



David P. Driscoll
Commissioner of Education

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Commissioner's Update

March 18, 2005

Dear Superintendents, and Leaders of Charter Schools and Collaboratives:

I have four items and four announcements in this update at www.doe.mass.edu.

Snow Day Policy

A number of you have contacted me regarding concerns about your school attendance calendars for the remainder of this school year, subsequent to the numerous storms that have closed schools this winter. I want to clarify the law and my position on makeup days.

Public school districts are required by law to operate schools a minimum of 180 days a year. As a routine matter, districts generally add at least 5 days to the school calendars to ensure that the minimum requirement is met. However, even with this insurance, some districts have come close to the last day in June this year.

It is my opinion that there is sufficient time left in this school year for districts to adjust school calendars to comply with the law. I am asking you to consider all remaining options available so that schools are open for the minimum required days.

Finally, I want to note for your future planning that districts that began the school year before Labor Day will have little difficulty meeting the school attendance minimum before the end of June.

Title I Conference

I am pleased to announce that the Massachusetts Department of Education and the Title I Dissemination project will be holding the 29th Annual Massachusetts Title I Conference in Hyannis, from May 10 to 13. Due to the success of the institutes that were offered last year to administrators, curriculum directors, teachers and Title I staff, several one-day institutes have been added to this year's conference schedule. The institutes will address such topics as improving literacy and math, promoting leadership development, and addressing the needs of English language learners. In addition to the institutes, a wide variety of workshops will address current educational issues and practices. Registration information and details will be available soon, or contact Barbara Solomon, Title I Director, at bsolomon@doe.mass.edu.





MCAS Appeals Workshop

An MCAS Performance Appeals workshop will be held on Thursday, March 31, from 10 a.m. to noon, at the Department of Education, and registration is still open. The MCAS performance appeal process is an outstanding resource for students who qualify, and applications must be thorough in order to ensure a proper review. Please register by emailing the participant(s) name and school district to mcasappeals@doe.mass.edu, and please forward this message to your high school staff.

The Concord Review

Founded in 1987, The Concord Review, the first and only quarterly journal in the world for the academic work of secondary students, publishes history essays written by students in forty-three states and thirty-three countries. These exemplary essays have been distributed throughout the United States and the world. The Concord Review is offering free back copies of its journals to interested high school and middle school teachers of history and of academic writing. If you are interested in receiving the journals or if your students would like to submit a history essay for publication, please contact Will Fitzhugh at The Concord Review, 730 Boston Post Road, Suite 24, in Sudbury, MA 01776. Winning student essays qualify for the Emerson Prize and each laureate will receive a check for \$3,000.

Here are four items recently posted at www.doe.mass.edu:

1. Spring 2005 MCAS Test Administration Updates

2. MCAS History and Social Science Question Tryout

3. SIMS Reporting of Special Education Students Attending Out-of-District Placements

4. Service-Learning Leader Award Nominations


All the best, and

Sincerely,

David P. Driscoll
Commissioner of Education

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Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

Spring 2005 MCAS Administration Updates

To: Superintendents, Principals, Directors of Charter Schools, Approved Private Special Education Schools, Institutional Schools, and Collaboratives

From: David P. Driscoll, Commissioner of Education

Date: March 18, 2005

To comply with the federal No Child Left Behind Law, which requires annual testing in reading and mathematics in grades 3 through 8 beginning in spring 2006, we have developed and scheduled the administration of **Question Tryouts**   in reading and mathematics for this spring. In addition, schools must administer *Question Tryouts* in History and Social Science as required by the Education Reform Law of 1993.

Participation Requirements

All students in the grades for which *Question Tryouts* are scheduled are required to participate. The only exceptions apply to students who need Braille or large-print tests, electronic text readers, or Alternate Assessments. LEP students in their first year of enrollment in U.S. schools are not required to participate in *Question Tryouts* or *Pilot Tests*. At the high school level, students in grade 10 or 11 who have not taken both U.S. History I and II are not required to participate in the *U.S. History Question Tryout*.

Purpose and Description of the *Question Tryouts*

The purpose of the *Question Tryouts* is to collect student data on individual items in order to determine which items might be eligible for use on future tests. No individual, school, or district results will be reported. Each *Question Tryout* is one session and will take approximately one hour to administer. Following is a description of *Question Tryouts* by content area.

1. *Reading Question Tryouts: Grades 5, 6, and 8*
 - The *Reading Question Tryout* is similar to the language and literature portion of ELA tests (i.e., multiple choice and open-response items), but has no writing prompt.
 - *Question Tryout* items are aligned with the standards in the *2001 Massachusetts English Arts Curriculum Framework* and the *2004 Supplement to the Massachusetts English Language Arts Curriculum Framework*.







