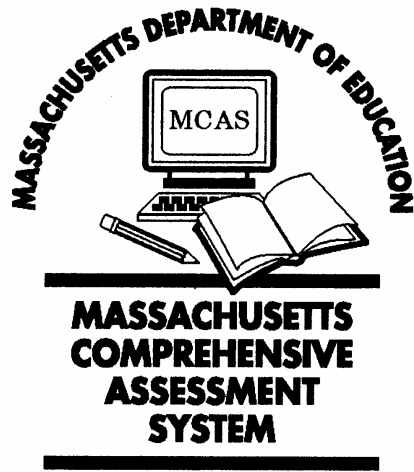
Here are 6 items posted at [www.doe.mass.edu](http://www.doe.mass.edu):

1. Requirements for the Participation of Students with Disabilities in MCAS (Spring 2005 Update)  
 
2. Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA) Standard Setting Panels  

3. Application Subsidies for National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Certification  

4. Request for Proposals (RFP) for the 2005 Content Institute Program  

5. MCAS Score Request Tool  

6. Board in Brief, a Summary of the November 2004 Meeting of the Board of Education  


All the best, and

Sincerely,

David P. Driscoll  
Commissioner of Education



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Spring 2005 Update

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*Requirements for  
the Participation of  
Students with Disabilities  
in MCAS*

*Including Test Accommodations  
and Alternate Assessment*

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**A Guide for Educators and Parents**

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# Massachusetts Department of Education

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This document was prepared by the Massachusetts Department of Education.  
Dr. David P. Driscoll, Commissioner of Education

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## *Commissioner's Foreword*

Dear Colleagues:

I am pleased to provide an updated version of *Requirements for the Participation of Students with Disabilities in MCAS*. This document provides guidelines for the participation of students with disabilities in the MCAS tests, and includes a list of commonly used test accommodations. To assist the Department in tracking the use of individual accommodations, **please review the list of accommodations carefully and note that the numbers of many of the test accommodations have been changed.**

As is true for *all* students, those students with disabilities who receive a challenging curriculum based on the *Curriculum Frameworks* are more likely to perform well on MCAS. MCAS test scores for Massachusetts students with disabilities continue to rise, an indication that more students are receiving such a curriculum. Therefore, I encourage you to address goals for each student in reading, math, and other content areas, as appropriate, in the annual review of each student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

I appreciate the role you have played in advancing student performance.

Sincerely,

David P. Driscoll  
Commissioner of Education

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## APPENDICES

Appendix A: Advisory on Test Accommodations #16 and #26 - Reading MCAS Tests Aloud to a Small Group of Students

Appendix B: Acknowledgments

# I. Overview of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)

## A. Background

The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) measures the performance of students, schools, and districts on the academic learning standards in the Massachusetts *Curriculum Frameworks*. It was developed to fulfill the requirements of the Education Reform Law of 1993. The fundamental goal of education reform is to improve student performance.

All students, including students with disabilities, are required to participate in all MCAS tests scheduled for their grades.<sup>1</sup> Students with significant disabilities who are unable to take the standard MCAS tests, even with accommodations, must take the MCAS Alternate Assessment (MCAS-Alt).

## B. High School Competency Determination

In order to graduate from high school, students are required to earn a Competency Determination by passing the grade 10 MCAS tests in *English Language Arts* and *Mathematics* at a scaled score of 220 or higher. Students must also meet all local graduation requirements. Students who fail either or both tests are offered multiple opportunities to participate in MCAS *Retests*.

Meeting the state's graduation requirement through the MCAS Alternate Assessment is discussed in chapter V of this document.

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<sup>1</sup> LEP students in their first year of enrollment in U.S. schools have the option, but are not required, to participate in *Reading* and *English Language Arts* tests for their grades. These students, however, **are** required to participate in *Mathematics* and *Science and Technology/Engineering Tests* for their grades.

## II. Spring 2005 MCAS Test and Question Tryout Schedule

Students will be tested in the grades and subjects shown in the following table.

Students with disabilities in **ungraded** programs must take assessments in the same subjects as those taken by their non-disabled peers at the equivalent chronological age.

**Table 1:  
Subject Tests and Question Tryouts  
MCAS Spring 2005**

Grade	Subject Tested	Question Tryout*
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mathematics Question Tryout</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English Language Arts</li> <li>• Mathematics</li> </ul>	
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Science and Technology/ Engineering</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading Question Tryout</li> <li>• Math Question Tryout</li> <li>• History and Social Science Question Tryout</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mathematics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading Question Tryout</li> </ul>
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English Language Arts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mathematics Question Tryout</li> <li>• History and Social Science Question Tryout</li> </ul>
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mathematics</li> <li>• Science and Technology/Engineering</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading Question Tryout</li> </ul>
9	End-of-Course Pilot Tests* in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introductory Physics</li> <li>• Technology/Engineering</li> </ul>	
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English Language Arts</li> <li>• Mathematics</li> </ul> End of Course Pilot Tests* in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biology</li> <li>• Chemistry</li> <li>• Introductory Physics</li> <li>• Technology/Engineering</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• U.S. History Question Tryout (grades 10 and 11)</li> </ul>
11 and 12	Retests (offered Nov. 2005 and Mar. 2006) in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English Language Arts</li> <li>• Mathematics</li> </ul>	

\* Students participating in the MCAS Alternate Assessment are not required to take **Question Tryouts** for Reading, Math, or History and Social Science, or **High School End-of-Course Pilot Tests** in Biology, Chemistry, Introductory Physics, or Technology/Engineering. Also, there are no large print, Braille, or text reader software versions of the Question Tryouts.

### III. Participation of Students with Disabilities in MCAS

#### A. Definition of a Student with a Disability

For purposes of MCAS and other statewide tests, a student with a disability has either an Individualized Education Program (IEP) provided under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* or a plan provided under *Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973*.

The student must be engaged in an instructional program guided by the standards in the Massachusetts *Curriculum Frameworks*.

#### B. MCAS Participation Requirements for Students with Disabilities

The Massachusetts *Education Reform Law* mandates that *all* students with disabilities who are educated with Massachusetts public funds participate in MCAS, including

- students enrolled in public schools
- students enrolled in charter schools
- students enrolled in educational collaboratives
- students enrolled in approved private special education schools within and outside Massachusetts
- students enrolled in unapproved private schools
- students receiving educational services in institutional settings
- students in the custody of the Department of Social Services
- students in the custody of the Department of Youth Services

Students with disabilities must take grade-level tests. Students in ungraded classrooms must take tests at the grade that is equivalent to their chronological age.

##### *Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students with Disabilities*

LEP students with disabilities must participate in all MCAS tests given at their grade level, regardless of their years in the U.S. or planned enrollment in regular instructional programs the following year. For further information regarding the participation of LEP students with disabilities in MCAS testing and in the Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA), including circumstances under which an LEP student may be excused from testing, please refer to *Requirements for the Participation of Students with Limited English Proficiency in State-Mandated Assessments*. This document is available on the Department's website at [www.mass.doe.edu/mcas](http://www.mass.doe.edu/mcas).

