



MASSACHUSETTS

Department of Elementary
and Secondary Education

*Release of Spring 2026
MCAS Test Items from the
Grade 8 Civics
Paper-Based Test*

Spring 2026

**Massachusetts Department of
Elementary and Secondary Education**



MASSACHUSETTS

Department of Elementary
and Secondary Education

This document was prepared by the
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Pedro Martinez
Commissioner

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, an affirmative action employer, is committed to ensuring that all of its programs and facilities are accessible to all members of the public. We do not discriminate on the basis of age, color, disability, gender identity, national origin, race, religion, sex or sexual orientation. Inquiries regarding the Department's compliance with Title IX and other civil rights laws may be directed to the Human Resources Director, 135 Santilli Highway, Everett, MA 02149-1950 781-338-6105.

© 2026 Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Permission is hereby granted to copy for non-commercial educational purposes any or all parts of this document with the exception of English Language Arts passages that are not designated as in the public domain. Permission to copy all other passages must be obtained from the copyright holder. Please credit the "Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education."

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
135 Santilli Highway, Everett, MA 02149-1950
Phone 781-338-3000 TTY: N.E.T. Relay 800-439-2370
www.doe.mass.edu



Overview of Grade 8 Civics Test

The spring 2026 grade 8 Civics test was administered in two formats: a computer-based version and a paper-based version. Most students took the computer-based test. The paper-based test was offered as an accommodation for eligible students who were unable to use a computer. More information can be found on the MCAS Test Administration Resources page at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/admin.html.

Most of the operational items on the grade 8 Civics test were the same, regardless of whether a student took the computer-based version or the paper-based version. In places where a technology-enhanced item was used on the computer-based test, an adapted version of the item was created for use on the paper test. These adapted paper items were multiple-choice or multiple-select items that tested the same Civics content and assessed the same standard as the technology-enhanced item.

This document displays released items from the paper-based test, along with associated sources. Released items from the computer-based test are available on the MCAS Resource Center website at mcas.onlinehelp.cognia.org/released-items.

Test Sessions and Content Overview

The grade 8 Civics test included a state performance task and an end-of-course test. The state performance task was based on a topic in the History and Social Science (HSS) standards announced to all districts in the fall, and included selected-response questions and constructed-response questions. The end-of-course test consisted of selected-response questions. On the paper-based test, the selected-response questions were multiple-choice items and multiple-select items, in which students select the correct answer(s) from among several answer options.

Standards and Reporting Categories

The grade 8 Civics test was based on learning standards in the 2018 *Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework*. The Framework is available on the Department website at www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html.

The civics standards are grouped by topics under the three content reporting categories listed below.

- Foundations of Government (Topics 1 & 2)
- Government Structures (Topics 3 & 6)
- Rights and Responsibilities (Topics 4, 5, & 7)

Items on the grade 8 Civics test were also aligned to the Standards for History and Social Science Practice. The HSS practice standards are grouped and reported under the practice categories listed below.

1. Civic Knowledge (Standard 1)
2. Civics-based Questioning (Standards 2 & 7)
3. Analyzing Sources (Standards 4 & 5)
4. Explanations and Reasoning (Standards 3 & 6)

The tables at the conclusion of this document provide the following information about each released and unreleased operational item: reporting category, standard covered, HSS practice standard, item type, and item description. The correct answers for released selected-response questions are also displayed in the released item table.

Reference Materials

During both Civics test sessions, the use of authorized bilingual word-to-word dictionaries and glossaries was allowed for students who are currently or were ever reported as English learners. No other reference materials were allowed during any Civics test session.

Grade 8 Civics

State Performance Task

This session contains 11 questions.

Directions

Read each question carefully and then answer it as well as you can. You must record all answers in this Test & Answer Booklet.

For some questions, you will mark your answers by filling in the circles in your Test & Answer Booklet. Make sure you darken the circles completely. Do not make any marks outside of the circles. If you need to change an answer, be sure to erase your first answer completely.