2. *Mathematics Question Tryouts: Grades 3, 5, 7*
 - The *Mathematics Question Tryout* has a similar format to the operational math tests (i.e., multiple choice, short answer, and open-response items). However, the grade 3 open-response questions are scored on a scale of 0-2 in contrast to 0-4 for all other tests/tryouts.
 - *Question Tryout* items are aligned with the standards in the *2000 Massachusetts Mathematics Curriculum Framework* and the *2004 Supplement to the Massachusetts Mathematics Curriculum Framework* for grades 3, 5, and 7.
 - Students in grade 7 must have sole access to at least a four-function calculator with a square-root key, which will be allowed on one one part of the *Mathematics Question Tryout*. Calculators will not be allowed in grades 3 and 5.
 - Students in grade 3 will use a combined Test and Answer Booklet similar to the *Grade 3 Reading Test*.

3. *History and Social Science Question Tryouts: Grades 5, 7, and 10/11*

- The *History and Social Science Question Tryout* will include multiple choice items and modules. Modules are comprised of a stimulus (e.g., a primary source document, map, or quotation), and two multiple-choice questions and one open-response question that relate to the stimulus.
- *Question Tryout* items will be aligned with the standards in the *2003 Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework*.
- High schools will administer the *U.S. History Question Tryout* either in grade 10 or 11, depending on the year in which students have completed the appropriate coursework for U.S. History I and II.

For more specific information on the *History and Social Science Question Tryouts*, please refer to <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/2005/news/0318hssqtryout.html>

2005 MCAS Administration and Reporting

In general, *Question Tryouts* will be administered during the two testing windows that are scheduled for this spring. *Reading Question Tryouts* will be administered during the first testing window, March 28 - April 8 and the *Mathematics and History and Social Science Question Tryouts* will be administered during the second testing window, May 16 - May 27. The **U.S. History**   *Question Tryout* will be given during the week of May 23 - May 27. Attached is a **table**   with information about the MCAS tests, *Question Tryouts*, and MEPA tests that will be required in each grade. The **table**   provides information regarding the number and length of each session and plans for reporting results.

For information about administering tests and *Question Tryouts* to students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency, please refer to the *Requirements for the Participation of Students with Disabilities in MCAS (2005 Update)* and *Requirements for the Participation of Students with Limited English Proficiency in MCAS, MEPA-R/W, and MELA-O (2005 Update)*. These publications are posted on the Department website at http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/part_req.html

Please contact Student Assessment Services at the Department of Education at (781) 338-3625 with any questions about this spring's MCAS administration.

  **Spring 2005 Test Administration Table**

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Spring 2005 MCAS Administration

Grade	Test/Tryout		Basis of Test /Tryout	Sessions		Reporting of Results			
				Number	Approximate Session Length (Minutes) ¹	Raw Score	Scaled Score	Performance Level	Test Item Analysis
K-12	MELA-O		<i>2003 English Language Proficiency Benchmarks and Outcomes for English Language Learners</i>	NA	NA	✓	✓	✓	
3-12	MEPA RW		<i>2003 English Language Proficiency Benchmarks and Outcomes for English Language Learners</i>	4	45				
3	Reading Test		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>2001 English Language Arts Curriculum Framework</i> <i>2004 Supplement to the MA English Language Arts Curriculum Framework, Grades 3, 5, and 7</i> 	3	60/ 45/ 45	✓		✓	✓
	Mathematics Question Tryout		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>2000 Mathematics Curriculum Framework</i> <i>2004 Supplement to the MA Mathematics Curriculum Framework, Grades 3, 5 and 7</i> 	1	60				
4	English Language Arts Test	Composition	<i>2001 English Language Arts Curriculum Framework</i>	2	45	✓	✓	✓	✓
		Language and Literature		3	45				
	Mathematics Test		<i>2000 Mathematics Curriculum Framework</i>	2	60	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note:

1. While test sessions are designed to be completed in the times indicated, MCAS tests are untimed. Please refer to the *MCAS Principal's Administration Manual, Spring 2005* for additional information.