#### C. Determining How Students with Disabilities Will Participate in MCAS

During its annual meeting, a student's IEP Team or 504 team must determine how that student will participate in MCAS for each subject scheduled for assessment in the coming year. This information, including any accommodations that a student will use, **must** be documented in the student's IEP and should also be documented, when appropriate, in the student's 504 plan. Guidelines to assist teams in making participation decisions for individual students appear on the following pages.

## D. Communicating Resource and Other Testing Needs to the Principal

Prior to MCAS testing, the IEP Team or 504 team chairperson must inform the school principal of which students, if any, will require test accommodations, and the specific accommodation(s), resources, and/or space that each student will need.

## E. MCAS Participation Guidelines

The following guidelines are intended to assist IEP Teams and 504 teams as they make decisions regarding how each student with a disability will participate in MCAS.

The student's IEP or 504 team should begin by asking the following questions (also illustrated by Options 1, 2, and 3 in the chart that follows):

- Can the student take the standard MCAS test under routine conditions?
- Can the student take the standard MCAS test with accommodations?
- If so, which accommodations are necessary and appropriate for the student?
- Does the student require an alternate assessment? (Alternate assessments are intended for a very small number of students with significant disabilities who are unable to take standard MCAS tests, even with accommodations.)

The student's team must make a separate decision for **each subject** scheduled for testing.

Characteristics of Student's Instructional Program and Local Assessment	Recommended Participation in MCAS
<p><b>OPTION 1</b></p> <p><i>If the student is</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) generally able to demonstrate knowledge and skills on a paper-and-pencil test, either with or without test accommodations; <b>and is</b></li> <li>b) working on learning standards <b>at or near grade-level expectations;</b> <b>or is</b></li> <li>c) working on learning standards that have been modified and are <b>somewhat below grade-level expectations</b> due to the nature of the student's disability,</li> </ul>	<p><i>Then</i></p> <p>The student should take the <b>standard MCAS test</b>, either under routine conditions or with accommodations that are consistent with the instructional accommodation(s) used in the student's educational program.</p>

OPTION 2

*If the student is*

- a) **generally unable** to demonstrate knowledge and skills on a paper and pencil test, even with accommodations, **and** is
- b) working on learning standards that have been **substantially modified** due to the nature and severity of his or her disability, **and** is
- c) receiving **intensive, individualized instruction** in order to acquire, generalize, and demonstrate knowledge and skills,

*Then*

The student should take the **MCAS Alternate Assessment** in this subject.

OPTION 3

*If the student is*

- a) working on learning standards **at or near grade-level expectations**, **and** is
- b) **sometimes able** to take a paper-and-pencil test, either without accommodations, or with one or more test accommodations(s), **but** is
- c) presented with **unique and significant challenges** in demonstrating knowledge and skills on a test of this format and duration,

*Then*

The student should take the **standard MCAS test** with necessary accommodations, if possible.

*However*

The Team may recommend the **MCAS Alternate Assessment** when the nature and complexity of the disability prevent the student from demonstrating knowledge and skills on the test.

(Instances in which a student in this category may require an alternate assessment are provided on the following page.)

## F. Unique Circumstances in Which a Student May Be Considered for an Alternate Assessment

When the nature and complexity of a student's disability present significant barriers or challenges to standardized testing, even though the student may be working at or near the grade-level expectations, the student's IEP Team or 504 team may designate the student to take an alternate assessment in that subject.

In addition to the criteria outlined in Options 2 and 3 on the previous page, the following examples of unique circumstances are provided to expand the team's understanding of the appropriate use of alternate assessments. An alternate assessment may be administered if

- a student, as a consequence of either severe emotional or behavioral impairments or other disability(ies), is unable to maintain sufficient concentration to participate in standard testing, even with test accommodations
- a student with a severe health-related disability, neurological disorder, or other complex disability or disabilities, cannot meet the demands of a prolonged test administration
- a student with a significant motor, communication, or other disability would require more time than is reasonable or available for testing, even with the allowance of extended time

## IV. MCAS Test Accommodations

### A. Definition and Purpose of Test Accommodations

A test accommodation is a variation in how a test is administered or how a student responds to test questions. Accommodations are allowed in order to provide students with disabilities the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and achievement on statewide tests.

### B. Students Eligible for Test Accommodations

The right to receive accommodations on statewide tests is guaranteed by law to a child with a disability. A student with a disability must be provided test accommodations when the student's IEP Team or 504 team has determined their necessity on a particular MCAS or other statewide test.

While the majority of students eligible for accommodations are those with an IEP or served under a 504 plan, accommodations may also be provided for students with disabilities who are **not** served under either plan. To determine such a student's eligibility for test accommodations, a request for accommodations with supporting documentation of a disability must be provided to the principal, who will then consult, as needed, with the local administrator of special education. The **principal** may then authorize the accommodation or deny the request for its authorization.

Reliance on test accommodations should never replace appropriate and rigorous instruction in the subject being tested.

### C. Test Accommodations Policy

Test accommodations should only be provided to students with disabilities when they meet two important criteria:

- 1) The accommodation is required by the student in order to participate in statewide tests;  
**and**
- 2) The accommodation is already provided during routine instruction and assessment in this subject (both before and after the test is administered).

Accommodations **may not**

- 1) alter, explain, simplify, paraphrase, or eliminate any test item, reading passage, writing prompt, or multiple-choice answer option;  
**or**
- 2) provide verbal or other clues or suggestions that hint at or give away the correct response to the student.

Both "standard" and "non-standard" accommodations may be used on MCAS tests under the conditions outlined on the following pages.

## D. Untimed Test Sessions

**All MCAS test administrations are untimed.**

Any student, including students without disabilities, who requires time to complete a test session beyond what is scheduled for the regular test administration session may take extra time; additional time is therefore not considered a test accommodation.

However, no test session may extend beyond the end of the regular school day, and any single test session must be completed on the same day on which it is begun. In addition, both session A and session B of the *English Language Arts Composition Test* **must** be completed on the same day on which session A is begun.

Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 plans who require additional time may take until the end of the school day to complete a single test session, except in the case of the *ELA Composition Test*, for which both sessions A and B must be completed in a single school day.

## E. Definition of Standard Accommodations

**Standard accommodations** are changes in the routine conditions under which students take MCAS tests. Standard accommodations are grouped into the following four categories:

- **Changes in timing or scheduling of the test;** for example, administration of the test in short intervals or at a time of day that takes into account the student's medical needs
- **Changes in test setting;** for example, administration of the test in a small group or separate setting
- **Changes in test presentation;** for example, test questions presented in large-print or Braille
- **Changes in how the student responds to test questions;** for example, the student dictates his or her responses to a scribe

A list of standard test accommodations can be found in section G of this chapter.

