



Massachusetts Department of
ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY
EDUCATION

2011–2012 Update

*Requirements for
the Participation of
English Language Learners
in
MEPA and MCAS*

A Guide for Educators and Parents/Guardians



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

Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.
Commissioner

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Commissioner's Foreword

September, 2011

Dear Colleagues:

I am pleased to present the 2011–2012 Update of the *Requirements for the Participation of English Language Learners (ELL) in MEPA and MCAS*. Since the participation requirements differ for each test, it is important that you review this manual carefully.

With increasing numbers of English language learners entering our public schools every day, providing quality instruction and assessment becomes ever more critical. Our two statewide tests—the Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA) and the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)—are designed to measure the English language proficiency and academic success of students who are still learning English. As English language learners strengthen their English skills, they are likely to become more successful academically. Therefore, it is important to teach these skills as rapidly and efficiently as possible.

I appreciate and value the work you perform with English language learners. By helping them become more fluent in English, you are preparing them for success in college and their chosen careers.

Sincerely,

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

Table of Contents

Commissioner's Foreword

| | |
|--|----------|
| I. Overview of Testing Requirements for English Language Learners | 1 |
| A. Definition of an ELL Student..... | 1 |
| B. Identification of ELL Students..... | 1 |
| C. Assigning Testing Spaces for ELL Students..... | 1 |
| II. Participation of ELL Students in the Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA) | 2 |
| A. General Participation Requirements | 2 |
| B. Participation Guidelines for the Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 MEPA Administrations | 2 |
| C. Administering the MELA-O..... | 4 |
| D. Computer-based MEPA Testing..... | 5 |
| III. Participation of ELL Students in the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)..... | 6 |
| A. General Participation Requirements | 6 |
| B. MCAS Participation Requirements for ELL Students with Disabilities..... | 5 |
| C. Use of Bilingual Word-to-Word Dictionaries by ELL Students on MCAS Tests | 7 |
| D. Reporting MCAS Results for ELL Students..... | 7 |
| E. High School Competency Determination (CD) | 8 |
| IV. Available Resources | 9 |

I. Overview of Statewide Testing Requirements for English Language Learners (ELLs)

State and federal laws require that ELL students participate in statewide testing. Massachusetts students will meet the testing requirements by participating in both the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) and the Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA).

A. Definition of an ELL Student

An ELL student (or a student with limited English proficiency) is defined by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as “a student whose first language is a language other than English and who is unable to perform ordinary classroom work in English.”

When a student meets the criteria, he or she is considered an English language learner regardless of whether the student’s parent or guardian has declined a program of language support or services. ELL students are required to participate in statewide tests according to the guidelines provided in this document.

When reporting enrollment information to the Student Information Management System (SIMS), districts must report a student’s limited English proficiency (LEP) status and remove the LEP designation when a student is no longer identified as an ELL. Enrollment information is reported to SIMS throughout the year.

B. Identification of ELL Students

Districts are required to have a procedure in place to evaluate the English proficiency of all students whose home language is not English to determine whether they are ELLs. Students must be evaluated in the areas of reading, writing, listening, and speaking (603 CMR 14.02). In addition, districts must have a procedure in place for determining when a student is no longer an ELL.

If you have questions regarding the **identification and initial assessment of ELL students**, please contact the Office of Language Acquisition and Academic Achievement at 781-338-3518 or via email at ell@doe.mass.edu. Information on identifying ELL students is available on the Department’s website at www.doe.mass.edu/ell/sei/identify_lep.html.

C. Assigning Testing Spaces for ELL Students

The principal or designee is responsible for assigning appropriate testing spaces for students. Generally, this means testing students in their regular classrooms. However, the principal has the authority to schedule ELL students in appropriate groups and in testing spaces other than classrooms, as long as all requirements for testing conditions are met as set forth in the *Principal’s Administration Manuals* for MCAS and MEPA.

II. Participation of ELL Students in the Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA)

A. General Participation Requirements

Federal and state laws require that ELL students be assessed annually to measure their proficiency in listening to, speaking, reading, and writing English, as well as the progress they are making in learning English. In keeping with these laws, ELL students must participate in the two components of MEPA:

- **Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral (MELA-O)** assesses ELL students' proficiency in listening (comprehension) and speaking (production).
- **Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment-Reading/Writing (MEPA-R/W)** assesses ELL students' proficiency in reading and writing.

MEPA is administered twice annually: in the spring to all ELL students in grades K–12 and in the fall to ELL students in grades 1–12 who did not participate the previous spring.