Some questions will ask you to write a response. Write your response in the space provided. Only responses written within the provided space will be scored.

The following performance task focuses on the political institutions of the U.S. government.

- 1** The three branches of the U.S. government are shown in the diagram. Different positions in the branches include chief justice, senator, and president.

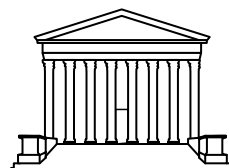
Legislative



Executive



Judicial



The chief justice is a part of the

- Ⓐ executive branch.
- Ⓑ judicial branch.
- Ⓒ legislative branch.

A senator is a part of the

- Ⓐ executive branch.
- Ⓑ judicial branch.
- Ⓒ legislative branch.

The president is a part of the

- Ⓐ executive branch.
- Ⓑ judicial branch.
- Ⓒ legislative branch.

Read and examine the source. Then answer questions 2–4.

The following text describes the U.S. Department of the Interior.

The Department of the Interior is a federal agency responsible for managing and protecting the nation's natural resources. The agency was established by an act of Congress in 1849 to preserve lands for the public to enjoy.

In 2021, the U.S. Senate voted 51 to 40 to confirm Deb Haaland as Secretary of the Interior. She became the first Native American to serve in that position. The photograph shows Secretary Haaland speaking at Yellowstone National Park.



Courtesy of the National Park Service

Part of the Secretary of the Interior's role is to ensure that rules and regulations related to public lands are being enforced. During her visit to Yellowstone National Park, Secretary Haaland stated, "Nature is essential to the health, well-being, and prosperity of every family and community in America. . . . [N]ow is the time to make the investments in our lands and waters that are long overdue." The Department of the Interior's budget for 2021 was \$12.8 billion dollars. Secretary Haaland used a portion of this budget to maintain national parks.

- 2** Which branch of government is the Secretary of the Interior a member of?
- Ⓐ executive
 - Ⓑ judicial
 - Ⓒ legislative

Which of the following is a responsibility of the Secretary of the Interior?

- Ⓐ reviewing civil cases
- Ⓑ advising the president
- Ⓒ commanding the military

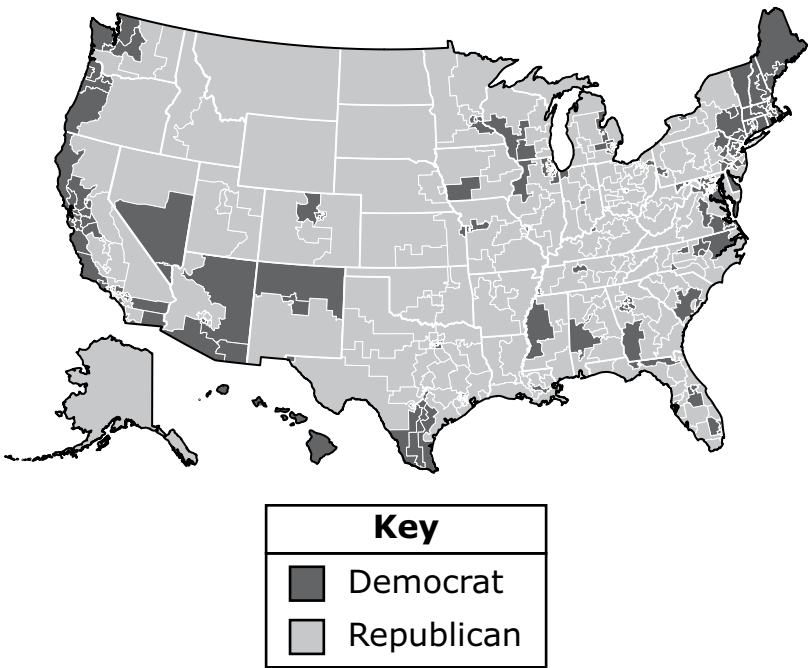
- 3** Based on the source, which of the following **best** describes the role Congress had in creating the Department of the Interior?
- Ⓐ Congress managed tourism.
 - Ⓑ Congress passed legislation.
 - Ⓒ Congress made a court decision.
 - Ⓓ Congress appointed cabinet members.