## F. Definition of Non-Standard Accommodations

**Non-standard accommodations** are modifications that change the way in which an MCAS test is presented or the way in which a student responds to test questions. Non-standard accommodations may alter what the test measures; teams should therefore exercise caution in considering whether a student requires a non-standard accommodation in order to access the test.

Non-standard accommodation(s) must be documented in the student's IEP and approved (signed) by a parent before being administered. A list of non-standard accommodations and descriptions of the circumstances in which they should be considered appears in section H of this chapter, beginning on page 13.

## G. List of Standard Accommodations

**PLEASE NOTE THAT TEST ACCOMMODATION NUMBERS LISTED BELOW  
HAVE BEEN UPDATED FOR THE 2004-2005 SCHOOL YEAR.**

Following is a list of standard test accommodations commonly used by students with disabilities on MCAS tests. Since **extended time** is allowed for all students, it is not considered a test accommodation, and is not listed below.

Please use this list as a general guide and call Student Assessment Services at (781) 338-3625 with any questions.

### *Changes in timing or scheduling of the test*

1. **Frequent Breaks:** Test administered in short periods with frequent breaks
2. **Time of Day:** Test administered at a time of day that takes into account the student's medical or learning needs

### *Changes in test setting*

3. **Small Group:** Test administered in a small group setting (i.e., 2-5 students)
4. **Alternate Setting:** Test administered in a room other than the one used by the rest of the class
5. **Individual:** Test administered to the student individually
6. **Specified Area:** Test administered with the student seated at the front or other specified area of the room, or in a study carrel, or other enclosed area

### *Changes in test presentation*

7. **Familiar Test Administrator:** Test administered by a test administrator familiar to the student
8. **Noise Buffers:** Student wears noise buffers (after test administration instructions have been read)
9. **Magnification or Overlays:** Student uses magnifying equipment, enlargement devices, or colored visual overlays
10. **Test Directions:** Test administrator clarifies general administration instructions and test directions
11. **Large Print:** Student uses large-print edition of the test

#### **Test Administration Information:**

The test administrator or student must transcribe answers verbatim into the student's standard *Answer Booklet*.

12. **Braille:** Student uses Braille edition of the test

**Test Administration Information:**

- a) The test administrator must transcribe answers verbatim into the student's standard *Answer Booklet*.
- b) Under secure conditions supervised by the principal, the Braille test administrator may review Braille test materials up to four days prior to test administration.

13. **Place Marker:** Student uses a place marker

14. **Track Test Items:** Test administrator assists the student in tracking and/or sequencing test items (e.g., moving from one test question to the next) or redirecting the student's attention to the test

15. **Amplification:** Student uses sound amplification equipment

16. **Read Test Aloud (except *ELA Language and Literature Test* and *Reading Test*):** Test administrator reads the *ELA Composition* writing prompt, *Mathematics*, *Science and Technology/Engineering*, and/or *History and Social Science* passages and test items to the student

**Test Administration Information:**

- a) All passages and test items must be read word-for-word exactly as written. The test administrator may not clarify, elaborate, or provide assistance to the student regarding the meanings of words, intent of test questions, or responses to test items.
- b) The test administrator may read the test to a **small group** (2-5 students) by following procedures outlined in Appendix A.

**Note:** Reading the *ELA Language and Literature Test* or *Reading Test* aloud to a student is non-standard accommodation #26.

17. **Sign Test (except *ELA Language and Literature Test* and *Reading Test*):** Test administrator signs the *ELA Composition* writing prompt, *Mathematics*, *Science and Technology/Engineering*, and/or *History and Social Science* passages and test items to a student who is deaf or hard of hearing

**Test Administration Information:**

- a) All passages and test items must be signed exactly as written, except in cases when doing so would reveal an answer to a test question. Interpreters may not provide assistance to the student regarding the meanings of words, intent of test questions, or responses to test items.
- b) Under secure conditions supervised by the principal, sign interpreters may review test materials up to four days prior to test administration in order to prepare accurate interpretations of test materials.

**Note:** Sign interpretation of the *ELA Language and Literature Test* or *Reading Test* is non-standard accommodation #27.

18. **Electronic Text Reader (except *ELA Language and Literature Test and Reading Test*):** Student uses computer-based text reader software for the *ELA Composition* writing prompt, *Mathematics, Science and Technology/Engineering*, and/or *History and Social Science Test(s)*

**Test Administration Information:**

- a) Electronic text materials are available to students in grades 6-12 already using an electronic text reader, such as the Kurzweil 3000. Electronic text materials must be requested by the principal on the school's MCAS Enrollment Survey.
- b) The student or test administrator must transcribe answers verbatim into the student's standard *Answer Booklet*.

**Note:** Using an electronic text reader for the *ELA Language and Literature Test* or *Reading Test* is non-standard accommodation #28.

*Changes in how the student responds to test questions*

19. **Scribe Test (except *ELA Composition*):** Test administrator writes the responses to open-response test items as they are dictated or signed by the student

**Test Administration Information:**

- a) The scribe must record the student's words exactly as dictated into the student's *Answer Booklet* and may not edit or alter the student's responses in any way.
- b) The scribe must allow the student to review and edit what the scribe has written.
- c) A scribe may be used for students who have this accommodation documented in their IEPs or 504 plans or have a **broken bone or fracture** in their writing hand or arm at the time of testing.

**Note:** Scribing the *ELA Composition* is non-standard accommodation #29.

- NEW!** 20. **Organizer, Checklist, Reference Sheet, or Abacus:** Student uses a graphic organizer, checklist, individualized mathematics reference sheet, or abacus

**Test Administration Information:**

- a) A **graphic organizer** or **checklist** is used to generate ideas for a draft *ELA Composition* or open-response question; or to check the steps in the writing process. Instructions for returning the graphic organizer will be included in the *Spring 2005 Principal's Administration Manual*.
- b) An **individualized mathematics reference sheet** or **checklist** is used to provide memory prompts, mnemonic devices, formulas, word banks, and/or generic steps in solving a mathematics problem.

**The mathematics checklist or individualized reference sheet may not include definitions, graphic illustrations, or specific examples.**

**The mathematics checklist or individualized reference sheet must be emailed ([mcas@doe.mass.edu](mailto:mcas@doe.mass.edu)) or faxed (781) 338-3630 to the Department for approval at least two weeks prior to testing.**

The mathematics checklist or reference sheet

- must be developed in response to an individual student's learning needs, documented in the student's IEP, and already be used for routine instruction
- must be limited to 1-3 pages
- should be similar in design to the MCAS Mathematics *Reference Sheet*

c) An **abacus** is used by a student who is visually impaired to solve mathematics problems.

21. **Student Reads Test Aloud:** Student reads the test aloud to him- or herself; or student records answers on audiotape, then writes answers while playing back the tape

**Test Administration Information:**

When a student reads the test aloud, the test must be administered in a separate setting.

