

Spring 2012 MCAS Administration Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

This informational resource provides responses to questions that principals frequently ask during MCAS test administrations. It is intended to supplement the *Principal's Administration Manual* (PAM), which contains all the basic information needed for a smooth test administration. Answers to other questions can be found by searching for a keyword in the index of the PAM. A PDF version is posted on the Department's website at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/testadmin/manual.

Please contact the MCAS Service Center at 800-737-5103 for clarification on test administration procedures and with questions about MCAS materials. Contact the Department at 781-338-3625 with policy questions.

1. Scheduling and Staffing

Q. Must test sessions (not those on prescribed dates) be administered on consecutive days?

A. No. Principals have flexibility, within the parameters stated in the PAM, to schedule test sessions.

Q. May a student take a test earlier than the school's scheduled administration date for that test if he or she plans to be out of school (e.g., on vacation)?

A. No. Students may not be tested before the prescribed testing dates. Students who are absent may make up the test(s) during the testing window according to instructions in the PAM. Principals should contact the Department to discuss any unusual situations.

Q. What are the Department's recommendations for cases when the fire department has asked to test fire alarms during MCAS testing?

A. The Department recommends that principals contact their local fire departments to schedule fire alarm testing prior to MCAS test administration to minimize interruptions.

Q. What should schools do if a student arrives late for a session?

A. If a student arrives after the test administrator has begun or has finished reading the script in the *Test Administrator's Manual* (TAM), the student may not begin work on the test until a test administrator has read the complete script to him or her. The Department suggests that a specific test administrator and room be designated for latecomers so that the script can be read to them without disturbing other students who have already begun the test.

Q. For the grades 7, 8, and 10 Mathematics tests, may schools administer session 2 before session 1, if there are not enough calculators for students?

A. No. Test sessions must be administered in the prescribed order.

Q. May substitute teachers administer MCAS tests?

A. Substitute teachers administer tests if they are regular school employees and meet other qualifications stated in the PAM on page 20.

Q. May students be tested in smaller groups even if they are not students with disabilities who have the accommodation for a small group setting?

A. Yes. Principals have the flexibility to schedule students in appropriate groups and testing spaces other than regular classrooms, as long as all requirements for testing conditions and staffing are met.

Q. May schools allow students to stay after school to complete their ELA Compositions if the test administrator is willing to stay?

A. The scripts in the TAMs that are read aloud throughout the session will help remind students how much time they have, so extra time should not be needed, in general. As stated in the PAM, no session may extend beyond the end of the regular school day; however, principals may provide students, upon request, with up to 15 extra minutes to review and complete their work.

2. Student Participation

Q. Are private school students permitted to participate in MCAS?

A. Only private school students whose tuition is publicly funded are allowed to participate in MCAS. Other private school students are not allowed to take MCAS tests.

Q. Are home-schooled students permitted to participate in MCAS?

A. No. Students in approved home education programs are not enrolled in public schools or educated with Massachusetts public funds. Consequently, they are neither required nor entitled to take the MCAS tests.

Q. Do home- or hospital-tutored students participate in MCAS?

A. Yes. Home-tutored students participate in MCAS. (A home- or hospital-tutored student is enrolled in a public school but receives instruction in the home or hospital due to a medical or other condition.) If possible, the student should be tested at the school under normal test administration conditions. When circumstances make it impossible to test the student at the school, the principal must contact the Department to determine how the student will participate in MCAS testing. Please refer to page 13 of the PAM for further instructions.

Q. Must foreign exchange students participate in MCAS?

A. No. Foreign exchange students are not required to participate in MCAS unless they are attempting to earn a Massachusetts high school diploma. When reporting student information to the Department's Student Information Management System (SIMS), foreign exchange students must be coded as "11" under "reason for enrollment."

Q. Must migrant students participate in MCAS?

A. Yes. Migrant students who are enrolled in a school temporarily are required to participate in MCAS tests.

Q. If a student becomes sick during a test session and is unable to complete the session, must he or she be scheduled for a make-up session?

A. Yes. Students who become ill mid-session need to be scheduled for a closely monitored make-up session to complete **only** the questions they have not yet answered. Students may not change answers or review responses to any questions that were answered before leaving the testing space.

Q. Must students who are repeating a grade take that grade's MCAS tests again?

A. Students in grades 3–8 who are repeating a grade must take the MCAS tests scheduled for the grade in which they are currently enrolled. Refer to pages 11–13 of the PAM for information regarding the participation of retained students in the grade 10 ELA and Mathematics tests and the high school Science and Technology/Engineering tests.