- 4** Based on the source, describe one way the legislative branch can check the power of the executive branch. Be sure to include information from the source in your response.

Read and examine the source. Then answer questions 5–7.

In the 2020 elections, 222 Democrats and 213 Republicans were elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. The map shows the distribution of members of the U.S. House of Representatives across the United States by political party.

Map of Congressional Districts



Note: There are additional non-voting representatives in the U.S. House of Representatives, including members from Puerto Rico and Washington, DC.

- 5 Which of the following **best** explains how political parties help elect candidates to the U.S. House of Representatives?
- Ⓐ by raising campaign funds for candidates
 - Ⓑ by establishing new voting processes for candidates
 - Ⓒ by passing laws to lower the minimum age of candidates
 - Ⓓ by collecting taxes that pay for the expenses of candidates
- 6 Which of the following **best** explains why a map showing the distribution of U.S. Senators would be different from the map shown in the source?
- Ⓐ Senators can serve only two terms.
 - Ⓑ Senators represent voters from multiple states.
 - Ⓒ Voters from each state elect senators every four years.
 - Ⓓ Voters from each state are represented by two senators.

7 Two students each make a claim based on the map.

Student 1’s claim: There should have been more Republicans than Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives following the 2020 elections.

Student 2’s claim: Even though Republican representatives were distributed over a larger area of the United States, there were more Democratic representatives in the House following the 2020 elections.

Student 2’s claim is correct.

Using your knowledge of civics, explain one reason student 2’s claim is correct.

Read and examine the sources. Then answer questions 8–10.

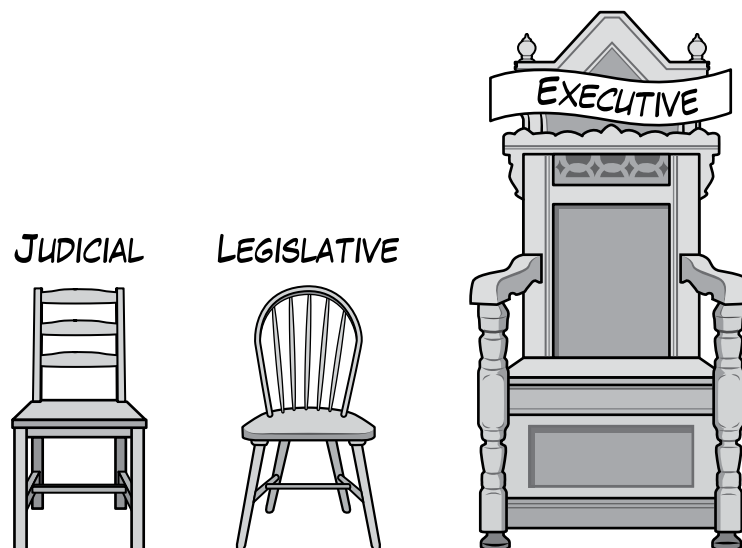
Source 1

The U.S. Constitution describes the roles of the three branches of the federal government. Over time, changes have been made to the Constitution by adding amendments. Summaries of two amendments are shown.

Amendment	Summary
16th Amendment	Congress is allowed to collect taxes on people's incomes.
22nd Amendment	A person cannot be elected to the office of President more than two times.

