



*The
Massachusetts
Comprehensive
Assessment
System*

GUIDE TO THE
2006 MCAS FOR
PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Massachusetts Department of Education



Massachusetts Department of Education

This document was prepared by the Massachusetts Department of Education.

Dr. David P. Driscoll, Commissioner of Education

Commissioner's Foreword

Dear Parent or Guardian:

MCAS tests are an important part of our state's effort to improve the achievement of every child in Massachusetts. The tests are designed to measure important skills and knowledge in core academic subjects.

This guide is designed to assist you in reviewing your child's results on the spring 2006 MCAS tests and in understanding how MCAS test scores are reported. The guide supplements your child's *Parent/Guardian Report*. This year the *Parent/Guardian Report* has been expanded to include additional information on test results for students at all grade levels. I hope you will find this information helpful.

If you have questions about the meaning of the results or your child's performance, I encourage you to meet with your child's teacher(s) to discuss the results and identify ways that you can partner with your school to support your child's education. Your support is extremely important in helping your child to be successful in school and in strengthening education for all Massachusetts students.

Sincerely,

David P. Driscoll
Commissioner of Education

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I. What Are the Purposes of MCAS?

The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) is designed to meet the requirements of the Education Reform Law of 1993. This law specifies that the testing program must

- test *all* public school students in Massachusetts, including students with disabilities and limited English proficient students;
- measure performance based on the Massachusetts *Curriculum Framework* learning standards;
- report on the performance of individual students, schools, and districts.

As required by the Education Reform Law, students must pass the grade 10 tests in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics as one condition of eligibility for a high school diploma (in addition to fulfilling local requirements).

In addition, the MCAS program is used to hold schools and districts accountable, on a yearly basis, for the progress they have made toward the objective of the No Child Left Behind Law that all students be proficient in Reading and Mathematics by 2014.

Participation Guidelines

In 2006, all public school students in grades 3–8 and grade 10 were required to participate in MCAS testing.

Students with Disabilities

During the year prior to scheduled statewide assessments, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 team meets to determine how an individual student with a disability will participate in MCAS testing. This information is documented in the student's IEP or 504 plan.

For students with disabilities who cannot be tested using the standard MCAS test with or without accommodations, the Department of Education administers the MCAS Alternate Assessment. Parents of students who participate in the Alternate Assessment receive two *Parent/Guardian Reports*—one standard report, which indicates that the student took the Alternate Assessment and shows the student's performance level, and one report that provides detailed information on the student's performance on the Alternate Assessment.

MCAS results for students with disabilities, including students who participate in the Alternate Assessment, are included in school, district, and state results.

More information about participation requirements and the range of available accommodations may be found in the *Requirements for the Participation of Students with Disabilities in MCAS (Spring 2006 Update)*, which is on the Department's Web site at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/part_req.html.

Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students

An LEP student is “a student whose first language is a language other than English who is unable to perform ordinary classroom work in English.” The determination of LEP status is made according to district identification procedures.

Federal and state law requires that *all* LEP students enrolled in Massachusetts public schools and in private schools at public expense must participate in MCAS tests given at their grade level in Mathematics and Science and Technology/Engineering. LEP students in their first year of enrollment in U.S. public schools had the option of participating in the ELA test at their grade level. In addition, all LEP students are required to participate in annual tests of English proficiency (MEPA-R/W and MELA-O).

In 2006, eligible Spanish-speaking LEP students who had been enrolled in schools in the continental U.S. for fewer than three years had the option of taking an English/Spanish dual-language version of the grade 10 Mathematics test if they could read and write at or near grade level in Spanish.

More information about participation guidelines for LEP students may be found in the *Requirements for the Participation of Students with Limited English Proficiency in MCAS and MEPA (Spring 2006 Update)*, which is on the Department's Web site at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/part_req.html.

II. What MCAS Tests/Question Tryouts Were Administered in Spring 2006?

The table below shows the 2006 MCAS tests and question tryouts administered at each grade level.

Grade 3	Reading Mathematics
Grade 4	ELA (Composition; Language and Literature) Mathematics
Grade 5	ELA Language and Literature Mathematics Science and Technology/Engineering History and Social Science Question Tryout*
Grade 6	ELA Language and Literature Mathematics
Grade 7	ELA (Composition; Language and Literature) Mathematics History and Social Science Question Tryout*
Grade 8	ELA Language and Literature Mathematics Science and Technology/Engineering
Grade 10	ELA (Composition; Language and Literature) Mathematics
Grade 9/10	Science and Technology/Engineering Tests**: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biology • Chemistry • Introductory Physics • Technology/Engineering
Grade 10/11	U.S. History Question Tryout*
Retests	ELA (Composition; Language and Literature) Mathematics

* No student level results were produced based on question tryouts.

