



# Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.  
Commissioner

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Superintendents, Principals, and Directors of Charter Schools, Approved Private Special Education Schools, Institutional Schools, and Educational Collaboratives  
**From:** Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.  
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education  
**Date:** April 22, 2009  
**Subject:** Announcement of Enhancements to MCAS

I would like to inform you of major changes to the MCAS program. I am very pleased that three of these changes represent major enhancements to the program.

### 1. Accelerated Reporting of MCAS Student Results

In response to your feedback, the Department will accelerate the release of MCAS tests beginning with English Language Arts (ELA) this June.

- By June 17, 2009, the Department will release full *preliminary* student results, including scaled scores and performance levels, for ELA tests (grades 3–8 and 10).
- By August 10, 2009, the Department will release full *preliminary* results for Mathematics and Science and Technology/Engineering (all tested grades).
- Beginning in 2010, the Department will release student-level multiple-choice results for Mathematics tests (grades 3–8 and 10) before the end of the school year in June.
- Beginning in 2010, the Department will release full *preliminary* student results, including scaled scores and performance levels, for Mathematics and Science and Technology/Engineering (all tested grades) in the first week of August.

### 2. Reduction in MCAS Testing Time for Students in Grades 3–8

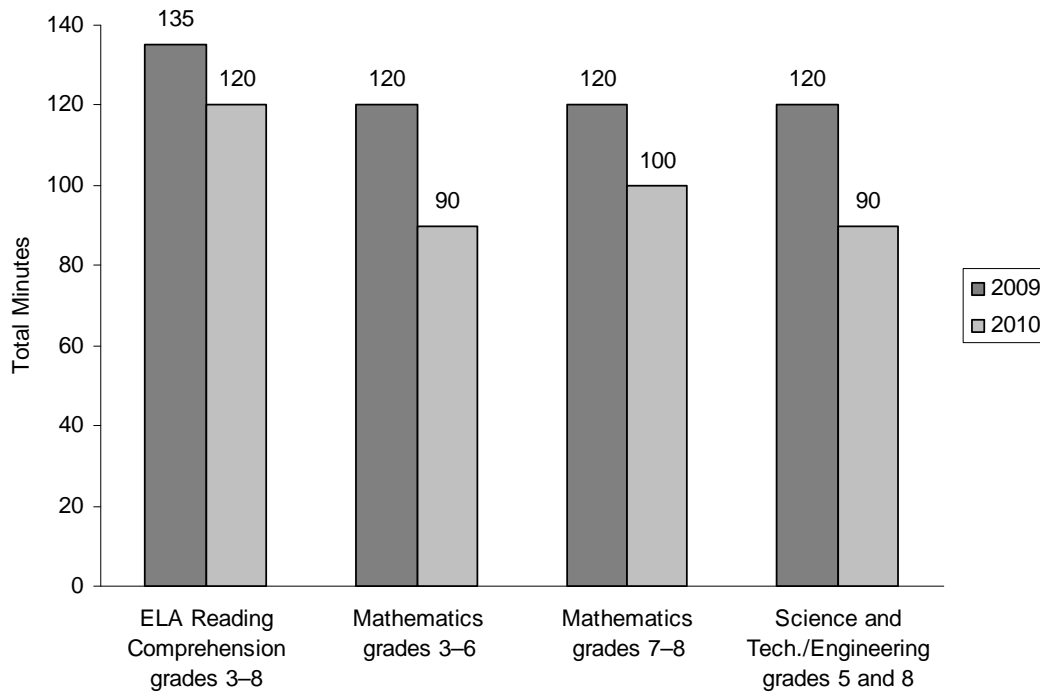
In response to your feedback, the Department will reduce the amount of time that students will need to spend participating in MCAS tests. Beginning in spring 2010 there will be:

- a reduction of one test session for each grade 3–8 ELA Reading Comprehension test, which will consist of two 60-minute sessions, rather than three 45-minute sessions;
- a reduction of one common open-response item for all grades 4–8 tests, and a reduction in the total number of test items each student in grades 3–8 will respond to in each test.

On average, this will reduce MCAS testing time overall by 15 percent for each student.

The figure below displays the reduction in testing time requirements for the spring 2010 MCAS administration.

### Estimated Average Change in MCAS Testing Time for Students by Test



### 3. Change in Policy of Releasing 100 Percent of Common Items

The Department is able to reduce testing time as described above by decreasing the number of items that we annually field test in grades 3-8. In order to decrease the number of field-tested items, we must increase the number of items available to use in future tests by suspending our longstanding practice of releasing all common items (questions on which students' scores are based) each year. Therefore, beginning in spring 2009, we will release approximately 50% of common items annually for all grades 3-8 MCAS tests, instead of all common items. The items released will be representative of all reporting categories assessed. No change will be made to our current practice of releasing all common test items for all subjects at the high school level.

I understand that schools and teachers value released items for planning student instruction and professional development. After 10 years of releasing all common test items, the Department has banked over 3,800 currently posted MCAS items. These items, which are available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/testitems.html>, will continue to be a rich resource for schools.

### 4. Implementation of a Growth Model

The Department has been working with experts from the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment to develop a model that will help the Department calculate the extent to which student performance, as measured by MCAS, changes from year to year.

This spring the Department is planning to roll out student growth data on a pilot basis with a small group of districts. In fall 2009, the Department will provide growth calculations based upon students tested on MCAS in spring 2008 and 2009.

If you have questions about any of the MCAS changes or enhancements, please contact the Office of Student Assessment at 781-338-3625.