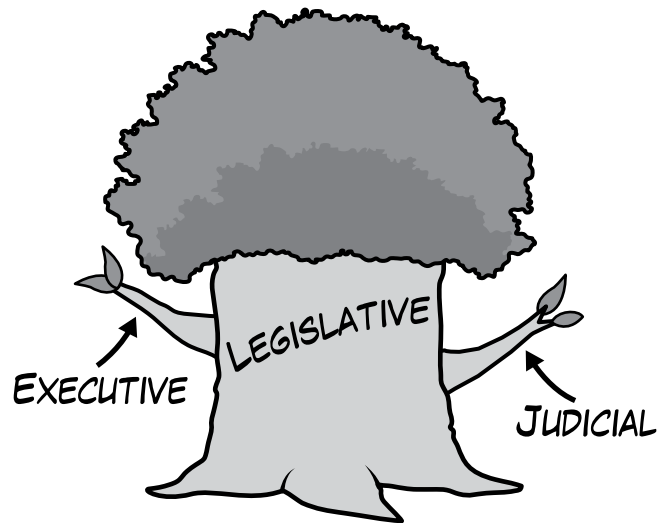
Source 2

A political cartoon about the three branches of the federal government is shown.



Source 3

Another political cartoon about the three branches of the federal government is shown.



- 8** Which of the following did the passage of the 16th Amendment most likely expand?
- Ⓐ judicial powers
 - Ⓑ legislative authority
 - Ⓒ individual protections
 - Ⓓ the president's influence
- 9** Which of the following is the most likely reason the 22nd Amendment was passed?
- Ⓐ to limit the influence of the Electoral College
 - Ⓑ to limit the influence of the executive branch
 - Ⓒ to limit the number of individuals in Congress
 - Ⓓ to limit the number of transitions between presidents

10 A student claims that Congress is the most powerful part of the federal government.

Identify which source, Source 2 or Source 3, shows the political cartoon that best supports the student’s claim. Explain your reasoning.

This question has four parts. Write your response on page 17. Be sure to label each part of your response.

- 11** Franklin D. Roosevelt was president of the United States from 1933–1945. The following photograph shows President Roosevelt giving a speech on the radio.



Courtesy of Library of Congress

In 1933, the law known as the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) was passed, which allowed President Roosevelt to decide how much American workers would be paid at private companies. Many business owners thought the law was unfair and that the federal government had too much power. They challenged the law in the court system. In 1935, the Supreme Court ruled that the law was unconstitutional.

After the Supreme Court declared NIRA unconstitutional, President Roosevelt stated, "During the past half century the balance of power between the three great branches of the federal government has been tipped out of balance. . . ." To help restore the balance of power, President Roosevelt proposed a law to increase the number of justices on the Supreme Court. This new law would have allowed the appointment of a new Supreme Court justice for every justice that was more than 70 years old. The proposed law was rejected by Congress.

- A. Which part of government did President Roosevelt think had too much power?
Mark your answer by filling in the appropriate circle on the next page.
- A** the judicial branch
 - B** the executive branch
 - C** the Department of Labor
 - D** the House of Representatives
- B. Explain why President Roosevelt thought the part of government you identified in Part A had too much power. Use evidence from the source to support your answer.
- C. Determine whether President Roosevelt was able to tip the balance of power. Explain your reasoning using information from the source.
- D. Using your knowledge of civics, describe one way that a president can check the power of the part of government you identified in Part A.

11

A. ☒ the judicial branch

ⓑ the executive branch

© the Department of Labor

④ the House of Representatives

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings on the paper.

