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/retest/pam.pdf.

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. Test Administration, Scheduling, and Staffing

Q. The PAM states that only the principal may sign the Principal’s Certification of Proper Test Administration (PCPA) and that the principal must sign his or her name on the PCPA exactly as the name is listed in School/District Profiles on the Department’s website. How should a school sign the PCPA if the principal is out of school during testing (e.g., because of surgery or other emergency)?
A. The acting principal’s signature for the PCPA should include “Interim” or “Co-principal.”

Q. Do teachers who served as test administrators for the November retests need to participate in training again before the February Biology test?
A. Yes. The principal must meet with test administrators before each test administration for which they will administer tests. (Other personnel authorized to have access to secure materials also need to be trained before each test administration for which they have access to secure materials.) The training session should cover the topics on pages 25–27 of the PAM. Based on the principal’s judgment, the training session for the February Biology test or March retest may include an evaluation of procedures from the November testing that require refinement during the February Biology or March retest administrations or serve as a refresher for test administrators.

Q. What should schools do if a student uses a highlighter in his or her answer booklet?
A. Light yellow highlighter marks will not cause problems in scanning/scoring. Contact the MCAS Service Center at 800-737-5103 if a color other than yellow was used.

Q. What should schools do if a student’s test or answer booklet rips?
A. Contact the MCAS Service Center at 800-737-5103 for instructions.

Q. What is the Department’s recommendation for when students finish testing?
A. In order to minimize the length of time that students must wait to be dismissed after completing their tests, the Department recommends that schools consider dismissing groups of students in periodic “waves.” Removing students who are finished from the testing room decreases the incidence of irregularities that occur when students are idle for long periods of time.

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 or after 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 Mathematics retests, may schools change the sequence and 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 may administer tests if they are regular school employees and meet the other qualifications stated in the PAM on page 21.

Q. May students be tested in small 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. Can students have a snack at their desk? Can schools schedule a snack break mid-session?
A. Students may have water at their desk at the principal’s discretion. While the Department does not recommend providing food during testing, snacks at students’ desks or at a table in the corner of the room may be permitted as long as the test administration is not disrupted. Class-wide breaks for snacks may not be scheduled to occur once a session has begun. See Part III of the PAM for guidance on scheduling lunch. If students have not completed their test during the regularly scheduled session, they may be provided with a break before returning to their session in a test completion room.

Q. What staff coverage is appropriate for bathroom breaks?
A. There must be a sufficient number of hall monitors to make sure that students leaving different classrooms are not discussing tests.

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 students receiving home/hospital instruction participate in MCAS?
A. Yes. Students receiving home/hospital instruction participate in MCAS. (A student receiving home/hospital instruction is enrolled in a public school but receives instruction in the home or hospital

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due to a medical condition or other circumstance.) 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 should contact the Department to determine how the student will participate in MCAS testing. Please refer to page 15 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. 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 they answered before leaving the testing space.

Q. What procedures should be followed for a student who enters a school or transfers out of a school during the testing window?
A. For the February Biology test, 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. For all the fall/winter test administrations, 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).

3. Students with Disabilities and English Language Learner (ELL) Students

Students with Disabilities

Q. How do principals indicate that a student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a 504 plan?
A. Since IEP and 504 statuses are reported to SIMS by districts, principals do not report this information on answer booklets. If a student incurs a temporary disability and is placed on a 504 plan as a result, this information must be reported to the district SIMS contact, even if the 504 plan begins and ends between SIMS submission dates. Updates to IEP or 504 status from the October SIMS submission must be made in the March SIMS submission.

Q. For the retests and the February Biology test, what special MCAS test editions are available for students with disabilities?
A. The following editions are available:
  - Braille
  - Large-print
  - Electronic text reader CD (Kurzweil 3000)
Q. Does the Department post sample reference sheets, graphic organizers, or checklists for students with disabilities using accommodation 20?
A. Yes. Sample pre-approved graphic organizers for use during the ELA tests are posted on the Department’s website at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/organizers. Materials designed for use during the Mathematics tests should be individualized for students by their teachers. General guidelines for submitting individualized materials for approval are included in Appendix B of the PAM and Accommodation 20 Cover Sheet is on page 123.