** No student level results were produced for the high school Science and Technology/Engineering tests. Full reporting of official results will take place in fall 2007 for the spring 2007 high school Science tests.

Question Tryouts

Students in grades 5, 7, 10, and 11 participated in question tryouts in History and Social Science. No student, school, or district results are reported for question tryouts.

Retests

Each fall and spring, the Department offers an opportunity for eleventh-graders, twelfth-graders, and out-of-school youth to participate in MCAS retests. All members of the classes of 2003–2006 who had not yet earned a Competency Determination were eligible to participate in the MCAS ELA and Mathematics retests during the past year.

Eleventh-grade students attempting to improve their MCAS score(s) to attain a Certificate of Mastery were allowed to participate in the standard 2006 MCAS grade 10 ELA and Mathematics tests. Other grade 11 students with medically documented absences for their grade 10 tests or who transferred into Massachusetts public schools after grade 10 were allowed to participate in the standard 2006 MCAS grade 10 tests in an attempt to qualify for the John and Abigail Adams Scholarship.

III. *What Types of Questions Appear on MCAS Tests?*

The MCAS tests use a variety of question formats to measure student learning.

- **Multiple-choice questions** are used in all subject area tests except the ELA Composition test. Students select the correct answer from four options.

A correct answer is assigned a score of 1 point, and an incorrect answer is assigned a score of 0 points.

- **Open-response questions** are used in all subject area tests except the ELA Composition test. Depending on the subject area tested, students create a written response that consists of one or more paragraphs and/or a chart, table, diagram, illustration, or graph.

For grade 3 math only, each answer receives a score from 0 to 2 points, based on scoring guides. For all other grades and subjects, each answer receives a score from 0 to 4 points, based on a scoring guide for each open-response question.

- **Short-answer questions** are used in only Mathematics tests. Students generate a brief response, which usually consists of a numeric solution or short statement.

A correct answer is assigned a score of 1 point, and an incorrect answer is assigned a score of 0 points, based on scoring guides.

- **Writing prompts** are used in ELA Composition tests. In grades 4, 7, and 10, students write a composition in response to a writing prompt.

The ELA Composition test includes two test sessions, which are administered on the same day with a short break between sessions. In the first session, students respond to the writing prompt by preparing a first, unscored draft of their writing. Following a break, students return to revise their first draft into a final composition, which is submitted for scoring.

Each ELA Composition is scored in the following two areas, based on a scoring guide:

- Topic Development (2–12 points)
- Standard English Conventions (2–8 points)

IV. *How Will My Child's Test Results Be Used?*

As you review your child's results, please keep the following in mind:

- The *Parent/Guardian Report* provides important information about your child's academic performance in the subjects tested by MCAS during the 2006 administration. Use the MCAS results, along with teacher evaluations and your child's day-to-day schoolwork, to assess how well your child is doing in school. Your interest and encouragement are important.
- Your child's MCAS *Parent/Guardian Report* becomes part of his or her temporary student record. Your child's temporary student record includes all of the information the school maintains about your child that is not contained in his or her transcript. Generally, these records cannot be examined by anyone other than the student, the student's parent or guardian, and authorized school personnel without the consent of the student or the student's parent or guardian. A student's temporary record is destroyed no later than five years after the student transfers, graduates, or withdraws from the school system. For more information about this topic, refer to the Department's Web site at www.doe.mass.edu.
- Students must pass the grade 10 MCAS tests in ELA and Mathematics as one requirement for earning a high school diploma. In addition to passing the MCAS tests, students must also meet local requirements for high school graduation. If your child does not attain a scaled score of 220 or higher on the MCAS ELA and Mathematics tests, he or she will be able to retake the test or tests not passed. Students will have multiple opportunities to retake tests they do not pass. If your

child failed one or both of the grade 10 MCAS tests, you have received with the *Parent/Guardian Report* a written notice of the eligibility requirements for filing a Performance Appeal.