Grade 8 Civics

Spring 2026 Released Operational Items

PBT Item No.	Page No.	Reporting Category	Standard	HSS Practice Standard	Item Type*	Item Description	Correct Answer**
1	4	<i>Government Structures</i>	8.T3.3	<i>Civic Knowledge</i>	SR	Use a diagram to determine which positions are part of each of the three branches of government.	B;C;A
2	6	<i>Government Structures</i>	8.T3.2	<i>Civic Knowledge</i>	SR	Describe the role of the Cabinet using information from a source.	A;B
3	6	<i>Government Structures</i>	8.T3.3	<i>Analyzing Sources</i>	SR	Determine a role of the U.S. Congress using information from a source.	B
4	7	<i>Government Structures</i>	8.T3.2	<i>Explanations and Reasoning</i>	CR	Use evidence from a source to describe how one branch of government can check the power of another branch of government.	
5	9	<i>Government Structures</i>	8.T3.5	<i>Explanations and Reasoning</i>	SR	Describe how political parties help elect candidates in Congressional elections.	A
6	9	<i>Government Structures</i>	8.T3.4	<i>Explanations and Reasoning</i>	SR	Analyze a map to explain one difference between the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate.	D
7	10	<i>Government Structures</i>	8.T3.4	<i>Explanations and Reasoning</i>	CR	Evaluate a claim about the distribution of Republicans and Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives using evidence from a map.	
8	13	<i>Government Structures</i>	8.T3.2	<i>Analyzing Sources</i>	SR	Determine how an amendment to the U.S. Constitution expanded the power of the legislative branch using information from a source.	B
9	13	<i>Government Structures</i>	8.T3.3	<i>Analyzing Sources</i>	SR	Explain why an amendment to the U.S. Constitution was passed using information from a source.	B
10	14	<i>Government Structures</i>	8.T3.2	<i>Explanations and Reasoning</i>	CR	Analyze two political cartoons and evaluate a claim using evidence from the cartoons.	
11	15–17	<i>Government Structures</i>	8.T3.2	<i>Explanations and Reasoning</i>	CR	Analyze an historical example to describe interactions between the three branches of the U.S. government and explain checks on executive and judicial power.	

* Civics item types are selected-response (SR) and constructed-response (CR).

** Answers are provided here for selected-response items only. Sample responses and scoring guidelines for any constructed-response items will be posted to the Department's website later this year.

Grade 8 Civics

Spring 2026 Unreleased Operational Items

PBT Item No.	Reporting Category	Standard	HSS Practice Standard	Item Type*	Item Description
12	<i>Rights & Responsibilities</i>	8.T4.4	<i>Analyzing Sources</i>	SR	Analyze a U.S. Supreme Court case to describe a principle of civic life.
13	<i>Foundations of Government</i>	8.T1.5	<i>Analyzing Sources</i>	SR	Describe a similarity between the U.S. Constitution and the Constitution of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy using information from a source.
14	<i>Rights & Responsibilities</i>	8.T5.6	<i>Explanations and Reasoning</i>	SR	Determine which First Amendment right protects given political activities.
15	<i>Foundations of Government</i>	8.T2.5	<i>Analyzing Sources</i>	SR	Describe the purpose of the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution and describe a fundamental principle of the U.S. government expressed in the Preamble.
16	<i>Government Structures</i>	8.T3.5	<i>Explanations and Reasoning</i>	SR	Analyze the platforms from two political parties to support a claim about the role of party platforms in elections.
17	<i>Rights & Responsibilities</i>	8.T4.4	<i>Analyzing Sources</i>	SR	Analyze an historical event to describe how individuals worked to create a new law.
18	<i>Rights & Responsibilities</i>	8.T4.8	<i>Explanations and Reasoning</i>	SR	Analyze an historical event to explain how individuals worked with elected officials on an issue.
19	<i>Rights & Responsibilities</i>	8.T4.8	<i>Explanations and Reasoning</i>	SR	Analyze an historical event to describe the role of protests to influence the passing of a new law.
20	<i>Foundations of Government</i>	8.T1.3	<i>Explanations and Reasoning</i>	SR	Determine which characteristic of the U.S. government best supports a claim about an idea discussed by Enlightenment philosophers.
21	<i>Rights & Responsibilities</i>	8.T4.9	<i>Analyzing Sources</i>	SR	Analyze a quotation about public service to describe a career in federal public service positions.
22	<i>Government Structures</i>	8.T6.6	<i>Explanations and Reasoning</i>	SR	Use information from the Massachusetts Constitution to explain a difference between the Massachusetts and U.S. constitutions.
23	<i>Foundations of Government</i>	8.T2.1	<i>Explanations and Reasoning</i>	SR	Determine how characteristics of the U.S. Constitution addressed complaints about the actions of Great Britain written in the Declaration of Independence.
24	<i>Rights & Responsibilities</i>	8.T4.8	<i>Analyzing Sources</i>	SR	Analyze a description of a conflict between local, state, and federal government agencies to identify actions taken by the different levels of government and describe a role of individuals within the political process.
25	<i>Rights & Responsibilities</i>	8.T4.3	<i>Civic Knowledge</i>	SR	Identify examples of activities related to an individual's political life.
26	<i>Rights & Responsibilities</i>	8.T5.3	<i>Explanations and Reasoning</i>	SR	Explain one purpose of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution using information from a source.
27	<i>Foundations of Government</i>	8.T2.3	<i>Analyzing Sources</i>	SR	Analyze a source to describe how the issue of separation of powers was addressed during the Constitutional Convention.
28	<i>Rights & Responsibilities</i>	8.T4.8	<i>Civic-based Questioning</i>	SR	Describe how a group of individuals can communicate with elected officials to take action on a community issue.