B. Participation Guidelines for the Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 MEPA Administrations

Only specified ELL students must participate in the fall 2011 MEPA administration as shown in Table 1. Note that students in kindergarten may not participate in any part of fall 2011 MEPA. All enrolled ELL students must participate in the spring 2012 MEPA administration.

Table 1
Student Participation Requirements

| MEPA Test | Fall 2011 Participation Requirements | Spring 2012 Participation Requirements |
|--|---|---|
| MELA-O: Listening and Speaking | Only those ELL students enrolled in grades 1–12 who did not participate in spring 2011 MELA-O, including students new to Massachusetts and students who were absent or took only part of the spring 2011 MEPA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All ELL students enrolled in grades K–12 • All students reported as formerly LEP (FLEP) enrolled in grades K–12 who were reported as LEP in the October 2011 SIMS submission |
| MEPA-R/W: Reading and Writing | Only those ELL students enrolled in grades 1–12 who did not participate in spring 2011 MEPA-R/W, including students new to Massachusetts and students who were absent or took only part of the spring 2011 MEPA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All ELL students enrolled in grades K–12 • All FLEP students enrolled in grades K–12 who were reported as LEP in the October 2011 SIMS submission |

Districts may research an enrolled ELL student's previous MEPA scores either by contacting the student's previous school/district; reviewing *MEPA Parent/Guardian Reports*; reviewing data files available at www.mcasservicecenter.com; or contacting the MCAS Service Center at 800-737-5103.

Students Not Required to Participate

A very small number of ELL students are not required to participate in MEPA testing. These students are limited to the following categories:

MEPA-R/W

- Students with a medically documented absence who are unable to participate in make-up testing
- Students with disabilities who require unavailable accommodations, such as Braille tests, an electronic text reader, or a scribe, unless other appropriate accommodations would allow them to participate
- Students with disabilities who have an IEP indicating that their primary disability is “deaf or hard of hearing”
- Students with significant disabilities who require an alternate assessment, as determined by their IEP or 504 team

MELA-O

- Students with a medically documented absence who are unable to participate in make-up testing (Students who are absent for an extended period of time during the MELA-O testing window must provide to the school a written statement from a licensed medical professional documenting the medical condition preventing them from taking the test and the dates of absence due to this condition.)
- Students who have an IEP indicating that their primary disability is “deaf or hard of hearing”

Foreign Exchange Students

Foreign exchange students who are coded #11 under “reason for enrollment” in SIMS are not required to participate in MEPA.

Assigning Students to MEPA-R/W Test Levels/Sessions

Grades 1-2 (Fall)/ K-2 (Spring)

ELL students will participate in either the Level A **or** Level B MEPA-R/W test for both Reading and Writing in grades 1–2 (fall) and K–2 (spring). One determination must be made for *both* the Reading and Writing tests. An optional **locator survey** to assist in making decisions about which test to administer (Level A or Level B) and instructions for its use are posted to the Department’s website at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/mepa/testadmin.

Grades 3–12

ELL students participate in test sessions 1 and 2 **or** 2 and 3 in grades 3–12. For grades 3–12, separate decisions must be made for participation in Reading and Writing. Students participate in the grade span test corresponding to the grade in which they are enrolled: grade span 3–4, 5–6, 7–8, or 9–12. Optional **locator tests** to assist in making decisions about which test sessions to administer (sessions 1 and 2 **or** 2 and 3) and instructions for their use are available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/mepa/testadmin. The locator tests for grades 3–12, for each grade span, contain a reading session and a writing session and take approximately 45 minutes to administer.

Table 2
Participation in MEPA Test Levels/Test Sessions

| Grades | Reading | Writing |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| 1–2 (fall)/K–2 (spring) | Level A or Level B | |
| 3–12 | Sessions 1 and 2 or Sessions 2 and 3 | Sessions 1 and 2 or Sessions 2 and 3 |

Criteria to consider in determining which level or pair of sessions a student will take include the following:

- locator survey/test results
- the student’s scores on reading and other English proficiency assessments used by the district
- the student’s scores on MCAS English Language Arts and other content area tests
- observations by staff working closely with the student
- the student’s scores on previous MEPA tests (for spring only)

C. Administering the MELA-O

An ELL student’s speaking and listening skills are assessed by a Qualified MELA-O trainer (QMT) or Qualified MELA-O administrator (QMA) who observes the student engaging in interactive academic activities with the classroom teacher and/or other students. Using the MELA-O Scoring Matrix, the QMT or QMA rates the student’s levels of comprehension (listening) and production (speaking) on a 0–5 scale. The test administrator records MELA-O scores on each student’s MEPA-R/W answer booklet, including answer booklets for students who were not required to participate in MEPA-R/W. For more information see *MELA-O Overview* which is available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/mepa/testadmin.