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 IEP or 504 plan must be included in the return shipment, even if the material has no student handwriting on it, or the student refused the accommodation.

Q. If a student has an IEP but the parents have not signed the most recent version, should the school administer the MCAS tests to the student using accommodations from the old IEP or from the new one? What if an IEP meeting is held just before MCAS testing, and MCAS accommodations are added or removed?
A. A new or revised IEP must be signed by the student’s parent/guardian prior to testing in order to implement the IEP changes during testing. This is also true if the student is in the evaluation process or has just been placed on an IEP for the first time; no part of an IEP can be implemented until it has been signed by a parent/guardian.

Q. What accommodations may be provided to a student with a recently occurring disability that may or may not be temporary?
A. If the school has proper documentation of a disability by a qualified diagnostician and the student needs classroom or MCAS test accommodations because of the disability, the school should develop a 504 plan that specifically states which accommodations the student will need, based on the nature of the disability. There is no need to contact the Department to request permission to create the 504 plan. However, schools must report in SIMS that the student has a 504 plan.

Q. What should a school do if a student refuses an accommodation during testing?
A. If a student is offered an accommodation based on his or her IEP or 504 plan and refuses it, the school must continue to make the accommodation available to the student for the remainder of testing. The school should document the refusal of the accommodation but should not have the student sign a “waiver” of any accommodation. Rather, the documentation provides a record for the school to keep on file that the accommodation was offered but not used by the student. A sample Student Accommodation Refusal form is provided in Appendix C of the Participation Requirements manual available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/participation/sped.pdf. This information is not submitted to the Department, and accommodations that were refused are not to be documented on the student’s answer booklet. At the next IEP or 504 meeting, the team should discuss whether or not the refused accommodation is still appropriate and necessary for the student.

**ELL Students**
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. 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 Mathematics retest by a test administrator who is fluent in both English and Spanish.

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, which was updated in summer 2013 and includes bilingual dictionaries and glossaries with specialized terms for mathematics and science and technology/engineering, is posted at http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/participation/?section=ell.

Q. If a school has students who speak a language that does not have a bilingual word-to-word dictionary on the approved list, can the school 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 small group or separate setting (see related question on page 2), 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, may 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 standard thickness (e.g., Avery labels).

Q. Should schools use a Student ID Label if the State-Assigned Student Identifier (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, schools should report the problem to the district contact and request that the information be corrected in the next SIMS submission.
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 TAM 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 to which the student transferred must fill in all information requested on the student’s answer booklet. The school the student no longer attends should 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.

5. Mathematics Retest

Q. Are the Mathematics reference sheets for the retest different from the ones provided in spring 2014?
A. No. The same formulas and other information are provided on this year’s reference sheets.

Q. Are there other formulas that students need in addition to those provided on the Mathematics reference sheets?
A. Other formulas will be included along with test questions as appropriate. No other formulas, reference sheets, or materials may be provided to students except those allowed in the manuals.

6. February Biology Test

Q. Can a student who participates in, but does not pass, 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 page 13. February Biology test results are expected to be posted at DropBox Central in late March.

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.

Q. May students in grade 9 take the February Biology test and have their results count toward the state STE graduation requirement?
A. Yes. Students in grade 9 may participate in the February Biology test to fulfill the STE requirement for the CD, provided they have completed a high school biology course by the time of testing and have not yet earned their CD in STE.

Q. May students who are not currently enrolled in a biology course participate in the February Biology test administration?
A. Yes. As long as a student has completed a high school biology course at the time of testing, and has not previously earned a CD in STE, he or she may take the February Biology test.
7. Returning Shipments of Materials

Q. A school has an alternative program in another location. How can the program receive Student ID Labels and shipments of test materials directly, so the program does not need to request permission from the Department to transport materials?
A. Contact Student Assessment Services at 781-338-3625 or mcas@doe.mass.edu to make arrangements.

8. Other

Q. How do principals stay informed about future tasks, 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 future events, including dates for ordering materials and reporting results, are also emailed in the Student Assessment Update. In addition, important, time-sensitive information is sent to principals via fax and email.

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. May students write on pages that say “No test material 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 a school uses 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.