22. **Monitor Placement of Responses:** Test administrator monitors placement of student responses in the student's *Answer Booklet*

23. **Word Processor:** Student uses a word processor, typewriter, or similar device to type the *ELA Composition* and/or answers to open-response questions

**Test Administration Information:**

a) Special templates for typed responses will be sent to schools with their testing materials. Schools must provide the following information on each page of the student's typed response:

- student's name
- SASID
- grade
- district name and school name
- *Answer Booklet* serial number
- subject tested
- question number

b) Instructions for preparing and returning typed responses will be included in the Spring 2005 *Principal's Administration Manual*.

c) For the *ELA Composition*, any **spell- or grammar-checking device** must be turned off/disabled. The use of a spell- or grammar-checking device or word prediction software for the *ELA Composition* is non-standard accommodation #31.

24. **Answers Recorded in Test Booklet:** Student records answers directly in the *Test Booklet*

**Note:** The test administrator must transcribe answers verbatim into the student's *Answer Booklet*.

25. **Other Standard Accommodation:** Other standard accommodation identified by the IEP Team or 504 team, documented on the student's IEP, and not on this list

**Note:** Prior to test administration the principal or designee must notify (and may consult with) the Department when standard accommodations not on the above list are being considered for a student. Please call (781) 338-3625, e-mail [mcas@doe.mass.edu](mailto:mcas@doe.mass.edu), or fax (781) 338-3630.

## H. List of Non-Standard Accommodations

Students may use one or more of the following non-standard MCAS test accommodations that are consistent with accommodations provided to the student during routine instruction and assessment in the subject being tested. The student's IEP Team or 504 team must agree that the non-standard accommodation is absolutely necessary in order for the student to participate in MCAS testing, and use of any accommodation must meet the conditions described below.

26. **Read Aloud *ELA Language and Literature Test* or *Reading Test*:** Test administrator reads the *ELA Language and Literature Test* or *Reading Test* to a student

**Test Administration Information:**

- a) The use of non-standard accommodation #26 may be considered when **both** of the following conditions apply:
- The student has a specific impairment that greatly limits or prevents her or his ability to decode text, even after varied and repeated attempts to teach the student to do so;  
**AND**
  - The student has access to printed materials only through a reader, or is provided with spoken text on audiotape, video, or other electronic format during routine instruction.
- b) All passages and test items must be read word-for-word exactly as written. The test administrator must not provide assistance to the student regarding the meanings of words, intent of test items, or responses to test items.
- c) The test administrator may read the test to a **small group** (2-5 students) by following procedures outlined in Appendix A.

27. **Sign *ELA Language and Literature Test* or *Reading Test*:** Test administrator signs the *ELA Language and Literature Test* or *Reading Test* for a student who is deaf or hard of hearing

**Test Administration Information:**

- a) The use of non-standard accommodation #27 may be considered when **both** of the following conditions apply:
- The student has a specific impairment that greatly limits or prevents her or his ability to decode text, even after varied and repeated attempts to teach the student to do so;  
**AND**
  - The student has access to printed materials only through a sign-language interpreter, or is provided with signed text on video or other electronic format during routine instruction.

- b) All passages and test items must be signed word-for-word exactly as written, except in cases when doing so would reveal an answer to a test item. The test administrator must not provide assistance to the student regarding the meanings of words, intent of test items, or responses to test items.
- c) Under secure conditions supervised by the principal, the sign interpreter may review test materials up to four days prior to test administration in order to prepare an accurate interpretation of test materials.

**28. Electronic Text Reader for the *ELA Language and Literature Test and Reading Test*:**

Student uses computer-based text-reader software for the *ELA Language and Literature Test* or *Reading Test*.

**Test Administration Information:**

- a) Electronic test materials are available to students in grades 6-12 already using electronic text reader software, such as the Kurzweil 3000. Electronic test materials must be requested by the principal on the school's MCAS Enrollment Survey.
- b) The test administrator or student must transcribe answers verbatim into the student's standard *Answer Booklet*.

**29. Scribe *ELA Composition*:** The student dictates or signs the *ELA Composition* to a scribe; records or signs the *ELA Composition* on audiotape or video; or uses a "speech-to-text" conversion device to record the *ELA Composition*.

**Test Administration Information:**

- a) The use of accommodation #29 may be considered when any of the following conditions apply:
  - The student routinely
    - dictates or signs all compositions to a scribe
    - records all compositions on audiotape or video
    - uses an electronic "speech-to-text" conversion device for all compositions
  - OR**
  - The student does not have sufficient manual dexterity at the time of testing to produce legible written work
  - OR**
  - The student has a **broken bone or fracture** in his or her writing hand or arm at the time of testing.
- b) If the student uses an electronic "speech-to-text" conversion device, the test administrator must follow the instructions for submitting typed responses that are included in the Spring 2005 *Principal's Administration Manual*.

**Clarification on the role of a scribe for the *ELA Composition*:**

- a) During *session A*, the scribe must write what the student says exactly as dictated into the student's *Test Booklet*. The scribe may not edit or alter the student's dictation in any way. When scribing the draft composition, the scribe may assume that each sentence begins with a capital letter and ends with a period. All other capitalization and

punctuation is the responsibility of the student.

After the student has finished dictating his or her draft composition, the scribe must ask the **student** to do the following:

- 1) **Spell key words.** Key words include proper nouns, multisyllable words, and other words pertinent to the story.
  - 2) **Review the draft composition and make any necessary edits,** including edits to capital letters and punctuation. A scribe may not assist the student during the editing process.
- b) During *session B*, the scribe copies the final draft, including the student's edits, into the student's *Answer Booklet*.

**Clarification on the role of a scribe for students using sign language for the *ELA Composition*:**

When the student uses sign language to dictate the *ELA Composition* to a scribe, the text transcription into the student's *Answer Booklet* should approximate the student's dictated response as closely as possible.

30. **Calculation Devices:** Student uses a calculator, number chart, arithmetic table, or manipulatives on non-calculator sections of the *Mathematics Test*

**Test Administration Information:**

The use of accommodation #30 is allowed only when **both** of the following conditions apply:

- a) The student has a specific impairment that greatly limits or prevents her or his ability to calculate mathematically, even after varied and repeated attempts to teach the student to do so;

**AND**

- b) The student has access to mathematical calculation only through the use of a calculator, number chart, arithmetic table, or manipulatives, which the student uses for routine instruction.

31. **Spell- or Grammar-Checking Device or Word Prediction Software for the *ELA Composition*:** The student uses a spell- or grammar-checking device for the *ELA Composition*; or uses word prediction software

**Test Administration Information:**

- a) Use of accommodation #31 should be considered when **one** of the following conditions applies:
- The student has a specific impairment that greatly limits or prevents her or his ability to spell, even after varied and repeated attempts to teach the student to do so,
- OR**
- The student can produce understandable written work only through the use of a spell- or grammar-checking device or word prediction software, which the student uses during routine instruction.

b) If using word prediction software, the “predict-ahead” and “predict on line” software functions must be turned off.