Q. What procedures should be followed for a student who enters a school or transfers out of a school during the testing window?

A. The Change of Enrollment Status section of the answer booklet should be completed to indicate that a student's enrollment status changed (i.e., the student transferred into or out of the school) **and** the student completed **at least one but not all** of the sessions in the answer booklet. An answer booklet should not be returned for students who transfer out of a school **before** the first day of testing.

If a standard answer booklet is not submitted for a student, and the student is reported in both March and June SIMS as enrolled in the same grade and school, the student will automatically be reported as absent without medical documentation (exception: repeating grade 10 students who participated in the previous spring's test).

Q. If a student was reported in SIMS as a grade 7 student and is transitioned to grade 8 by the time of May testing, which Mathematics test should he take? (He took the grade 7 ELA test.)

A. The student must take the grade 7 Mathematics test. (Students can only take tests from one grade level per year).

3. Questions Related to Students with Disabilities and Students Who Are English Language Learners (ELL)

Students with Disabilities

Q. How do principals indicate that a student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a 504 plan?

A. Since IEP status is reported to SIMS by districts, principals do not report this information on answer booklets. New for 2012, 504 status will also be reported to SIMS by districts. If any students have 504 plans because of a temporary disability, such as a broken arm, this information needs to be reported to the district SIMS contact. Updates IEP or 504 status from the October SIMS submission must be made in the March SIMS submission, or, if that deadline has passed, in the June SIMS submission.

Q. What special MCAS test editions are available for students with disabilities?

A. The following editions are available:

- Braille
- Large-print (Note for grades 8 and 10: there is no large-print edition of the questionnaire; as the questionnaire is not a secure item, schools may enlarge the standard edition as needed.)
- Pre-wrapped class packs of six test booklets, each of the same numbered test form for use when providing accommodation 16 or 26 (reading aloud the test to an individual student or to a small group)
- Electronic text reader CD (Kurzweil 3000)
- Grade 10 Mathematics only: American Sign Language (ASL) DVD edition
- Individually shrink-wrapped test booklets labeled "Test Booklet for Signing to a Deaf Student" for use when providing accommodation 17 or 27

Q. Does the Department post sample reference sheets, graphic organizers, or checklists for students with disabilities using accommodation 20?

A. Sample pre-approved graphic organizers for ELA are posted on the Department's website at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/organizers. For mathematics, materials are meant to be individualized for students by their teachers. General guidelines for submitting individualized materials for approval are included in Appendix B of the PAM.

Q. If a student is using an ELA graphic organizer in accordance with an IEP or 504 plan that specifies accommodation 20, and the organizer does not contain any text, must it be submitted to the Department in advance for approval?

A. *No.* Graphic organizers that do not contain any words do not require prior Department approval.

Q. Do schools need to return graphic organizers, checklists, or individualized math reference sheets to the testing contractor in their return shipments of test materials?

A. *Yes.* All checklists, math reference sheets, and graphic organizers (including those posted on the Department's website) that are provided to students with disabilities who have accommodation 20 specified in their IEPs or 504 plans must be included in the return shipment, even if the material has no student handwriting on it, or the student refused the accommodation.

Q. Can a student participate in the MCAS Alternate Assessment (MCAS-Alt) in one subject and the standard MCAS paper-and-pencil test in another? If so, how do principals indicate this?

A. *Yes.* IEP or 504 plan teams may decide that a student should be tested using the standard paper-and-pencil test in one subject and the MCAS-Alt in another. (Students in grades 4, 7, and 10 who are participating in the MCAS-Alt for ELA must participate in **both** the ELA Composition and ELA Reading Comprehension portions of the assessment through the MCAS-Alt.) The principal should submit an answer booklet containing the student's responses to the standard test, and an MCAS-Alt Student Scoring Booklet (SSB) for the subject in which the student took the alternate assessment.

Students Who Are English Language Learners (ELL)

Q. Does an ELL student have to pass MCAS tests to be eligible for a high school diploma, even if the student recently arrived in this country?

A. *Yes.* All students, including ELL students who recently arrived in this country, must earn a Competency Determination (CD) and meet all local graduation requirements in order to receive a high school diploma.

