



# Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.  
Commissioner

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education  
**From:** Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D., Commissioner  
**Date:** June 13, 2014  
**Subject:** Competency Determination Decision for the Class of 2019

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At the June 24, 2014, meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, I am recommending that the Board vote to extend the use of MCAS tests for students to earn the Competency Determination (CD) for high school graduation through the graduating class of 2019. At the November 2013 meeting, the Board voted to “maintain continuity in the use of MCAS tests for students to earn the Competency Determination for high school graduation, at least through the graduating class of 2018.” For the reason articulated in this memorandum, I believe that transitioning the Class of 2019 to a new assessment for the CD is premature, as well.

### Background

At the November 2013 Board meeting, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with Mass. General Laws chapter 69, sections 1B and 1I, adopted the two-year MCAS-to-PARCC transition plan, as presented by the Commissioner, and directed the Commissioner to implement the plan. The transition plan is designed to:

- provide for a robust comparison of the MCAS and PARCC student assessment programs, so the Board can decide in the fall of 2015 whether to sunset the MCAS English language arts and mathematics assessments for grades 3-8 and employ PARCC as the state testing program for these subjects beginning in the 2015/2016 school year;
- give teachers and schools additional time to continue implementing the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks in English language arts and math adopted by the Board in December 2010 and to become familiar with new online test administration procedures before full-scale implementation of PARCC;
- permit a smooth transition in using assessment results for accountability while maintaining trend lines that link back to pre-PARCC performance;
- reserve for a future date the Board’s consideration of options for English language arts and math assessments at the high school level (grades 9-12); and
- maintain continuity in the use of MCAS tests for students to earn the Competency Determination for high school graduation, at least through the graduating class of 2018 (this year’s eighth graders).

**Class of 2019**

Students in the graduating class of 2019 will be eighth-graders in the coming school year, 2014-2015. The Board has not yet announced the Competency Determination standard for the class of 2019.

The current plan is for the Board to vote on PARCC adoption in fall 2015, after students in the class of 2019 have begun their ninth-grade year. If the Board votes to adopt PARCC at that time, the Board will also adopt a new Competency Determination standard. I believe these students should know, before they enter ninth grade, the standards and assessments for the Competency Determination that they must earn for high school graduation. To provide fair notice and certainty, I recommend that the Board vote to continue the use of MCAS tests for students to earn the Competency Determination for high school graduation, through the graduating class of 2019.

As a reminder, to earn the Competency Determination, students must earn the required score on one of four high school Science and Technology/Engineering MCAS tests as well as on the grade 10 English language arts and math MCAS tests. I am recommending that the Board announce now that regardless of the decision to be made next year on PARCC, we will continue to use MCAS tests as the Competency Determination measure through the class of 2019.

The table below gives a visual representation of the graduating classes across academic years, with the Competency Determination years highlighted. The specific decision point for the class of 2019 is highlighted in orange.

**Graduating Classes 2015-2020 Across Academic Years**

Class of	School Year 14-15		School Year 15-16*		School Year 16-17		School Year 17-18		School Year 18-19	
	grade	test	grade	test	grade	test	grade	test	grade	test
2015	12	MCAS Retest								
2016	11	MCAS Retest	12	MCAS Retest						
2017	10	MCAS**	11	MCAS Retest	12	MCAS Retest				
2018	9	PARCC Choice	10	MCAS**	11	MCAS Retest	12	MCAS Retest		
2019	8	MCAS/PARCC Choice	9		10***		11		12	
2020	7	MCAS/PARCC Choice	8		9		10**		11	

\*Fall of 2015: Board of Elementary and Secondary Education votes on PARCC Adoption

**\*\* Competency Determination year**  
**\*\*\* Decision point for the class of 2019**