Only QMTs and QMAs who have been trained and passed a qualifying test since 2007 are authorized to administer the MELA-O. Once qualified, QMTs are expected to conduct training sessions for prospective QMAs in their districts. Any district that does not have the capacity to administer the MELA-O to each enrolled ELL student must make arrangements with a qualified administrator or trainer in another district.

If you are uncertain about whether your district has a sufficient number of QMTs and QMAs, please consult the list of QMTs and QMAs by district that is posted on the Department website at http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/mepa/testadmin/melao_list.xls. Information about additional MELA-O training sessions for QMTs is posted on the Department’s website at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=6351>.

D. Computer-based MEPA testing

The majority of ELL students took a paper-and-pencil MEPA-R/W test in spring 2011, while approximately 15 percent participated in online MEPA-R/W testing using their computers. Only schools with a high incidence of ELL students were invited to participate in spring 2011 online testing, and only those that met minimum technology requirements participated. In spring 2012, *all* schools with ELL students that meet the minimum technology requirements will be invited to participate in online testing. In early fall, formal letters of invitation will be sent to principals and the process of training staff and preparing schools to administer the spring online tests to ELLs in one or more grade spans will begin.

III. Participation of ELL Students in the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)

A. Participation Requirements

ELL students must participate in *all* MCAS tests scheduled for their grades regardless of the program and services they are receiving or the amount of time they have been in the United States. The only exception applies to first-year ELL students who enrolled in U.S. schools **after March 1, 2011**. Schools have the option of administering ELA tests to first-year ELL students, provided that they have participated in MEPA. First-year ELL students *must* participate in MCAS Mathematics and Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) tests for diagnostic purposes. Their results are not included in school and district AYP performance and improvement calculations.

Table 3
ELL Participation Requirements for Spring 2012 MCAS Tests

| | Content Area of Test | | |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| | English Language Arts | Mathematics | Science and Technology/Engineering |
| First-Year ELL Students ¹ | <i>Optional</i> ² | Required | Required |
| All Other Students | Required | Required | Required |

¹ Results for first-year ELL students are **not** included in MCAS school and district summary results.

² ELA testing is optional provided that the student has participated in MEPA.

High School English/Spanish Tests

Grade 10 Spanish-speaking ELL students who have been enrolled in U.S. schools for **fewer than three** years may choose to take the English/Spanish edition of the grade 10 Mathematics test if they can read and write in Spanish at or near grade level. English/Spanish editions of the Mathematics test are available for the grade 10 Mathematics test and high school Mathematics retests only. Students who are eligible for an English/Spanish MCAS test take the test during the same time period in which the English edition of the test is administered. The designated test administrator must be fluent in both English and Spanish.

Foreign Exchange Students

Foreign exchange students who are coded as #11 under “Reason for Enrollment” in SIMS are not required to participate in MCAS tests.

B. MCAS Participation Requirements for ELL Students with Disabilities

ELL students with disabilities must participate in MCAS by taking either

- MCAS test(s) with or without accommodations
- OR
- MCAS Alternate Assessment (MCAS-Alt).

The ELL student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team or 504 team must determine

how the student will participate in MCAS testing and must document this information in the student’s IEP or 504 plan. Additional information is available in the *Requirements for the Participation of Students with Disabilities in MCAS (2011–2012 Update)*, which is posted on the Department’s website at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/participation/sped.doc.

C. Use of Bilingual Word-to-Word Dictionaries and Glossaries by ELL Students on MCAS Tests

Any ELL student, including students who have been identified as LEP in the past, may use an authorized bilingual word-to-word dictionary and/or glossary on the following MCAS tests:

- ELA—authorized word-to-word dictionary (if available)
- Mathematics—authorized word-to-word dictionary and glossary (if available)
- Science and Technology/Engineering—authorized word-to-word dictionary and glossary (if available)

Dictionary use for MCAS tests is strictly limited to those that provide word-to-word translations. Dictionaries that include definitions, synonyms, antonyms, phrases, and other information are strictly prohibited. Electronic dictionaries are not allowed. Note: The use of bilingual word-to-word dictionaries and glossaries is prohibited on all MEPA tests.

