# **Grade 8 Civics MCAS Achievement Level Descriptors**

## General MCAS Achievement Level Descriptors

Exceeding Expectations   
A student who performed at this level exceeded grade-level expectations by demonstrating mastery of the subject matter.

Meeting Expectations  
A student who performed at this level met grade-level expectations and is academically on-track to succeed in the current grade in this subject.

Partially Meeting Expectations   
A student who performed at this level partially met grade-level expectations in this subject. The school, in consultation with the student’s parent/guardian, should consider whether the student needs additional academic assistance to succeed in this subject.

Not Meeting Expectations   
A student who performed at this level did not meet grade-level expectations in this subject. The school, in consultation with the student’s parent/guardian, should determine the coordinated academic assistance and/or additional instruction the student needs to succeed in this subject.

## Grade 8 Civics Achievement Level Descriptors

Student results on the MCAS tests are reported according to four achievement levels: *Exceeding Expectations, Meeting Expectations, Partially Meeting Expectations,* and *Not Meeting Expectations.* The descriptors below illustrate the knowledge and skills students demonstrate on MCAS at each level. **Knowledge and skills are cumulative at each level.** No descriptors are provided for the *Not Meeting Expectations* achievement level because students’ work at this level, by definition, does not meet the criteria of the *Partially Meeting Expectations* level.

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|  | **Partially Meeting Expectations**  ***On MCAS, a student at this level:*** | **Meeting Expectations**  ***On MCAS, a student at this level:*** | **Exceeding Expectations**  ***On MCAS, a student at this level:*** |
| **Understanding and Application of Content Standards** | Demonstrates a partial understanding of some civics concepts and processes by identifying and sometimes describing or providing evidence for these concepts and processes.  Uses some basic civics terms in common history and social science examples. | Demonstrates a solid understanding of many civics concepts and processes by mostly describing, explaining, and providing evidence for these concepts and processes.  Mostly applies appropriate civics terms in a variety of applications, including common history and social science examples and some novel situations. | Demonstrates a comprehensive, in-depth understanding of many civics concepts and processes by consistently describing, explaining, and providing evidence for these concepts and processes.  Consistently applies appropriate civics terms in a variety of contexts including common history and social science examples and many novel situations. |
| **Understanding and Application of History and Social Science Practices** | Demonstrates a partial understanding of civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions by identifying, and sometimes describing, how individuals engage in active and responsible citizenship.  Identifies a focus question or problem statement for an inquiry.  Uses information from a source to draw general conclusions about a familiar civics concept.  Identifies evidence to support a claim.  Describes one way individuals can participate in civic life. | Demonstrates a solid understanding of civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions by mostly describing and explaining how individuals engage in active and responsible citizenship.  Develops a focus question or problem statement for an inquiry.  Organizes and analyzes information and data from multiple primary and/or secondary sources to draw conclusions about a familiar civics concept.  Constructs a basic argument or explanation using some evidence and reasoning for a civics concept.  Determines next steps in a scenario where individuals take informed action to address a basic civic issue. | Demonstrates a comprehensive, in-depth understanding of civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions by consistently describing, explaining, and providing evidence for how individuals engage in active and responsible citizenship.  Consistently develops focus questions and/or problem statements for an inquiry.  Organizes and analyzes information and data from multiple primary and secondary sources to draw conclusions about a novel or complex civics concept.  Constructs a thorough argument or explanation using several pieces of evidence and valid reasoning for a civics concept.  Determines multiple ways individuals can take informed action to address a complex civic issue. |

