**Frequently Asked Questions: Assessment and Accountability  
September 2021**

**General Information about Spring 2021 MCAS Testing**

1. **Why did the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) administer the MCAS tests during the pandemic last year?**

The MCAS provides one piece of information about student learning in a school year. As a result of the pandemic, it was critical to have diagnostic insight into the impacts on student progress in the 2020-21 school year. Annual state assessments are required by state and federal law. In February 2021, the U.S. Department of Education [granted a number of flexibilities to states in administering assessments](https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-releases-guidance-states-assessing-student-learning-during-pandemic) in spring 2021, and Massachusetts took advantage of many of those flexibilities. In addition, the high school MCAS tests provide access to college scholarships.

1. **Why are the 2021 MCAS results going to be made public?**

Results from the 2021 MCAS tests provide Massachusetts educators and families with critical diagnostic information about how the challenges and disruptions of the pandemic have affected students’ learning and progress in core academic subjects.

1. **What was different about the 2021 MCAS administration?**

To support students, families, and schools, DESE implemented a number of flexibilities, including some that were made available by the U.S. Department of Education and the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) in acknowledgement of the challenges of the pandemic.

**For grades 3-8**, these changes included lengthening the test administration windows until almost the end of the school year, shortening the testing experience (students took only one session of the tests instead of two sessions), and allowing students who were learning remotely at the time of testing to take the assessments remotely.

**For high school**, testing windows were extended and began later in the year. In addition, [in April 2021, BESE voted](https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/graduation.html) to allow students in the class of 2022 to be awarded a modified competency determination (CD) in ELA and mathematics upon district certification that the student earned full credit for a relevant course in that subject matter. Students in the class of 2022 were still permitted to voluntarily participate in testing for scholarship purposes.

1. **Was participation on the 2021 MCAS consistent with previous school years?**

Statewide participation rates remained high in 2021 (93-97% at grades 3-8 and 89-90% for high school ELA and mathematics). Participation in some individual schools and districts may be lower. The 2021 MCAS data include a reminder to note participation when viewing school and district results.

**Spring 2021 MCAS Results**

1. **Can the 2021 MCAS results be compared to previous years’ MCAS results at the state, district, school, and student group levels?**

Yes. Although individual students in grades 3-8 each took a shorter test, when aggregated at the state, district, school, or student group level, the results can be reasonably compared to previous administrations of the test. As with previous school years, the 2021 participation rates of individual schools and districts (and the size of the student groups) should be considered when making those comparisons.

1. **Can the 2021 MCAS results be compared to previous years’ MCAS results at the individual student level?**

Because students in grades 3-8 were given one session of the test instead of two sessions, individual student performance may vary more than usual as compared to previous years. These variations even out as groups of students are aggregated, but the difference is important when viewing individual results.

1. **Can the 2021 MCAS results be compared within and across districts?**

DESE encourages schools and districts to focus on using the results for diagnostic and improvement purposes at the local level. As a result of the many unique circumstances faced by districts and schools during pandemic, DESE will not be releasing district comparison tools as in previous years. Caution should be exercised when making comparisons across districts and across schools within the same district, with particular attention to the participation rates of individual schools and districts.

1. **Has the 2021 growth calculation changed as a result of the pandemic?**

Yes. In prior years, student growth percentiles (SGPs) were calculated by comparing students’ current-year score to that of students with similar scores in their cohort. Each year, the cohort group changed (depending on the performance of the current year population), which resulted in a state average SGP of about 50.

In 2021, based on the advice of its MCAS Technical Advisory Committee and other experts in the field, DESE decided to calculate SGPs using a historical academic peer group. This historical peer group represents a “baseline” from which current progress can be measured over time.

The baseline method provides a more sensitive and realistic measure of student growth when a systemic event, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, has a significant, widespread impact on student performance and progress. Please see the additional one-page document for a more technical explanation on the calculation of SGPs in 2021.

1. **Was there a difference in results for students who took remote tests compared to students who took in-person tests?**

On average, across the vast majority of test questions, students who took a remote test performed similarly to students who took an in-person test.