32. **Other Non-Standard Accommodation** identified by the IEP Team or 504 team, documented on the student’s IEP, and not on this list

**Note:** Prior to test administration the principal or designee must notify (and may consult with) the Department when non-standard accommodations not on the above list are being considered for a student. Please call (781) 338-3625, e-mail [mcas@doe.mass.edu](mailto:mcas@doe.mass.edu), or fax (781) 338-3630.

## V. MCAS Alternate Assessment (MCAS-Alt)

### A. Overview

The MCAS Alternate Assessment (MCAS-Alt) is a portfolio-based assessment that measures a student's performance and achievement on the learning standards in the Massachusetts *Curriculum Frameworks*. For each student scheduled to take an alternate assessment in one or more subjects, a portfolio is developed over the course of the school year by the student, the student's teacher, and other adults who work with the student. Portfolio evidence may include work samples, instructional data, video, and other supporting information linked to instruction in the subject being assessed.

To assist teachers in providing access to the general curriculum to students with significant disabilities, the Department has developed a *Resource Guide to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for Students with Significant Disabilities*. Additionally, the *2005 Educator's Manual for MCAS-Alt* includes important forms and other information regarding the MCAS Alternate Assessment.

To view and download copies of both documents, visit the Department's alternate assessment web page at [www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt). Teachers who are conducting alternate assessments may request a printed copy of these publications by completing and returning the order form downloaded from this web address.

Teachers who are conducting alternate assessments are also encouraged to participate in an alternate assessment training session, or to view the Department's training video, made available in December. Please call Student Assessment Services at (781) 338-3625 for additional information.

### B. Participation Guidelines

The MCAS-Alt is intended for a very small number of students with significant disabilities who, due to the nature and complexity of their disabilities, are unable to participate in the standard paper-and-pencil MCAS tests, even with accommodations. IEP Teams must determine annually which students will take alternate assessments in each subject after considering the participation guidelines found on pages 4-6 of this document.

The Department will monitor the use of alternate assessments statewide to ensure that they are being conducted appropriately and that participation decisions are made in accordance with the law.

### C. Enrolling Students for MCAS-Alt and Sending Portfolio Binders and Mailing Materials to Schools

The Department uses information provided by schools on their *MCAS Enrollment Surveys* to determine the number of three-ring portfolio binders, mailing envelopes, student data forms, and pre-paid mailing materials that will be sent to principals in March 2005.

### D. Alternate Assessment Schedule

The schedule of spring 2005 MCAS assessments by grade and subject is provided in chapter III of this document. A student designated by his or her IEP Team or 504 team for MCAS Alternate

Assessment must be separately assessed in each subject scheduled for testing in his or her grade. Students with disabilities in ungraded programs must be assessed in the same subjects as the tests taken by their non-disabled peers at the equivalent chronological age.

Alternate assessment portfolios, including all necessary forms found in the *2005 Educator's Manual for MCAS-Alt*, must be submitted to the Department in three-ring binders provided to the school by the Department for that purpose, postmarked no later than **Friday May 6, 2005**. The submission deadline for portfolios of students in grade 12 who are working toward a **Competency Determination** is Friday, **April 15, 2005**.

## E. Scoring

Massachusetts educators who work with students with disabilities are recruited to score student portfolios at scoring institutes each summer. Applications for these institutes will be posted to the Department's website in April 2005.

Scores of alternate assessment portfolios are based on a scoring rubric, which is included in the *2005 Educator's Manual for MCAS-Alt*. Each portfolio is evaluated based on the following criteria:

- the completeness of materials submitted
- the level of complexity at which the student addresses the *Curriculum Framework* learning standards
- the accuracy of the student's responses and performance
- the independence demonstrated by the student in performing each task or activity
- the frequency with which the student reflects, self-corrects, and evaluates his or her own performance of the task or activity
- the number of instructional approaches and contexts in which the student demonstrates knowledge and skills

For each subject assessed, a score is generated for each criterion listed above, and an overall *performance level* given in the content area. The following performance levels are used to describe and report student performance:

- **Incomplete** - The student demonstrates insufficient evidence and information to permit a determination of a performance level in the content area. The portfolio is incomplete.
- **Awareness** - The student demonstrates **very little understanding** of the learning standards and subject matter contained in the Massachusetts *Curriculum Framework*. The student requires extensive prompting and assistance, and performance is primarily inaccurate.
- **Emerging** - The student demonstrates a **simple understanding** of a limited number of learning standards contained in the Massachusetts *Curriculum Framework*, and addresses these at **below-grade-level expectations**. The student requires frequent prompting and assistance, and performance is limited and inconsistent.
- **Progressing** - The student demonstrates a **partial understanding** of some learning standards and subject matter contained in the Massachusetts *Curriculum Framework* and addresses these at **below-grade-level expectations**. The student appears to be receiving challenging instruction

and is steadily learning new skills, concepts, and content. The student requires minimal prompting and assistance, and performance is primarily accurate.

- **Needs Improvement** - The student demonstrates a **partial understanding** of subject matter and solves some simple problems **at grade-level expectations**.
- **Proficient** - The student demonstrates a solid understanding of challenging subject matter and solves a wide variety of problems **at grade-level expectations**.
- **Advanced** - The student demonstrates a **comprehensive and in-depth understanding** of challenging subject matter and provides sophisticated solutions to complex problems **at grade-level expectations**.

## VI. Reporting MCAS Results of Students with Disabilities

### A. Reporting MCAS Results

MCAS results are reported according to four performance levels: *Advanced*, *Proficient*, *Needs Improvement* and *Warning (Failing at grade 10)*. Results of MCAS tests taken with both standard and non-standard accommodations are aggregated with the scores of tests taken without accommodations.

The Department will maintain a record of the number of students in each school and district taking MCAS tests with non-standard accommodations and **will closely monitor schools and districts to ensure the proper use of non-standard accommodations.**

#### *LEP Students with Disabilities*

Results from tests taken by limited English proficient (LEP) students with disabilities are included with scores of students with disabilities on MCAS reports.

#### *Out-of-District Placements*

Out-of-district placements include approved and unapproved private special education schools, collaboratives, and other special education placements outside the student's home school district.

Test scores of students who attend out-of-district placements will be reported to the school or collaborative where the student took the test(s) and will be included with the scores of the student's sending district, regardless of whether the student took standard MCAS tests or the MCAS-Alt.

In cases where the student attends an out-of district placement, such as approved private special education school or educational collaborative, the student's scores are reported to the school or collaborative where the test was taken and included with the results of the student's sending district.

#### *MCAS-Alt*

Performance level results for the MCAS-Alt are reported to parents, schools, and districts, and are aggregated with standard test scores in school and district reports. (Students taking the MCAS-Alt do not receive scaled scores.) Results of the MCAS-Alt that are below the *Needs Improvement* level (*Incomplete, Awareness, Emerging, and Progressing*) are counted as *Warning/Failing*.

### B. Meeting the State's Graduation Requirement Through MCAS-Alt

Students who take the MCAS-Alt in grade 10 are eligible to earn a **Competency Determination** if they demonstrate the same level of knowledge and skills required of students who take the standard grade 10 MCAS tests in English language arts and mathematics. Portfolios that receive a "level of complexity" score of 4 or 5 during the initial round of scoring will be evaluated by a panel of experts to ensure that these students have met the grade 10 standards. In addition to passing MCAS, students must meet all local requirements to graduate from high school.

