



*The
Massachusetts
Comprehensive
Assessment
System*

Guide to the
2008 MCAS for
Parents/Guardians

Massachusetts Department of Elementary
and Secondary Education



Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

This document was prepared by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D., Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

Commissioner's Foreword

Dear Parent or Guardian:

MCAS student assessments are an important part of our commonwealth's effort to support the education of every child. The tests are designed to measure students' learning of important knowledge and development of skills in core academic subjects. They are also used to show how schools and districts are helping students learn and improve their academic performance.

This guide is intended to help you in reviewing the *Parent/Guardian Report*, which provides your child's results from the spring 2008 MCAS tests.

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,

Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary 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 along with one of four high school tests in Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) as one condition of eligibility for a high school diploma (in addition to fulfilling local requirements).

In addition, the MCAS program holds schools and districts accountable, on a yearly basis, for the progress they have made toward meeting the goal set by the No Child Left Behind Law of proficiency in reading and mathematics for all students by 2014.

Participation Guidelines

In 2008, all public school students in grades 3–8 and grade 10 were required to participate in MCAS testing available at their grade level. Schools were also required to administer a test to any grade 9 student who was enrolled in a Biology, Chemistry, Introductory Physics, or Technology/Engineering course and who chose to participate in the corresponding MCAS test.

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 Elementary and Secondary 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 *Requirements for the Participation of Students with Disabilities in MCAS*, which is on the Department’s website at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/participation.

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 STE. For LEP students in their first year of enrollment in U.S. public schools, the district has the option of having students participate in the ELA test at their grade level. The results for first-year LEP students are used for diagnostic purposes only. Therefore, these students do not receive scaled scores or performance levels.

In addition, all LEP students are required to participate in the Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment-Reading/Writing (MEPA-R/W) and the Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral (MELA-O) to measure their annual progress toward learning English. In spring 2008, K–2 LEP students in Title III districts also participated in a reading and writing assessment called the IDEA Proficiency Test (IPT).

In 2008, 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 *Requirements for the Participation of Students with Limited English Proficiency in MCAS and MEPA*, which is on the Department’s website at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/participation.

II. What MCAS tests were administered in 2008?

Spring 2008 Tests

The table below shows the 2008 MCAS tests administered at each grade level.

Grade 3	ELA Reading Comprehension Mathematics
Grade 4	ELA (Composition; Reading Comprehension) Mathematics
Grade 5	ELA Reading Comprehension Mathematics Science and Technology/Engineering History and Social Science*
Grade 6	ELA Reading Comprehension Mathematics
Grade 7	ELA (Composition; Reading Comprehension) Mathematics History and Social Science*
Grade 8	ELA Reading Comprehension Mathematics Science and Technology/Engineering
Grade 10	ELA (Composition; Reading Comprehension) Mathematics
High School	Science and Technology/Engineering <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biology • Chemistry • Introductory Physics • Technology/Engineering U.S. History*

* No student-, school-, or district-level results were produced based on the History and Social Science or U.S. History pilot tests.

Retests

Each fall and spring, the Department offers an opportunity for eleventh-graders, twelfth-graders, and adults who have exited high school to participate in MCAS retests. All students 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 2008 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 2008 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.

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

- **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 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 independently by two scorers, based on a scoring guide, in the following two areas:

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

IV. *How will your 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 2008 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 website at www.doe.mass.edu.
- Beginning with the class of 2010, as one requirement for earning a high school diploma, students are required to meet or exceed a scaled score of 240 (*Proficient*) on the grade 10 ELA and Mathematics tests, or receive a scaled score of 220–238 (*Needs Improvement*) on both tests and fulfill the requirements of an Educational Proficiency Plan (see www.doe.mass.edu/hsreform/epp). Students in the class of 2010 must also meet or exceed a scaled score of 220 on one of four high school STE tests. 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 grade 10 MCAS ELA and Mathematics tests, he or she will have multiple opportunities to retake tests for the subject areas not passed. The opportunity to take the high school Biology test will be offered twice each year, beginning in 2009; first in February, and again at the end of the spring term.

- 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 used to determine eligibility for the John and Abigail Adams Scholarship. A Massachusetts public high school student automatically qualifies for the Adams Scholarship if his or her results satisfy the following three requirements:

1. a score in the *Advanced* category in either grade 10 ELA or Mathematics;
2. a score in the *Proficient* or *Advanced* category in the second subject (ELA or Mathematics); and
3. a combined MCAS score on these assessments that places the student in the top 25% of the graduating class in his or her school district.

Students in charter schools and students who participate in school choice or METCO are eligible for the scholarship if they meet the eligibility requirements for either the school they attend or the district in which they live.

- 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.
- The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education uses MCAS results to gauge each school's progress toward all students being proficient 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 public schools and districts in the state and for subgroups of students 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/Latino, Native American, White, and Multi-Race—Non-Hispanic/Latino students

V. How are MCAS results reported?

Parents of each student in grades 3–8 and 10 receive a *Parent/Guardian Report* that shows the results for all spring 2008 MCAS tests taken by their child.

Parents of grade 9 students who participated in a high school Biology, Chemistry, Introductory Physics, or Technology/Engineering test in spring 2008 receive a *Parent/Guardian Report* with results for the test taken by their child. This year the Department is piloting a new reporting format for grade 9 tests only. Information regarding the redesigned report is provided at the end of sections A through D below.

Parent/Guardian Reports are not provided for History and Social Science or U.S. History tests. Results from these tests are not officially reported this year. Rather, they are used to provide information regarding the performance of test questions. Results for selected items for the History and Social Science and U.S. History tests are provided to schools for diagnostic purposes only.

A. Section I: Your Child's Performance

For students in grades 4–8 and 10, 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 your child's probable range of scores.