1. **Will the data on remote administration be publicly available?**

Yes. For school, district, and state results, users can select remote administration as a filter when viewing 2021 data for grades 3-8 in [School and District Profiles](https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/) and in Edwin Analytics.

**Accountability**

1. **How do the 2021 MCAS results factor into the accountability results for this and future school years?**The Department will not issue updated district and school accountability determinations in fall 2021. In April 2021, DESE requested and received a [waiver of certain federal accountability requirements](https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/04/ma-acct-waiver-response.pdf). On June 22, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) voted to amend state accountability regulations to allow DESE to refrain from issuing district and school accountability regulations following the 2020-2021 school year. In addition, the Commissioner has committed to not naming any new Underperforming Schools this school year.

The Department will review its options for accountability reporting in 2022 and beyond. Information will be made available as decisions are made.

1. **When will 2022 accountability targets and lowest performing student lists be issued to districts and schools?**

The 2022 accountability targets and lowest performing student group information will be made available in fall 2021.

1. **Will current *underperforming* and *chronically underperforming* schools retain that status for the 2021-2022 school year?**Yes. Through state law and regulations, the Commissioner maintains the authority to name new *underperforming* or *chronically underperforming* schools at any time, or to remove such a designation from an existing *underperforming* or chronically underperforming school or district. MCAS results are among the many measures used to determine whether school may exit its *underperforming* or *chronically underperforming* status. Since the 2021 MCAS results should primarily be used for informational or diagnostic purposes, schools that were previously identified as *underperforming* or *chronically underperforming* will retain that status in the 2021-2022 school year.

For individual student results, the 2021 MCAS parent/guardian reports for grades 3-8 will include a notation, in each subject area, to indicate that a student took a test remotely.

**Competency Determination and Scholarship Qualification**

1. **What is the relationship between the 2021 MCAS results and the competency determination (CD) for the class of 2023 (last year’s 10th graders)?**The 2021 MCAS results include English language arts (ELA) and mathematics achievement and growth data for students who were enrolled in grade 10 during the 2020-2021 school year. Students in the class of 2023 (i.e., students who were enrolled in grade 10 in 2021) are required to earn a passing score on the MCAS tests in ELA and mathematics in order to meet state graduation requirements.

The 2021 MCAS results do not include grade 10 science and technology/engineering (STE) MCAS data. Typically, grade 10 STE results are reported based on students’ best performance on any STE test taken in grade 9 or grade 10. Due to the suspension of in-person instruction and the cancellation of the spring 2020 MCAS assessments due to the COVID-19 emergency, most grade 9 students did not have the opportunity to take a 2020 science assessment. As such, the BESE voted to temporarily [modify the CD requirement](https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/graduation.html) for these students. Students in the class of 2023 may be eligible for the modified CD in science, which can be met by earning full credit in one more DESE-identified biology, chemistry, introductory physics, or technology/engineering courses during their high school career.

1. **How did changes to the 2021 MCAS testing affect qualification for the John and Abigail Adams Scholarship?**Students who were in grade 11 in spring 2021 (class of 2022) were able to take the grade 10 ELA and mathematics tests on a voluntary basis to attempt to qualify for the Adams Scholarship. Students in the class of 2022 who missed the spring 2021 testing opportunity may take the November retests or the March retests to qualify instead. Qualification for the scholarship is based on a student’s first-time testing attempt. More information about scholarship eligibility for the class of 2022 is [available on the Department’s website](https://www.doe.mass.edu/scholarships/adams.html).

**ACCESS for ELLs Results**

1. **When will the 2021 ACCESS results be made publicly available?**On August 5, Individual Student Reports, School and District Frequency Reports, and Student Roster Reports were made available in the WIDA AMS online, and printed reports were mailed to schools on September 8. Student-level results will be available in​ dropboxes beginning in early October, and school and district results will available in Edwin Analytics in mid-October. School and district results will be available publicly on the DESE ACCESS web page in late October.

**MCAS Testing and the Acceleration Roadmap**

1. **How should districts connect the MCAS results to DESE’s Acceleration Roadmap?**

See the section titled “MCAS Results and Learning Acceleration” in the attached document.