PBT Item No.	Reporting Category	Standard	HSS Practice Standard	Item Type*	Item Description
29	<i>Rights & Responsibilities</i>	8.T7.6	<i>Analyzing Sources</i>	SR	Analyze information from two op-eds and describe a feature to consider when evaluating the point of view of an op-ed.
30	<i>Foundations of Government</i>	8.T1.1	<i>Civic Knowledge</i>	SR	Describe how the concept of civic participation from ancient Athens influenced the U.S. government.
31	<i>Foundations of Government</i>	8.T1.4	<i>Analyzing Sources</i>	SR	Evaluate a timeline about some Massachusetts laws to explain why the laws were passed and how they helped develop democratic government in Massachusetts.
32	<i>Rights & Responsibilities</i>	8.T4.4	<i>Analyzing Sources</i>	SR	Describe an individual right related to a U.S. Supreme Court case based on information from a source.
33	<i>Rights & Responsibilities</i>	8.T7.1	<i>Analyzing Sources</i>	SR	Analyze a political cartoon and use evidence from a source to support a claim about the First Amendment and political change.
34	<i>Rights & Responsibilities</i>	8.T7.1	<i>Analyzing Sources</i>	SR	Analyze a political cartoon to determine which First Amendment right is represented in the cartoon.
35	<i>Rights & Responsibilities</i>	8.T7.1	<i>Analyzing Sources</i>	SR	Analyze a political cartoon to describe the author's point of view on a civic issue.
36	<i>Foundations of Government</i>	8.T1.4	<i>Analyzing Sources</i>	SR	Determine which feature of government is most similar to an idea expressed in the Mayflower Compact.
37	<i>Foundations of Government</i>	8.T2.4	<i>Civic Knowledge</i>	SR	Describe Federalist and Anti-Federalist positions on the U.S. Constitution.
38	<i>Rights & Responsibilities</i>	8.T4.12	<i>Analyzing Sources</i>	SR	Use information from a source to explain how political protests can influence changes in government policies.
39	<i>Foundations of Government</i>	8.T1.3	<i>Analyzing Sources</i>	SR	Analyze a description of an Enlightenment idea about government and determine how that idea influenced the Founders of the U.S. government.
40	<i>Government Structures</i>	8.T6.10	<i>Civic Knowledge</i>	SR	Use information from a table to identify positions in local government and determine the branches of government to which the positions belong.
41	<i>Foundations of Government</i>	8.T1.2	<i>Civic Knowledge</i>	SR	Determine which form of government is most similar to a characteristic of the Roman Republic.
42	<i>Rights & Responsibilities</i>	8.T7.4	<i>Civic Knowledge</i>	SR	Explain one way digital news and social media may benefit democratic governments.
43	<i>Rights & Responsibilities</i>	8.T5.6	<i>Explanations and Reasoning</i>	SR	Analyze information from two court cases to describe a characteristic of the U.S. Supreme Court.

* Civics item types are selected-response (SR) and constructed-response (CR).