Beyond grade 10, a student requiring an alternate assessment may, at the discretion of the IEP Team or 504 team, annually resubmit a cumulative English language arts portfolio and/or mathematics portfolio until the student achieves a performance level of *Needs Improvement* or higher, or exits publicly funded education. This decision should be addressed as part of the annual IEP Team meeting process and documented in the student's IEP.

## C. School and District Accountability for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

A central goal of the federal education law, *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), is for schools and districts to demonstrate their annual progress toward proficiency for all students in English language arts/reading and mathematics. In order to make “adequate yearly progress,” Massachusetts schools must meet specific annual performance objectives in these content areas for all student subgroups, including students with disabilities.

Students taking standard MCAS tests contribute to the *Composite Performance Index* for their schools and districts by earning points as shown in Table 2. NCLB, however, also permits states to include results of a small percentage of students with **significant intellectual/cognitive disabilities** (up to 1% of the assessed students in the state) for AYP as shown in Table 3. The Department calculates school and district performance for AYP by combining the results of all students in a *Composite Performance Index* (Tables 2 and 3).

Although only up to 1% of the number of students participating in MCAS will be counted for AYP using the MCAS-Alt Index shown in Table 3, this limit is not intended to restrict IEP Teams from making appropriate determinations as to which students are designated for alternate assessments. The state has the authority to grant waivers to districts that educate a population of students with significant disabilities that exceeds 1%.

**Tables 2 and 3**  
**How Students are Counted in the *Composite Performance Index* for AYP**

<b>Table 2: MCAS Test Index Students taking Standard MCAS Tests</b>	
<b>MCAS Scaled Score</b>	<b>Points Awarded</b>
200 – 208 <i>Failing/Warning – Low</i>	0
210 – 218 <i>Failing/Warning – High</i>	25
220 – 228 <i>Needs Improvement – Low</i>	50
230 - 238 <i>Needs Improvement – High</i>	75
240 - 280 <i>Proficient/Advanced</i>	100

<b>Table 3: MCAS Alt Index Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities taking MCAS-Alt (up to 1% of all assessed students)</b>	
<b>MCAS Alt-Score</b>	<b>Points Awarded</b>
Portfolio not submitted	0
Incomplete portfolio	25
Awareness	50
Emerging	75
Progressing	100

## VII. Preparing for MCAS Testing

### A. Preparing Students with Disabilities for MCAS

Educators should analyze their curricula and implement an instructional program that enables *all* students to acquire the content knowledge and skills outlined in the Massachusetts *Curriculum Frameworks*. Every student must be engaged in an instructional program that

- is based on the *Curriculum Framework* learning standards
- uses varied approaches to instruction
- includes a range of opportunities that enables the student to demonstrate his or her knowledge and skills
- provides necessary and appropriate program supports and instructional accommodations to guarantee student access to the general curriculum

### B. Role of Parents/Guardians

Parents and guardians of students with disabilities play a key role in preparing their child(ren) for MCAS. Some suggestions follow:

- Meet regularly with your child's teacher(s) to discuss how you can support your child's education at home.
- Inquire about the use of appropriate MCAS accommodations at IEP Team or 504 team meetings.
- Review your child's *Test Item Analysis* results at your child's school. Identify your child's strengths and weaknesses.
- Review class assignments and make sure that adequate time is set aside for homework.
- Make sure your child attends school regularly.
- Review MCAS test questions with your son or daughter. Released test items can be found on the Department website at [www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/testitems.html](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/testitems.html) and in your public library.
- Ask whether the school offers an MCAS support program that would benefit your child.
- Become familiar with the Massachusetts *Curriculum Frameworks*.

## C. Available Resources

### *Reports for Parents*

- *Parent/Guardian Report*
- *Test Item Analysis Report*

### *Reports/Student Work Available at Your Child's School*

- *ELA Compositions* (sent to schools on a CD)
- *School and District Reports*

### *Other Available Resources*

With the exception of the *Released Test Items in Braille*, most of the following publications are available on the Department's website at [www.doe.mass.edu/mcas](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas). Many are also available in Massachusetts public libraries.

- *The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System: Release of Spring 2004 Test Items* (Available for 1998 - 2004)
- *The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System: 2005 Educator's Manual for MCAS Alternate Assessment*
- *The Massachusetts Comprehensive System Resource Guide to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for Students with Significant Disabilities (2001)*
- *The Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks in English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Technology/Engineering, and History and Social Science*
- MCAS Scoring Guides and Sample Student Work
- *The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System: Release of Test Items in Braille* (Available for 1999-2004 by calling the Vision Resources Library at 1-800-827-7772)
- *The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System: Release of Fall Retest Items* (Available for 2001–2004)
- *The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System: Release of Spring Retest Items* (Available for 2003–2004)
- *Requirements for the Participation of Students with Limited English Proficiency (2004–2005 Update)*
- *Approved Bilingual Dictionaries for Use on the MCAS by Students with Limited English Proficiency*

APPENDIX A  
Advisory on Test Accommodations #16 and #26 --  
Reading MCAS Tests Aloud to a Small Group of Students

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The test administrator may read test items aloud to a small group of students, provided that each student has an IEP or 504 plan that includes and documents either standard accommodation #16 or non-standard accommodation #26. **The following procedures must be followed:**

- No more than five students may be grouped together, since students typically proceed through the test at different rates.
- Students with the same test form number should be grouped together, since all questions in a given test form will be identical. If more than one group of students in the school will have test items read aloud, each group must use a different test form. Test form numbers appear in the upper right-hand corner of each *Student Test Booklet*.
- The assignment of students to groups based on their test form numbers should occur as close to the time of testing as possible.
- The principal or designee must personally supervise the assignment of students to groups that will have test items read aloud to them. *Student Test Booklets* may not be opened or reviewed by students prior to testing.