Q. Are MCAS tests available in other languages?

A. MCAS tests in languages other than English are limited to the grade 10 Mathematics test and Mathematics retests, which are available in an English/Spanish edition. The use of the English/Spanish edition is limited to Spanish-speaking ELL students who have been enrolled in school in the continental United States for fewer than three years and can read and write in Spanish at or near grade-level.

Q. May schools translate directions or any portion of the test into other languages for students?

A. *No.* Test administrators may not translate directions or any portion of an MCAS test into other languages for students. A Spanish script from the TAM must be read verbatim to students taking the English/Spanish edition of the grade 10 Mathematics test by a test administrator who is fluent in both English and Spanish.

Q. How are scores reported on MCAS tests for a first-year ELL student?

A. If a first-year ELL student takes an MCAS test and earns a raw score equivalent to a scaled score of 220 or higher on any MCAS test, a scaled score and performance level will be reported for diagnostic and CD purposes. However, these students will not be included in school and district results. If a student does not earn a raw score equivalent to 220 or higher, the student will be reported as limited English proficient (“LEP”).

Q. Are students who are no longer reported as LEP, or those who have chosen not to receive English language support services (e.g., students enrolled in sheltered English immersion classes), eligible to use a bilingual word-to-word dictionary?

A. *Yes.* Any student who is or was ever reported as LEP may use a bilingual word-to-word dictionary during MCAS testing. A list of authorized bilingual word-to-word dictionaries (updated in fall 2011, including specialized terms for mathematics and science and technology/engineering) is posted at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/participation/?section=lep.

Q. If schools have students who speak a language that does not have a bilingual word-to-word dictionary on the approved list, can they submit a request for an update to the list?

A. *Yes.* Requests for updates should be submitted via email to mcas@doe.mass.edu. Unfortunately, bilingual word-to-word dictionaries are not available for all languages.

Q. My school has a student who attended school in the U.S. for a short time, then returned to her native country for a year. The student has returned to my school and is still reported as LEP. May we classify the student as a first-year LEP student?

A. *No.* The student may be reported as LEP but is no longer **first-year** LEP since the student was previously reported to SIMS in his or her first year of enrollment in a U.S. school.

4. Providing Student Information/Using Student ID Labels

Q. If a regular education student is tested in a smaller group or separate setting (see related question on page 1), but the student does not have these accommodations specified in an IEP or 504 plan, do we need to indicate this on the student’s answer booklet?

A. *No.* Do not fill in accommodation circles on an answer booklet unless a student has a disability and accommodations listed in an IEP or 504 plan.

Q. Instead of writing the school and district name on each student’s answer booklet or test booklet, could a school print this information on a label?

A. *Yes.* The label must fit designated sections (other sections of answer booklets must not be covered), and the label must be of regular thickness (e.g., Avery labels).

Q. How are Student ID Labels for each test administration generated and what are some uses for SIMS data?

A. Student ID Labels are based on information provided by districts in the October SIMS submission.

Labels for the high school Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) tests are provided for each student in grades 9–12 reported in October SIMS who has not yet met the STE requirement for earning a CD.

March SIMS data are the source for demographic information (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, low-income status) used in final data reports. March and June SIMS data are the source for program status (e.g., special education, limited English proficiency).

Q. Should schools use a Student ID Label if the SASID is correct, but other information provided on the label is incorrect?

A. Yes. Schools should use the label if the student's SASID is correct. The labels are used to ensure that a student's MCAS results are connected to the state's official SIMS database. If the student's name or date of birth is incorrect, it is likely that this information was incorrectly reported to SIMS. Schools should report the problem to the district contact and request that the information be corrected in June SIMS.

Q. Is it possible to obtain an additional Student ID Label for a student who recently transferred to our school?

A. No. If a student does not have a label, schools must provide all of the requested student identification information on the student's answer booklet. See the TAMs for instructions.

Q. One of our school's students has moved to another school in our district. May we send his or her Student ID Label to the new school?

A. No. MCAS test materials, including Student ID Labels, must **not** be moved from one school to another. The student's information needs to be updated in the next SIMS submission. The school that the student has transferred to will need to fill in all information requested on the student's answer booklet. The school the student no longer attends will return the unused Student ID Label according to the packing instructions in the PAM.

Q. If a student with a Student ID Label completes the front cover of his or her answer booklet in pen, may the answer booklet still be used by the student?