A list of authorized bilingual dictionaries and glossaries, updated in 2011, is available on the Department’s website at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/participation/?section=ell. To discuss the approval of a word-to-word dictionary not included in the list, please call 781-338-3625.

D. Reporting MCAS Results for ELL Students

Results for ELL students are reported with those of other students, and separately in the ELL subgroup. The one exception is the reporting of results for first-year ELL students as shown in Table 4. In reporting school and district Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) results, scores for ELL students with disabilities are included in two categories: students with disabilities and ELL students.

**Table 4
MCAS and AYP Reporting for First-Year ELL Students**

| How Results Reported | Content Area of Test | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| | English Language Arts (Testing optional) | Mathematics (Testing required) | Science and Technology/Engineering (Testing required) |
| Student-level MCAS Results | Student item analysis roster report (if tested) | Student item analysis roster report | Student item analysis roster report |
| Participation for AYP | Counted as <i>participating</i> whether tested or not, provided that the student participated in MEPA | Counted as <i>participating</i> unless absent | Not included in AYP calculations |
| Performance and Improvement for AYP | Not included in <i>Composite Performance Index (CPI)</i> ratings or <i>Improvement</i> determinations | Not included in <i>Composite Performance Index</i> ratings or <i>Improvement</i> determinations | Not included in AYP calculations |

E. High School Competency Determination (CD)

All Massachusetts students, including English language learners, are required to meet the CD standard in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science and technology/engineering (STE).

To earn a CD, students must **either** earn a scaled score of at least 240 on both the grade 10 MCAS ELA and Mathematics tests, **or** earn a scaled score between 220 and 238 on both tests and fulfill the requirements of an Educational Proficiency Plan (EPP). Students must also earn a scaled score of at least 220 on one of the high school STE tests in Biology, Chemistry, Introductory Physics, or Technology/Engineering. In addition to passing MCAS tests, students must meet all local graduation requirements.

Students eligible to take the English/Spanish edition of the MCAS grade 10 Mathematics test may meet the CD requirement in Mathematics through this test but must also pass ELA and STE tests in English.

Since the CD requirement may present a challenge for ELL students who have recently enrolled in a U.S. school, some ELL students may need to continue their education beyond grade 12 in order to attain the requisite knowledge and skills in ELA, mathematics, and STE. After grade 12, students who still need to pass one or more of the required MCAS tests may take the MCAS retest(s) at the school in which they were last enrolled. Some students may also be eligible for an MCAS performance appeal.

For more information on meeting the graduation requirement, please refer to the Department's website at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/graduation.html.

IV. Available Resources

For **policy** questions regarding the assessment of ELL students, please contact Student Assessment Services at 781-338-3625 or by email at mcas@doe.mass.edu. For questions regarding the **identification and initial assessment** of English language learners, please call the Office of Language Acquisition and Academic Achievement at 781-338-6220

Resources to support educators, parents, and others who work with ELL students are available on the Department's website at www.doe.mass.edu/ell. Specific resources are listed below:

- *Bilingual Dictionaries and Glossaries Authorized for Use by English Language Learners* is available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/participation/?section=ell.
- *English Language Proficiency Benchmarks and Outcomes for English Language Learners* (June 2003) defines the standards that are assessed on MEPA tests and is available at www.doe.mass.edu/ell/benchmark.pdf.
- *Requirements for the Participation of Students with Disabilities in MCAS* (2011–2012 Update) provides guidelines for the participation of students with disabilities in MCAS and includes a list of MCAS test accommodations. The document is available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/participation/sped.doc.
- *Guide to Interpreting the 2011 MEPA Reports for Schools and Districts* is available at http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/mepa/2011/interp_guide.pdf.
- *Guidance on Using MEPA Results to Plan Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) Instruction and Make Reclassification Decisions for Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students* (September 2009) is available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/mepa/2009/guidance.doc.
- Information on identifying new ELL students upon their enrollment in a school district is available at www.doe.mass.edu/ell/sei/identify_lep.html
- A current list of QMTs and QMAs is available at http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/mepa/testadmin/melao_list.xls
- MEPA Performance Level Descriptors (Updated May 2009) are available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/mepa/2009/pldescriptors.doc.
- *Qualified MELA-O Trainer (QMT) Training Manual (Fall 2010)* is available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/mepa/testadmin/qmt_manual.doc.
- Test administration resources and reports of results are available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/mepa.
- An Overview of MELA-O is available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/mepa/testadmin/mela-o_overview.doc.