## Foundations of Government (Topics 1 and 2)

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| **Partially Meeting Expectations**  ***On MCAS, a student at this level:*** | **Meeting Expectations**  ***On MCAS, a student at this level:*** | **Exceeding Expectations**  ***On MCAS, a student at this level:*** |
| Recognizes some characteristics of democratic and republican principles that were found in ancient Athens and the Roman Republic, such as how the power of governing is held in the hands of the people.  Uses a source to identify natural rights as an important principle in the American Revolutionary period.  Recognizes that British ideas and colonial government bodies helped develop practices for self-government in colonial America.  Identifies a feature of the U.S. government based on a description of the government of the Iroquois Confederacy.  Recognizes that opposition to British authority contributed to the American colonists declaring independence.  Identifies basic concepts in the Declaration of Independence, including equality, right to liberty, and that governments are responsible for protecting these rights.  Recognizes that the Articles of Confederation created a weak national government and identifies one of the weaknesses.  Identifies an issue debated at the Constitutional Convention and identifies one way the issue was resolved.  Identifies one Federalist or Anti-Federalist position on an issue debated during the ratification of the U.S. Constitution.  Identifies that the U.S. Constitution creates a framework for the structure and function of the U.S. government, including articles and amendments.  Describes the Bill of Rights as a list of rights that were added to the U.S. Constitution to protect some individual freedoms.  Identifies the First Amendment protection of freedom of speech as part of the Bill of Rights. | Describes and explains the democratic and republican principles that were developed in ancient Athens and the Roman Republic and are found in the U.S. government, including voting rights, trial by jury, and representative government.  Describes some Enlightenment concepts that influenced the American Revolution, such as criticizing England’s monarchy in the Declaration of Independence and the need to have separation of government powers.  Given a description of British ideas and colonial practices of government, such as the Mayflower Compact, town meetings, and colonial legislatures, describes how these practices prepared American colonists for self-government.  Describes a similarity or difference between the U.S. government and the government of the Iroquois Confederacy.  Describes multiple experiences or events, including British taxation policy and lack of representation in government, that contributed to the American colonists declaring independence.  Uses an excerpt of the Declaration of Independence to explain key ideas such as equality, natural rights, the common good, and the purpose of government.  Uses information about the Articles of Confederation to describe how weaknesses of the national government led to the Constitutional Convention.  Explains how a major issue debated at the Constitutional Convention, such as representation in Congress, was resolved in the U.S. Constitution.  Compares Federalist and Anti-Federalist positions on an issue debated during the ratification of the U.S. Constitution.  Provides a general description of the different parts of the U.S. Constitution, including the Preamble, Articles 1 to 3, and the Bill of Rights.  Describes several amendments in the Bill of Rights and how they are meant to protect some individual freedoms. | Compares democratic and republican characteristics in ancient Athens or the Roman Republic to characteristics of the U.S. government and explains the similarities and differences.  Analyzes ideas from the Enlightenment period to explain how those concepts were used during the American Revolution, such as the use of natural rights and the social contract in the Declaration of Independence, and in the framework of the U.S. government, such as the integration of separation of powers within the U.S. Constitution.  Uses evidence from multiple sources to explain how British ideas and political institutions in the colonies created forums for self-governance that were maintained in the U.S. political system, such as town meetings and state legislatures.  Analyzes a description of the government of the Iroquois Confederacy and supports a conclusion using evidence about how the Iroquois Confederacy influenced the development of the U.S. government.  Uses evidence and reasoning to explain why the American colonists declared independence.  Analyzes a novel situation and constructs an explanation for how concepts described in the Declaration of Independence, including equality, natural rights, the common good, and the purpose of government, were applied.  Uses critical events (such as Shays’ Rebellion) to explain how weaknesses in the government under the Articles of Confederation (such as the inability of the national government to form an army) led to the Constitutional Convention.  Analyzes several major issues debated at the Constitutional Convention, including the distribution of power among the branches of government and between the federal and state governments, and constructs an explanation for how the issues were addressed in the U.S. Constitution.  Compares Federalist and Anti-Federalist positions on an issue debated during the ratification of the U.S. Constitution and uses evidence to explain how the issue was addressed in the U.S. government.  Explains the roles and powers outlined in each section of the U.S. Constitution, including the Preamble, Articles 1 to 3, and the Bill of Rights.  Explains why some Anti-Federalists wanted to add the Bill of Rights to protect some individual freedoms as a condition for ratifying the U.S. Constitution. |