- The ELA and Mathematics results for tenth-graders (and for eleventh-graders who had not previously participated in the grade 10 ELA and/or Mathematics tests) are also used to determine eligibility for the John and Abigail Adams Scholarship. Massachusetts public high school students automatically qualify for the Adams Scholarship if they
 1. score in the *Advanced* category in either grade 10 ELA or Mathematics;
 2. score in the *Proficient* or *Advanced* category in the second subject (ELA or Mathematics); and
 3. have a combined MCAS score on these assessments that ranks in the top 25 percent in their school district.
- Educators use student, school, and district results to review curriculum and instruction and to plan for improvement. This practice fulfills, in part, the intent of the Education Reform Law, which is to improve the instruction and achievement of Massachusetts students based on the *Curriculum Framework* learning standards.
- Districts in which more than 20 percent of students have scored at the *Warning/Failing* level on an MCAS ELA or Mathematics test, at any grade level, are required to develop Individual Student Success Plans for all students who scored at that level. Educators in these districts use student results and other assessment information to develop the plans, which outline all of the additional supports and services, including Academic Support Programs offered to help students succeed in meeting the state's learning standards.
- The Department of Education uses MCAS results to gauge the progress of schools toward getting all students to reach proficiency in ELA and Mathematics. Achieving this goal by 2014 is the principal objective of the federal No Child Left Behind Law. Each year, the state releases Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) determinations for all schools in the state, all schools in each district, and student subgroups in each school and district. These student subgroups include the following:
 - limited or formerly limited English proficient students
 - students with disabilities
 - low income students
 - African American/black, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, and white students

V. How Are MCAS Results Reported?

A. Your Child's Performance

Section I of the *Parent/Guardian Report* lists the subjects tested at your child's grade, your child's performance level in each subject, your child's score in each subject, and the probable range of scores.

Performance Level

Performance levels relate a student's performance to the *Curriculum Framework* learning standards. In order to report test results using the MCAS performance levels, classroom teachers, administrators, higher education faculty, and community members participated in standard-setting panels for each operational test to identify the minimum total test score associated with each performance level.

Parent/Guardian Reports are *not* provided for the question tryouts. Question tryout results are not reported but are used to provide information regarding the performance of test questions.

Test item analysis results from the high school Science and Technology/Engineering tests are provided to schools and may be available to parents upon request.

At grades 4 through 8, MCAS results are reported according to four performance levels: **Advanced**, **Proficient**, **Needs Improvement**, and **Warning**. For grade 10 ELA and Mathematics tests and retests, performance levels are **Advanced**, **Proficient**, **Needs Improvement**, and **Failing**. For grade 3 Reading and Mathematics tests, performance levels are **Above Proficient**, **Proficient**, **Needs Improvement**, and **Warning**.

MCAS Alternate Assessments for students in grades 3–8 and 10 also include the performance levels of **Progressing**, **Emerging**, and **Awareness**.

The back cover of the *Parent/Guardian Report* provides general definitions of the MCAS and MCAS Alternate Assessment performance levels.

Scaled Scores

For grades 4–10, a student's scaled score ranges from 200 to 280. The use of scaled scores assists in the interpretation of MCAS results across tests and years. For example, a scaled score of 240 on any MCAS test always indicates that the student scored at the low end of the **Proficient** performance level. No scaled scores are reported for grade 3.

2006 MCAS Grades 4–10 Scaled Score Ranges

Performance Level	Scaled Score Points
<i>Advanced</i>	260–280
<i>Proficient</i>	240–258
<i>Needs Improvement</i>	220–238
<i>Warning</i> (grades 4–8) <i>Failing</i> (grade 10)	200–218

Raw Scores

Raw score points are shown in the Display of Scores and Probable Range of Scores portion of the report. The raw score represents the number of points your child earned on the test.

Display of Scores and Probable Range of Scores

This portion of section I shows your child’s score and probable range of scores using a horizontal gray bar with a vertical line in the middle. The vertical line represents your child’s scaled score (raw score for grade 3) on each test. The horizontal bar indicates the range of scores your child might receive if he or she took the test many times. The range of scores is also shown in relation to MCAS performance levels.

B. Section II (Grades 4, 7, and 10): Comments about your child’s writing performance

Students in grades 4, 7, and 10 were administered the Composition (writing) test and the Language and Literature (reading) test. Results from both tests were combined to arrive at the performance level and scaled score of the ELA test. For these grades, section II of the *Parent/Guardian Report* lists scorer comments about the Composition test.

Your child’s ELA Composition was independently scored by two scorers. Each scorer received a list of possible comments about student writing and chose two comments from this list to provide feedback about your child’s writing performance. If both scorers selected the same comment, it is listed only once. The entire list of possible scorer comments is available on the Department’s Web site at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/student/2005/scoring4.doc, www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/student/2005/scoring7.doc, and www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/student/2005/scoring10.doc.

C. Section III: Information about your child's performance on MCAS test questions

Section III of the *Parent/Guardian Report* indicates how your child answered every common test question in each subject tested. The first row of this section lists a number or abbreviation for each possible question. The table below shows the number of questions for each grade and subject.