## APPENDIX B Acknowledgements

### *Massachusetts Alternate Assessment Statewide Advisory Committee*

Edith Bazile	Boston Public Schools
Mary Ann Byrnes	University of Massachusetts, Boston
Edward Carter	The Education Cooperative
Alice Donahue	Westborough Public Schools
Nancy Dutton	Leicester Public Schools
Cynthia Essex	Perkins School for the Blind
Elizabeth Fleming	Simmons College
Anne Howard	Fitchburg State College
Carrie Ingrassia	Methuen Public Schools
Julia Landau	Massachusetts Advocates for Children
Donna Lehr	Boston University
Suzanne Recane	The Learning Center for Deaf Children
Richard Robison	Federation for Children with Special Needs
Jeffrey Rubin	Worcester Public Schools

### *Project Staff*

Susan Bechard	Measured Progress
Rachel Nemeth Cohen	Institute for Community Inclusion
Virginia Crocker	Massachusetts Department of Education
Kevin Froton	Measured Progress
Jake Goldsmith	Measured Progress
Debra Hart	Institute for Community Inclusion
Madeline Levine	Massachusetts Department of Education
Marcia Mitnacht	Massachusetts Department of Education
Jeffrey Nellhaus	Massachusetts Department of Education
Katherine Viator	Massachusetts Department of Education
Rebecca Walk	Measured Progress
Daniel Wiener	Massachusetts Department of Education
Joyce Zurkowski	Measured Progress



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## Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

### Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA) Standard Setting Panels

TO: Superintendents, Charter School Leaders, Principals, and Directors of Educational Collaboratives, Approved Special Education Private Schools, and Institutional Schools

FROM: David P. Driscoll, Commissioner of Education

DATE: December 3, 2004

This past October, limited English proficient students in Massachusetts public schools participated in the first operational administration of the new Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA). The MEPA program includes two components: a reading and writing test (MEPA R/W), and a speaking and listening test based on the Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral (MELA-O).

In order to report complete results following the spring 2005 administration of the MEPA, we plan to conduct standard setting sessions that will identify the minimum total score required to attain each of the program's four performance levels: *Beginning*, *Early Intermediate*, *Intermediate*, and *Transitioning*.

To assist with this task, the Department of Education invites classroom teachers and administrators to apply to serve on one of four panels that will convene in the first week of February 2005. The panels will be specific to grade spans 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, and 9-12.

The schedule for MEPA standard setting is as follows:

Wednesday, February 2	4:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.	Orientation and Dinner
Thursday, February 3	9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.	Panel Meeting
Friday, February 4	9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.	Panel Meeting

A Continental breakfast will be served beginning at 8:30 a.m., and lunch will be provided on February 3 and 4.

We will select a total of approximately 20 individuals for each standard-setting panel. All panelists will receive an orientation to MEPA, and training in the standard setting process. Panel members will receive Professional Development Points and be reimbursed for travel expenses.

Overnight accommodations will be provided if necessary.

Please inform your faculty and colleagues of this professional development opportunity and encourage them to apply. Completed applications  |  are due by **Friday, December 31**. Should you have any questions, please contact Virginia Crocker at (781) 338-3678.

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## The Master Teacher Program

### The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)

#### Application Subsidies for National Board Certification and Future Fee Increases

The National Board Certification process ([www.nbpts.org](http://www.nbpts.org)) is an enriching personal and professional experience that allows teachers to reflect upon and improve their practice. In Massachusetts over the past several years, the Department has encouraged teachers to participate in the process by offering application subsidies to defray the application costs.

This year the Department will continue to subsidize \$1,150 of the \$2,300 application fee for 131 candidates using federal funds it has received from the National Board. Currently, there are funds available to support 113 new candidates. Please note that candidates are responsible for the remaining \$1,150. The Department encourages districts, where possible, to help teachers subsidize the balance of the fee as well as support them through the process. Federal Title IIA: Improving Teacher Quality grants may be used by districts to support teachers who are going through the certification process.

Individuals who are interested in applying for an application subsidy would do so on the [Department's website](#). Individuals would select "New Users: Create Account" on the left side of the page. *After applying on line with the Department for a subsidy, individuals will need to submit their National Board application with a \$300 check made payable to the National Board to the Department by 2:00 p.m. on Friday, December 17, 2004.*

The National Board has recently announced future increases to their fees. Both districts and teachers should note that beginning January 1, 2005, first time applicants will be charged a \$65.00 processing charge payable upon submission of their application. Also beginning September 1, 2005, retake candidates will be charged a \$15.00 processing charge payable upon submission of their application. Finally, as of January 1, 2006, the application fee will increase \$200.00 to \$2,500.00. The Department asks you to inform your teachers of these impending changes and to encourage them to apply this year before the fee increases take effect.

For additional information, please contact Kristin LaMonica at (781)338-3237, or [Klamonica@doe.mass.edu](mailto:Klamonica@doe.mass.edu).

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## Grants and Other Financial Assistance Programs: FY2005

### Memorandum

**To:** Interested Parties

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

**Date:** December 7, 2004

**Subject:** [Request for Proposals: Content Institutes for 2005](#)

Since the enactment of the Education Reform Act of 1993, the Massachusetts Department of Education has published curriculum frameworks in the arts, English language arts, foreign languages, health, history and social science, mathematics, and science and technology/engineering. To support implementation of these Curriculum Frameworks, we provide opportunities annually for Massachusetts educators to strengthen their knowledge of discipline-specific content. The purpose of these institutes is to give educators specific content knowledge to improve student achievement.

The 2005 Content Institute Program is federally funded through the No Child Left Behind Act and focuses on increasing the number of highly qualified teachers who have competency in the subject areas that they teach. In addition to federal funding, the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative's Renewable Energy Trust and the Office of Commonwealth Development will partner with the Department to support institutes focusing on renewable energy and climate change in accordance with the relevant Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.

The Department is seeking proposals for content institutes that will take place in June-August 2005 with follow-up sessions in fall 2005. Our first priority for funding is for institutes in selected areas of mathematics, English language arts, history and social science, and science and technology/engineering. Our second priority for funding is for institutes in selected areas of the arts, foreign languages, and health. This year, all institutes must incorporate the use of appropriate technology in facilitating the institutes.

Proposals must be submitted by a school district, collaborative, or charter school on behalf of partnerships consisting of a high need school district (see Request for Proposals for list) and a Massachusetts institution of higher education. Additional partners may include other school districts, other high need school districts, other institutions of higher education, cultural institutions, professional educational organizations, and businesses. The Department will publicize these institutes statewide to assist in recruiting participants.

For further program information, please contact John Chiang Keh at (781) 338-6226 or [jkeh@doe.mass.edu](mailto:jkeh@doe.mass.edu) or Catherine Bowler at (781) 338-3464 or [cbowler@doe.mass.edu](mailto:cbowler@doe.mass.edu).



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# Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

## MCAS Score Request Tool

TO: Superintendents and Directors of Charter Schools  
 FROM: David P. Driscoll, Commissioner of Education  
 DATE: December 6, 2004

I am pleased to announce the release of the MCAS Score Request Tool, a new online application. The MCAS Score Request Tool is designed for authorized staff to quickly retrieve 2003 and 2004 MCAS results for students currently enrolled in their district who were not enrolled in their district in previous years (e.g., scores for grade 9 students enrolled in regional academic or vocational high schools, transfer students).

The MCAS Score Request Tool is available via the [Department's Security Portal](#) for district-level staff with the security role of either MCAS Dropbox or MDCS.

Instructions for using the tool are posted on the Department's Web site in the User's Guide  | . Please note that requests will be processed nightly. For example, data files will be provided on Wednesday morning for a request submitted on Tuesday.

TestWiz has been updated to import data files created by the MCAS Score Request Tool. In order to accommodate these files, you will need to install TestWiz version 9.14 from the TestWiz Web site at [www.testwiz.com/mass/update.html](http://www.testwiz.com/mass/update.html). Please note that the records you import will be stored within your district's AYP test administration files.