Spring 2005 MCAS Administration *continued*

Grade	Test/Tryout		Basis of Test/Tryout	Sessions		Reporting of Results			
				Number	Approximate Session Length (Minutes) ¹	Raw Score	Scaled Score	Performance Level	Test Item Analysis
5	Science and Technology/Engineering Test		<i>2001 Science and Technology/Engineering Curriculum Framework</i>	2	60	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Reading Question Tryout		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>2001 English Language Arts Curriculum Framework</i> • <i>2004 Supplement to the MA English Language Arts Curriculum Framework, Grades 3, 5, and 7</i> 	1	60				
	Mathematics Question Tryout		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>2000 Mathematics Curriculum Framework</i> • <i>2004 Supplement to the MA Mathematics Curriculum Framework, Grades 3, 5 and 7</i> 	1	60				
	History and Social Science Question Tryout		<i>2003 MA History and Social Science Curriculum Framework</i>	1	60				
6	Mathematics Test		<i>2000 Mathematics Curriculum Framework</i>	2	60	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Reading Question Tryout		<i>2001 English Language Arts Curriculum Framework</i>	1	60				
7	English Language Arts Test	Composition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>2001 English Language Arts Curriculum Framework</i> • <i>2004 Supplement to the MA English Language Arts Curriculum Framework, Grades 3, 5, and 7</i> 	2	45	✓	✓	✓	✓
		Language and Literature		3	45				
	Mathematics Question Tryout		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>2000 Mathematics Curriculum Framework</i> • <i>2004 Supplement to the MA Mathematics Curriculum Framework, Grades 3, 5 and 7</i> 	1	60				
	History and Social Science Question Tryout		<i>2003 MA History and Social Science Curriculum Framework</i>	1	60				
8	Mathematics Test		<i>2000 Mathematics Curriculum Framework</i>	2	60	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Science and Technology/Engineering Test		<i>2001 Science and Technology/Engineering Curriculum Framework</i>	2	60	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Reading Question Tryout		<i>2001 English Language Arts Curriculum Framework</i>	1	60				

Note:

1. While test sessions are designed to be completed in the times indicated, MCAS tests are untimed. Please refer to the *MCAS Principal's Administration Manual, Spring 2005* for additional information.

Spring 2005 MCAS Administration *continued*

Grade	Test/Tryout		Basis of Test/Tryout	Sessions		Reporting of Results			
				Number	Approximate Session Length (Minutes) ¹	Raw Score	Scaled Score	Performance Level	Test Item Analysis
10	English Language Arts Test	Composition	<i>2001 English Language Arts Curriculum Framework</i>	2	45	✓	✓	✓	✓
		Language and Literature		3	45				
	Mathematics Test	<i>2000 Mathematics Curriculum Framework</i>	2	60	✓	✓	✓	✓	
9/10	Science and Technology/Engineering Pilot Tests ²		<i>2001 Science and Technology/Engineering Curriculum Framework</i>	2	60	✓			✓
10/11	History and Social Science Question Tryout		<i>2003 MA History and Social Science Curriculum Framework</i>	1	60				

Notes:

1. While test sessions are designed to be completed in the times indicated, MCAS tests are untimed. Please refer to the MCAS Principal's Administration Manual, Spring 2005 for additional information.
2. Pilot Tests will be given in Biology (grade 10 only), Chemistry (grade 10 only), Introductory Physics (grades 9 and 10), and Technology/Engineering (grades 9 and 10).
The Department recommends that Pilot Tests be administered during the second week of the May testing window.



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MCAS History and Social Science Question Tryouts

To: Superintendents, Principals, Curriculum Coordinators, and Directors of Charter Schools, Educational Collaboratives, Approved Private Special Education Schools, and Institutional Schools

From: David P. Driscoll, Commissioner of Education

Date: March 18, 2005

I am writing to update you on the Department's plans for *MCAS History and Social Science Question Tryouts* that will be administered to students in grades 5, 7, and 10/11 in May.

The purpose of these *Question Tryouts* is to gather information on the performance of individual items. No student, school, or district results will be reported. The questions will be aligned to the learning standards in the *2003 Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework*. At the high school level, districts must administer the *Question Tryout* at the end of either grade 10 or 11, depending on when their students complete the coursework that covers the standards for U.S. History I and U.S. History II (as listed in the *Framework*).

Content and Format of the Question Tryouts

The table below outlines the learning standards covered by the *Question Tryouts*, as well as the learning standards that will not be covered. The table indicates that the tryouts for each grade will include a combination of ten multiple-choice questions and one module. Modules are composed of a stimulus (e.g., a primary source document, map, or quotation) and two multiple-choice questions and one open-response question, which relate to the stimulus. The table also indicates that tryouts at each grade will include items based on the concepts and skills incorporated in the *Framework*.