2006 MCAS Tests			
Number of Common Questions for Each Grade and Subject			
Grade	English Language Arts	Mathematics	Science and Technology/Engineering
3	42	35	--
4	40 plus Composition	39	--
5	40	39	39
6	40	39	--
7	40 plus Composition	39	--
8	40	39	39
10	40 plus Composition	42	--

Since the number of questions varies from one grade and subject to another, your child's report will have some reporting category and score spaces shaded out depending upon the number and type of questions on the test. For example, only reports that contain grades 4, 7, or 10 English Language Arts will include information under the WP question number abbreviations. These spaces will be shaded out for all other grades and subjects.

The legend on the back page of the *Parent/Guardian Report* provides information on interpreting the codes used in the reporting category and score rows. To view the actual questions and correct answers, go to the Department Web site at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/testitems.html where you will find *Release of Spring 2006 MCAS Test Items*. Material from this document can be selected and printed by grade level and subject.

D. Section IV: How did your child's performance compare to school, district, and state performance?

This section of the *Parent/Guardian Report* compares your child's performance on each subject area test with the average performance of students in the same grade at your child's school, in your child's local school district, and in the state overall.

Your child's performance level from Section I has been shaded on the left-hand side of each graph (A = Advanced; P+ = Above Proficient [grade 3 only]; P = Proficient; NI = Needs Improvement; W = Warning; F = Failing [grade 10 only]). The bars in the middle of the graph show the percentage of students in your child's school (SCH) and district (DIS), and in the state (STA), who performed at each performance level.

E. *What Does It Mean If the Parent/Guardian Report Indicates That My Child Participated in the Alternate Assessment?*

If your child took the Alternate Assessment, the *Parent/Guardian Report* shows a performance level, but no scaled score for the standard test. More detailed information about your child's performance on the Alternate Assessment is provided on a separate report for parents/guardians.

F. *Under What Circumstances Do Students Not Receive MCAS Scores?*

- If a student was absent from testing with a medically documented excuse, the *Parent/Guardian Report* shows a performance level of *medically excused*.
- If a student was absent from test sessions and make-up sessions without a medically documented excuse, the *Parent/Guardian Report* shows a performance level of *absent*.
- If your child is a limited English proficient student who was enrolled in U.S. schools for the first time during the 2005–2006 school year, the *Parent/Guardian Report* shows a performance level of *LEP*.
- In a small number of cases, the *Parent/Guardian Report* may indicate a performance level of *Incomplete* or *Transferred*, or the space may be blank. Contact your child's school for more information.

VI. *Where Can I Find More Information?*

A. *Additional Reports Available*

The resources listed in this section are provided to schools and districts following MCAS test administration. Please contact the school at which your child took the MCAS tests for access to these resources.

- *Composition CD* (grades 4, 7, and 10 only)
Students' ELA Compositions are sent to schools in electronic format on CD and are available to parents/guardians upon request.
- *School and District Reports*
These reports are available online and provide information about subgroups of students tested, distribution of results by scaled score interval, performance level results, and three-year comparisons of results.
- *Test Item Analysis Report Summaries*
These reports show the average item score and the percentage of total student responses for each multiple-choice answer, short-answer, or open-response score point.

B. Other Resources

The publications listed in this section are available on the Department's Web site. Many are also available at your child's school.

- *Release of Spring 2006 MCAS Test Items*, which is available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/testitems.html, contains all 2006 MCAS test questions that were used as the basis of student results.
- *Requirements for the Participation of Students with Disabilities in MCAS (Spring 2006 Update)*, which is available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/part_req.html, outlines the participation requirements and allowable accommodations for students with disabilities.
- *Requirements for the Participation of Students with Limited English Proficiency in MCAS and MEPA (Spring 2006 Update)*, which is also available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/part_req.html, outlines the participation requirements for LEP students.
- *Curriculum Frameworks in English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Technology/Engineering, and History and Social Science*, which are available at www.doe.mass.edu/Frameworks/current.html, describe what students should know and demonstrate at various grade spans.

C. What Can I Do to Help My Child?

Supporting your child is critical now and in his or her future academic career. Here are some tips for helping your child prepare for the next MCAS test administration.

- Have regular discussions with your child's teacher(s) to see what you can do at home to support your child's work in school.
- Make sure your child gets enough rest, eats properly, and arrives at school on time every day. Send your child to school prepared to learn.
- Discuss with your child subjects that need improvement and whether he or she thinks there has been improvement. If the answer is no, find out why.
- Ask your child about homework that is due tomorrow and next week, and make sure this homework is completed.
- Ask your child to explain what he or she is studying. These conversations help you follow your child's progress, and help your child to remember what he or she has learned.
- If your child has a disability, ask his or her teacher(s) how MCAS fits into your child's IEP or 504 plan.
- Help your child practice MCAS test questions, and review the tests together so you will all become familiar with the expectations.

English version