This is the first phase of the application, and we anticipate future updates. Currently, MCAS Score Request includes data from the spring 2003 and 2004 MCAS test administrations for grades 3-10. The first phase does not include data from retests.

If you have any questions about accessing the Security Portal, please contact your [District-Level Data Directory Administrator](#). Questions regarding MCAS scores may be directed to the Student Assessment Services Unit at (781) 338-3625 or via e-mail at [mcas@doe.mass.edu](mailto:mcas@doe.mass.edu)

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## The Massachusetts Board of Education

### Board in Brief

Tuesday, November 23, 2004

This is "*Board in Brief*," issued at the request of Commissioner David P. Driscoll to bring you up to date on Board of Education matters. This is a report on the regular meeting held on Tuesday, November 23, 2004, at the Massachusetts Department of Education in Malden.

#### Comments from the Chairman

Board of Education Chairman James A. Peyser opened the meeting by congratulating Commissioner Driscoll on his recent election as president of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). Commissioner Driscoll has served as president-elect of the CCSSO for the past year. Chairman Peyser said this well-deserved honor reflects the Commissioner's leadership on educational policy in Massachusetts and at the national level.

#### Comments from the Commissioner

Commissioner Driscoll thanked Chairman Peyser and emphasized that his duties as president of the CCSSO will not interfere with his responsibilities in Massachusetts. He said he looks forward to working with President Bush's nominee for U.S. Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, and other national education leaders to strengthen educational opportunities for all students and, in particular, to advocate for some "common sense" changes to the federal No Child Left Behind law.

The Commissioner made note of a report released recently by the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), *Windows of Opportunity: State Strategies to Close Educational Gaps and Raise Achievement Levels for All Students*. The report culminates a year of work by a committee of twenty-two state board of education members and other education leaders, co-chaired by Abigail Thernstrom of Massachusetts and Russell Thompson of Missouri. The report offers a series of policy recommendations for state leaders to consider in implementing comprehensive, system-wide improvement. Information about the report is available at [www.nasbe.org](http://www.nasbe.org).

Commissioner Driscoll asked student Board member Emily Levine to report on her visit to students at Holyoke High School, relating to the Board's designation of the Holyoke Public Schools as an under-performing district. With the cooperation of the high school's principal and Holyoke's superintendent, Ms. Levine and members of the Massachusetts Student Advisory Council (SAC) met with Holyoke students to hear their views and discuss their ideas for addressing the problems that led to the district being designated as under-performing. Ms. Levine said the students were very concerned about the declaration. As a result of the visit, Ms. Levine, SAC members and students from Holyoke High School plan to produce a question and answer video explaining what a declaration of under-performance for a district or school means, and how students can become more engaged in the improvement effort. Chairman Peyser commended Ms. Levine for her initiative and affirmed the importance of student voices in this process.

## **Board of Education Budget Proposal for FY 06**

The Board voted unanimously to approve its FY 06 budget proposal. Under the Board's proposal, the state education budget would increase by \$31.1 million over the FY 05 total of \$3.724 billion. The proposed increases over the current budget include: \$14.4 million more to fully fund the 75% special education reimbursement rate for the "circuit breaker" program; \$10.5 million more to reimburse school districts for students attending charter schools; \$8.3 million more for student assessment; \$7 million more for adult basic education; \$4.1 million more for academic support services; \$1.5 million more for state assistance to under-performing schools and districts; \$1.5 million to develop a statewide educator database; \$1.1 million to develop the certificate of occupational proficiency; and \$900,000 more for programs for gifted and talented students. Commissioner Driscoll noted that since Chapter 70 foundation aid may well be reviewed in the upcoming legislative session, the budget proposal maintains that line item at the current funding level. The Commissioner said the proposed budget, if enacted, will provide the Department with the resources necessary to continue and expand its work with school districts to implement education reform. In accordance with state law, the Commissioner will transmit the budget proposal to the House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means, the Joint Committee on Education, Arts and the Humanities, and the Secretary of Administration and Finance.

## **Proposed Amendments to Educator Licensure Regulations (603 CMR 7.00)**

The Board decided to defer action on some proposed amendments to the educator licensure regulations. Commissioner Driscoll opened the discussion by acknowledging that the current regulations are more complicated than they should be. He said this is an opportune time to review and simplify the regulations while maintaining the high standards for educator licensure that the Board has established.

Chairman Peyser agreed, noting that the regulations are intended to reflect three main objectives: strengthening focus on educators' content knowledge; strengthening focus on teaching practice; and opening the profession to more non-traditional candidates. He emphasized that the intent of the regulations is to establish the threshold competencies for an individual to earn an initial license. Board member Abigail Thernstrom added that the regulations and the licensure system should provide incentives rather than barriers for academically strong individuals who are interested in entering the education profession, and the requirements for licensure should be aligned with the qualities of good teaching.

The Commissioner said the Department will review the regulations as a whole and he will return to the Board with policy recommendations sometime in 2005. Pending that systemic review, he plans to return to the Board in December with a few proposed technical amendments to make the current regulations clearer and more workable in the meantime. If the Board agrees, it will solicit public comment on the proposed amendments before taking final action on them.

## **State's Role in Supporting Local Assessment of Student Performance**

The Board held an initial discussion on the use of "formative assessment" of student performance by schools and districts to strengthen teaching and learning. Classroom teachers who assess their students' progress regularly in relation to academic standards, and who use the assessment data to adapt their teaching to their students' needs, have a significant impact on boosting student achievement. This issue is receiving increasing attention in Massachusetts and across the nation. Associate Commissioner for Curriculum and Assessment Jeff Nelhaus and Mass Insight's Executive Director Andy Calkins presented an overview of the promising uses of formative assessment in several Massachusetts school districts. The Commissioner said the Department of Education is reviewing the role that it can play in supporting local educators in this initiative.

## **Dissection as a Learning Activity under Science and Technology/Engineering Curriculum Framework**

The Board held an initial discussion of dissection as a learning activity in schools. In September, the Governor vetoed legislation that would have required the Board of Education to establish guidelines requiring "all public schools that offer dissection as a learning activity to permit those students who choose not to participate in dissection to be allowed to demonstrate competency through an alternative method." In vetoing the legislation, the Governor stated that it is appropriate to leave this matter to the Board of Education, which is statutorily empowered to set statewide curriculum standards. On the Commissioner's recommendation, the Board agreed that the Department should gather more information on current policies and practices related to animal dissection in schools in Massachusetts and in other states. The Commissioner will report on his findings and then make recommendations to the Board at a future meeting.

## Approval of Grants

The Board approved grant awards for two programs: \$1.6 million under a federally-funded program for school renovation, supplementing approximately \$14 million in federal grants under this program that the Board awarded in October 2002; and \$99,999 for a state-funded grant for professional development related to gifted and talented students.

## Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Board of Education will be held on Tuesday, December 21, 2004, at the Department of Education in Malden.

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