A. Yes. If a student has a Student ID Label, the label will override information completed in pen on the answer booklet.

Q. Can a school use a student's Student ID Label from the standard MCAS administration on the student's MCAS-Alt SSB?

A. Yes. Standard MCAS Student ID Labels and MCAS-Alt labels are interchangeable.

5. High School Tests

Q. When will students be notified that they are eligible for an Adams Scholarship?

A. Eligible students will be notified in the fall of their senior year.

Q. A student moved to Massachusetts and enrolled in my school in spring 2011 as a grade 10 student. He was reported as "TRN" because he entered the school too late into the testing window to participate. Is the student required to take the grade 10 tests in ELA and Mathematics in spring 2012?

A. No. The student is not required to participate, but may participate in an attempt to qualify for the Adams Scholarship or the Koplik Certificate of Mastery with Distinction. The student may also choose to participate in the retests.

Q. Can a student who participates but does not pass in the February Biology test participate in a June STE test as well?

A. Yes. If a student who participates in the February Biology test does not earn a CD in STE, he or she may participate in any of the four June high school STE tests, based on the participation requirements stated in the PAM on pages 12–13. February Biology test results are expected to be posted at DropBox Central in late March.

Q. May a high school administer different subject area high school STE tests in the same room (e.g., Biology and Chemistry)?

A. *Yes.* However, test administrators should pay close attention when monitoring students and when reading the scripts, since there are different materials for each subject area test.

Q. Are students who are enrolled in a physical science course eligible to take the Introductory Physics test?

A. Students enrolled in a physical science course are eligible to take the Introductory Physics test if the course is based on the High School Introductory Physics standards in the *Massachusetts Science and Technology/Engineering Curriculum Framework*.

Q. Is it possible to submit an MCAS-Alt portfolio binder in February for Biology?

A. *No.* MCAS-Alt portfolios are submitted in the spring only. If a portfolio is completed earlier, it should be securely stored until spring.

6. Completing Student Information on Answer Booklets and Returning Shipments of Materials

Q. How does a school account for a student who is absent without a medically documented reason?

A. If the school already assigned the student's answer booklet by writing the student's name and SASID on the front cover and by affixing a Student ID Label on the front, the school should mark the booklet void (write "void" across the front cover and fill in the void circle on the back cover, and return the booklet in the Void Envelope). If the school did not assign a booklet to the student, no action is required. The Department will report the student as absent based on SIMS. Note that a student for whom an answer booklet is submitted and who did not respond to a single test question in any one test session will be reported as absent for that subject area test.

Q. The school has an alternative program in another location. How can the program receive Student ID Labels and shipments of test materials directly, so that the program does not need to request permission from the Department to transport materials?

A. Contact the Student Assessment Services Office at 781-338-3625 or mcas@doe.mass.edu to make arrangements.

7. Other

Q. How do principals stay informed about upcoming activities, such as ordering test materials?

A. All testing and reporting activities and test administration milestones are announced on the Department's website. It is important that principals familiarize themselves with the Department's website and the testing schedule that is posted at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/cal.html. Notices of upcoming events, including dates for ordering materials and reporting results, are posted in the Commissioner's Update and MCAS News Headlines (www.doe.mass.edu/mcas). Also, since faxes are sent to schools with important updates, the Department requests that principals update contact information with their District-level Directory Administrator (listing posted at www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/data/diradmin/list.aspx).

Q. Does the Department have suggestions for inventorying packets of secure test booklets, which must remain shrink-wrapped?

A. The Department recommends that principals count the spines of test booklets in the shrink-wrapped packets. A small box is printed on the spine of each booklet, and the boxes appear in descending order for the booklets in each shrink-wrapped packet to assist in counting.

Q. The TAMs state that students' test booklets will be destroyed following test administration. Students are concerned about this. What does this really mean?

A. Test booklets are securely shredded and recycled.

Q. May students write on pages that say "No test materials on this page" in their test booklets?

A. Yes. Students may write or do any pre-writing activities in their test booklets. However, **all** of their responses for scoring must be marked in the appropriate spaces in their answer booklets.

Q. Must displays that provide information related to the content being assessed or to test-taking strategies be removed from the hallways?

A. No. Such displays must only be removed from classrooms where students are being tested.

Q. Students are asked to write the name of the test administrator on the cover of their test booklets for each MCAS test session. What should students do if schools use more than one test administrator to proctor a test session?

A. Students may write the names of all test administrators on the appropriate line on the test booklet cover and in the space below that line.

Q. May students use mechanical pencils that contain #2 lead in their answer booklets?

A. Yes, mechanical pencils may be used, provided test administrators confirm they contain #2 lead.