# MEMORANDUM

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| **To:** | Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:** | Russell D. Johnston, Acting Commissioner |
| **Date:** | May 15, 2024 |
| **Subject:** | Update on MCAS Contract |

At the May 21, 2024, meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, I will update the Board on the contract for the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). This contract covers all aspects of the statewide MCAS tests, including item and test development, test production and administration, scoring, and reporting.

The current MCAS contract, which is held by Cognia of Alpharetta, GA, was last bid and awarded in 2016. The contract and all available extensions are scheduled to expire on June 30, 2024.

**Procurement Process**

In preparation for the new procurement cycle, beginning more than a year ago the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) convened focus groups, gathered information via surveys, and conducted other stakeholder engagement to obtain feedback on aspects of the current assessment program and to hear suggestions for additions, improvement, or changes that might be included in a future contract.

At the conclusion of this engagement process, in June 2023 DESE released a Request for Responses (RFR), which yielded bids from three assessment vendors. DESE convened a team to review the bids and to view demonstrations of services and systems from the prospective vendors.

In November 2023, DESE announced its intention to enter into negotiations with Cognia. Following a successful negotiation period, at the end of April 2024 DESE signed a contract with Cognia to collaborate on the development and production of the MCAS.

**Highlights of the New Assessment Contract**

Under the new five-year contract, which will begin on July 1, 2024, Cognia and its subcontractors—including eMetric of San Antonio, TX—will provide a full range of services in support of the assessment, including test construction and development, customer support for schools and districts, scoring, and reporting. The total five-year contract cost is $179.6 million.

The new contract includes the following updates and enhancements to the MCAS program:

* continued strong and ongoing participation by educators in the review of test items and in the setting of achievement standards for new tests
* revised tests in grades 5 and 8 science that encourage the “doing of science” in the context of real-world storylines and interactive simulations
* a new grade 8 civics assessment that measures students' understanding of civics and the foundations of the Massachusetts and U.S. governments
* revisions to the current English language arts tests in grades 3-8 intended to continue bringing down the amount of time spent on testing
* improved access to assessments through the translation of additional tests into Spanish
* a focus on improved turnaround times for assessment results through the increased use of automated scoring and a new reporting portal to inform students’ families and caregivers

Rob Curtin, chief officer for data, assessment, and accountability, will join us for the discussion.