Content/Format of Spring 2005 *History and Social Science Question Tryouts*

Grade	Learning Standards Covered	Learning Standards and Topics NOT Covered	Grade range of Concepts and Skills	Number and Length of Sessions	Number of Stand-Alone Multiple Choice Items	Number and Type of Module
5	Grade 4: 4.8-4.26 Grade 5: 5.1-5.32	4.1-4.7 4.27-4.30 5.33-5.35	Pre-K through Grade 5	1 session 60 minutes	10	1 concept-based module
7	Grade 6: World Geography Grade 7: 7.1-7.44	Optional Topics for Study	Pre-K through Grade 7	1 session 60 minutes	10	1 concept-based module

10 or 11	Grades 8-12: USI.1-41 USII.1-33	World History I World History II	Pre-K through High School	1 session 60 minutes	10	1 document or theme- based module
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For further information regarding the 2005 MCAS *History and Social Science Question Tryouts*, please contact Anders Lewis, History and Social Science Assessment Lead Developer, at 781-338-3272 or by email at alewis@doe.mass.edu.

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Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

SIMS Reporting of Special Education Students Attending Out-of-District Placements

To: Superintendents of Schools and Administrators of Charter Schools

From: David P. Driscoll, Commissioner of Education

Date: March 18, 2005

I am writing to ask that you verify specific information being reported to the Department's *Student Information Management System* (SIMS) for those students with disabilities residing in your district who attend public or private out-of-district special education placements.

A recent review by the Department indicated that many students with disabilities in out-of-district special education placements appeared not to have participated in the 2004 MCAS, or appeared to have taken tests in grades **other** than those for which they had been reported by their home districts in March 2004 SIMS. Upon closer review, however, it became evident that these students had indeed participated in MCAS, in the large majority of cases, but had been reported inaccurately by their sending districts in SIMS. In most cases, either the grade level or placement information of these students had been reported inaccurately.

The role of SIMS is crucial in tracking all students in Massachusetts and ensuring that they participate appropriately in MCAS so their schools and districts receive appropriate recognition in their AYP determinations. I ask that you take specific steps to ensure accurate reporting in March 2005 SIMS and beyond, particularly regarding the **grade level** and **placement information**, for students in out-of-district placements. I also request that you review the following action steps with your staff in an effort to prevent future reporting inaccuracies.

1. Please review any inaccurate SIMS information that may have been reported previously for students attending out-of-district placements. In order to facilitate this process, I am making available a list of students in each district for whom inconsistencies were found in March 2004 SIMS data. Your district's file can be accessed in the **SIMS File Exchange Drop Box in the DOE security portal (www4.doe.mass.edu)**. District staff with the security role of "MDCS" (Massachusetts Data Collection System) will be able to access this file and view each student's name; SASID; SIMS-reported grade; grade-level in which the student actually participated in 2004 MCAS; and the student's out-of-district special education placement. NOTE: This file is for your information only, and is provided only in the case of districts in which inconsistent information was reported for one or more students. You do not need to return this file to the Department.
2. Please correct any inaccurate or out-of-date student information in the March 2005 SIMS report for your district.
3. Please review your district's system for reporting SIMS data to the Department and ensure that **current and accurate information is conveyed to the district's SIMS contact person** for students attending out-of-district placements, either by the special education administrator, by the out-of-district placement coordinator, or by the collaborative or school that currently serves each student.

I also ask you to verify that the following activities have occurred:

- each student who currently attends an out-of-district placement has received a ten-digit **State Assigned Student Identifier (SASID)**; and
- each student attending an out-of-district placement continues to **participate in MCAS using the**

most appropriate assessment format; i.e., testing either with or without necessary accommodations; or through an alternate assessment, as determined by the student's IEP Team.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the efforts of educational collaboratives and private special education schools for their assistance in determining the nature and cause of these discrepancies, and for alerting sending districts to the inconsistencies in the SIMS reporting of their students.

I encourage you to address further questions about MCAS participation to Dan Wiener in the Student Assessment Office at (781) 338-3625, and questions about SIMS to the Data Collection Help Line at (781) 338-3282.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

C: Directors of Educational Collaboratives
Directors of Approved and Unapproved Private Special Education Schools

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Community Service Learning

Service-Learning Leader Award Nominations

To: Superintendents, Charter School Leaders, Principals, and Teachers

From: David P. Driscoll, Commissioner of Education

Date: March 18, 2005

The Community Service-Learning Advisory Council to the Massachusetts Board of Education is pleased to announce the 2005 Service-Learning Leader Program to recognize teachers and administrators who are committed to service-learning as a teaching practice. Service-learning is a teaching methodology that combines community service with academic learning. [Superintendents](#), [principals](#), and [teachers](#) are eligible to be nominated for a Service-Learning Leader Award.

Information regarding the nomination process is available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/csl/>.