For students in grade 3 only, section I of the report lists the subjects tested and your child's performance level in each subject. It also shows the location of your child's score within the performance level range.

For students in grade 9 only, section I of the report contains enhanced information in a format designed to help you clearly understand your child's results. Interpretive text accompanies the graphic display of your child's score, performance level, and probable range of scores.

Performance Level

Performance levels relate a student's performance to the *Curriculum Framework* learning standards. Classroom teachers, administrators, higher education faculty, and community members participated in standard-setting panels for each test to identify the minimum total test score associated with each performance level. The Department uses the standards that were set to report a student's performance level for each test.

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 for high school STE tests, performance levels are *Advanced*, *Proficient*, *Needs Improvement*, and *Failing*. For grade 3 ELA and Mathematics tests, performance levels are *Above Proficient*, *Proficient*, *Needs Improvement*, and *Warning*. MCAS Alternate Assessments include the performance levels of *Progressing*, *Emerging*, and *Awareness*.

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

Scaled Scores

For grades 4 and above, a student's scaled score ranges from 200 to 280. Scaled scores make MCAS results comparable from year to year. 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 students. Their raw scores are provided in section II of the reports.

2008 MCAS Scaled Score Ranges, Grades 4 and Above	
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 and high school Science and Technology/Engineering)	200–218

Display of Score and Probable Range of Scores (Grades 4–8 and 10)

This portion of section I shows your child's score for each subject 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 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 is shown in relation to MCAS performance levels.

Display of Student's Score within Performance Level Range (Grade 3)

This portion of section I displays the location of your child's score on each test in relation to the MCAS performance level range.

Display of Score and Probable Range of Scores (Grade 9)

Your child's scaled score for the STE test listed in the heading of the report is highlighted in a box in the upper left corner of section 1. The box also provides information on whether your child has met the MCAS standards for the high school STE test. A black arrow to the right of the box points to your child's score in a graphic display. The gray bar extending slightly above and below your child's score indicates the range of scores your child might receive if he or she took the test many times.

B. Section II: Information about Your Child's Performance on MCAS Test Questions

Section II 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 question. The table below shows the number of questions for each grade and subject.

2008 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	--
High-School	--	--	45 (Biology) 45 (Chemistry) 45 (Introductory Physics) 45 (Technology/Engineering)

The number of questions varies from one grade and subject to another. Depending upon the number and type of questions on the test, your child's report may have some reporting category and score spaces shaded out.

To interpret the codes used in the reporting category and score rows, refer to the legend on the reverse side of the *Parent/Guardian Report*.

The actual questions and correct answers are available from the Department website at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/testitems.html in the document *Release of Spring 2008 MCAS Test Items*. Material from this document can be selected and printed by grade level and subject.

For grade 3 students only, the column on the right in section II lists the total number of raw score points your child received for each subject tested.

C. Section III: 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 performance of students in the same grade at your child’s school, in your child’s local school district, and in the state overall. For the high school STE tests, the four subjects are combined in this section and the comparison is based on students in the class of 2010 for grade 10 reports and on students in the class of 2011 for grade 9 reports.

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 and high school Science and Technology/Engineering 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.

D. Section IV: Additional Information

For Grades 4, 7, and 10 Only: Descriptions of Your Child’s Writing Performance

Students in grades 4, 7, and 10 were administered the Composition (writing) test and the Reading Comprehension test. Results from both tests were combined to arrive at an ELA performance level and scaled score for each student. For these grades, section IV of the *Parent/Guardian Report* provides descriptions of your child’s writing performance. Descriptions associated with your child’s score for topic development are shown in the top box, and those associated with your child’s score for the use of standard English conventions are shown in the bottom box in this section of the report.

For Grade 9 Only: Percentage of Students in the Class of 2011 Who Participated in a High School STE Test

The bar graph in section IV displays the percentage of students in the class of 2011 who participated in an MCAS Biology, Chemistry, Introductory Physics, or Technology/Engineering test in spring 2008. Students in grade 9 were eligible to participate in a high school STE test if they were completing a course in one of the four subjects tested and chose to do so.

E. What information does the Parent/Guardian Report provide if your 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 in a separate report for parents/guardians, the *MCAS-Alt Parent/Guardian Report*.

F. *Under what circumstances do students not receive MCAS scores?*

- If your child was absent from testing with a medically documented excuse, the *Parent/Guardian Report* shows a performance level of *medically excused*.
- If your child 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 school indicated that your child is a limited English proficient (LEP) student who was enrolled in U.S. schools for the first time after March 1, 2007, the *Parent/Guardian Report* shows a performance level of *LEP*. The *Report* also provides item analysis for any parts of the test(s) that your child attempted.
- In a small number of cases, the *Parent/Guardian Report* may indicate a performance level of *Incomplete* or *Transferred*. Contact your child's school if you would like more information concerning this designation.

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.

- *ELA Composition (grades 4, 7, and 10 only)*
Students' ELA Compositions are made available to schools in electronic format from a secure website. They 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, short-answer, and open-response question.

B. *Other Resources*

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

- *Release of Spring 2008 MCAS Test Items*, which is available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/testitems.html, contains all 2008 MCAS test questions used to determine student results.
- *Requirements for the Participation of Students with Disabilities in MCAS*, which is available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/participation, 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*, which is also available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/participation, 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 each grade level.
- The MCAS Performance Appeals process, which was established in 2002, enables students to demonstrate, through their coursework, that they meet or exceed the required standards in ELA and/or Mathematics even though they have been unable to pass the tests or retests. It is anticipated that this resource will become available for high school Science and Technology/Engineering during the 2008–2009 school year. The primary source for information regarding MCAS Performance Appeals is www.doe.mass.edu/mcasappeals.

C. *What can you do to help your 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. Talk about 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