The deadline for nominations is April 22, 2005, and awards will be announced at the Community Service-Learning Conference on May 5, 2005 at the Hogan Center, Holy Cross, Worcester.

For more information, please contact Kristen McKinnon, kmckinnon@doe.mass.edu, 781-338-6306.

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Community Service Learning

2nd Annual Service-Learning Superintendent Leader Award

The Community Service-Learning (CSL) Advisory Council to the Board of Education is pleased to announce the Second Annual Massachusetts Service-Learning Superintendent Leader award - designed to recognize an outstanding superintendent who is committed to service-learning as a teaching methodology.

The CSL Advisory Council will present an award to a Massachusetts superintendent at the Community Service-Learning Conference in Worcester on May 5, 2005.

(Note: Members of the CSL Advisory Council to the Board of Education are not eligible to be nominated.)

Nomination Process

A principal, teacher, or student is asked to submit:

- I. Letter of Recommendation that demonstrates how the Superintendent Nominee:
 - A. Supports service-learning district-wide.
 - B. Fosters strong community connections.
 - C. Additional areas that may be addressed include:
 - collaborates and shares best service-learning practices with colleagues, parents, and partners.
 - models leadership qualities for teachers and students.
 - offers leadership opportunities for students.

- II. Description of service-learning program in nominee's district. (one page maximum)

Nominations (Parts I & II) are to be submitted by April 23, 2004, to Kristen McKinnon, Community Service-Learning Specialist, Massachusetts Department of Education, 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148 or via email to kmckinnon@doe.mass.edu.

For more information please contact Kristen McKinnon at (781) 338-6306; kmckinnon@doe.mass.edu.

2004 Superintendent Leader

Dr. Wayne LaGue, Wareham Public Schools



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Community Service Learning

2nd Annual Service-Learning Principal Leader Award

The Community Service-Learning (CSL) Advisory Council to the Board of Education is pleased to announce the Second Annual Massachusetts Service-Learning Principal Leader award - designed to recognize an outstanding principal who is committed to service-learning as a teaching methodology.

The CSL Advisory Council will present an award to a Massachusetts principal at the Community Service-Learning Conference in Worcester on May 5, 2005.

Nomination Process

The superintendent, teacher, or student is asked to submit:

- I. Letter of Recommendation that demonstrates how the Principal Nominee:
 - A. Supports service-learning school-wide.
 - B. Fosters strong community connections.
 - C. Additional areas that may be addressed include:
 - collaborates and shares best service-learning practices with colleagues, parents, and partners.
 - models leadership qualities for teachers and students.
 - offers leadership opportunities for students.

- II. Description of service-learning program in nominee's school. (one page maximum)

Nominations (Parts I & II) are to be submitted by April 22, 2005 to Kristen McKinnon, Community Service-Learning Specialist, Massachusetts Department of Education, 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148 or via email to kmckinnon@doe.mass.edu.

For more information please contact Kristen McKinnon at (781) 338-6306; kmckinnon@doe.mass.edu.

2004 Principal Leader

Rick Bidgood, Barnstable Middle School, Hyannis



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Community Service Learning

3rd Annual Service-Learning Teacher Leader Award

The Community Service-Learning (CSL) Advisory Council to the Board of Education is pleased to announce the 3rd Annual Massachusetts Service-Learning Teacher Leader Award - designed to recognize outstanding teachers who are committed to service-learning as a teaching methodology.

The CSL Advisory Council will present awards to up to ten Massachusetts teachers at the Community Service-Learning Conference in Worcester on May 5, 2005.

Nomination Process for Teacher nominee:

The superintendent, principal, supervisor, or student is asked to submit:

- I. Letter of Recommendation that demonstrates how the Teacher Nominee:
 - A. Integrates service into a standards-based curriculum.
 - B. Fosters strong community connections.
 - C. Additional areas that may be addressed include:
 - collaborates and shares best service-learning practices with colleagues, parents, and partners.
 - models leadership qualities for teachers and students.
 - offers leadership opportunities for students.

- II. Description of Service-Learning Project conducted by the Teacher Nominee. (one page maximum)

Nominations (Parts I & II) are to be submitted by April 22, 2005, to Kristen McKinnon, Community Service-Learning Specialist, Massachusetts Department of Education, 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148 or via email to kmckinnon@doe.mass.edu.

For more information please contact Kristen McKinnon at (781) 338-6306; kmckinnon@doe.mass.edu.

2004 Teacher Leaders:

Margaret Hoyt, Boston Public Schools
Mare Ambrose, Sharon Public Schools
Georgia Clancy, Whitman-Hanson Public Schools
Dawn Sather, Hudson Public Schools
Darcy Fernandes, Wareham Public Schools