## Structures of Government (Topics 3 and 6)

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| **Partially Meeting Expectations**  ***On MCAS, a student at this level:*** | **Meeting Expectations**  ***On MCAS, a student at this level:*** | **Exceeding Expectations**  ***On MCAS, a student at this level:*** |
| Identifies Congress as the legislative branch, the office of the President as the executive branch, and the Supreme Court as the judicial branch.  Identifies the roles of the branches of government, (e.g., legislative branch makes the laws, the executive branch carries out the laws, and the judicial branch interprets laws).  Recognizes that the checks and balances system was designed to prevent one branch of government from becoming too powerful.  Recognizes that U.S. Senators and Representatives run for and are elected to office.  Identifies some of the processes that are part of presidential elections.  Recognizes that the president and Congress each play a role in the nomination and confirmation process for some positions in the executive and judicial branches.  Identifies some ways that political parties support candidates in state or national elections.  Identifies that state governments and the federal government have shared powers, such as making laws, and recognizes that national laws apply to the entire country but state laws apply only to the state in which they were enacted.  Recognizes that both the U.S. and Massachusetts constitutions protect some individual rights, such as the freedom of religion, and identifies the Bill of Rights as a list of some of these protections.  Identifies that the Massachusetts Constitution protects some rights that are not provided by the U.S. Constitution.  Recognizes that governments at the federal, state, and local levels share some responsibilities and have different responsibilities.  Identifies that the Massachusetts state government has three branches: the executive branch, the legislative branch, and the judicial branch.  Describes that state and local taxes support some public facilities and services.  Recognizes positions or structures of local government in Massachusetts, such as mayor, school committee, or town meetings. | Describes the separate positions of the three branches of government: Congress (the Senate and the House of Representatives) as the legislative branch, the President and the executive agencies as the executive branch, and the Supreme Court and other federal lower courts as the judicial branch.  Describes some of the powers of the three branches of the federal government, such as:   * the Senate and House of Representatives work together to create legislation, approve federal spending, or declare war * the president, the Cabinet, and executive departments and agencies carry out laws, conduct foreign policy, nominate justices, or command the military * the Supreme Court and lower federal courts can use judicial review to decide whether laws and executive orders are constitutional, or can resolve disputes between states   Describes the checks and balances system and identifies ways one branch of government can check the power of another branch of government, such as how the president can veto a bill passed by congress to prevent the bill from becoming a law.  Compares and contrasts how U.S. Senators and U.S. Representatives are elected to office for different term lengths.  Describes how a president is elected, including the role of the Electoral College.  Describes how the president nominates individuals for Cabinet and Supreme Court positions and Congress confirms or rejects the nominations.  Describes the role of political parties in elections, such as nominating candidates and helping voters learn about candidates.  Describes some powers of the Massachusetts state government, such as issuing driver’s licenses, and describes some powers of the federal government, such as coining money, as defined by the U.S. and Massachusetts constitutions.  Describes the difference between an enumerated power that is listed in the U.S. or Massachusetts constitutions and an implied power as an action that is necessary to carry out an enumerated power.  Describes some of the individual rights protected under the U.S. Constitution through the Bill of Rights and 14th Amendment and under the Massachusetts Constitution, such as freedom of speech and equal protection under the law.  Identifies that powers not granted to the federal government in the U.S. Constitution are reserved for the state governments by the Tenth Amendment.  Identifies one right that is protected by the Massachusetts Constitution that is not provided by the U.S. Constitution, such as the right to an education.  Contrasts some responsibilities of local and state governments, such as funding and creating policies for public schools, with responsibilities of the federal government that address national concerns, such as negotiating international treaties.  Describes the three branches of the Massachusetts state government as:     * the executive branch that carries out state laws through the governor and executive agencies * the legislative branch that makes state laws through state representatives and state senators * the judicial branch that interprets state laws through the Supreme Judicial Court and lower courts   Describes some tax-supported facilities and services provided by state and local governments, such as public schools and libraries.  Describes positions and structures of local government in Massachusetts, including city councils, select boards, town meetings, and county offices. | Explains the processes that the three branches of the federal government use to carry out their powers, such as:   * how Congress passes legislation through committees and hearings, or how elections and political parties affect Congress * how the president, the Cabinet, and executive departments and agencies distribute the responsibility to carry out laws * how legal challenges move between levels of the federal court system, including lower federal courts and the Supreme Court   Analyzes a novel situation to describe the purpose of the checks and balances system and explains how the branches of government can check each other, such as examining a historical example of a federal law passed by Congress and signed by the president that was challenged and reviewed by the U.S. Supreme Court.  Analyzes a scenario to explain why U.S. Senators and U.S. Representatives are elected for different terms.  Explains the processes of a presidential election (campaigns, primaries, and general elections) and describes the role of the popular vote and the Electoral College in an election.  Uses evidence to explain why the executive branch nominates individuals for Cabinet and Supreme Court positions and the legislative branch confirms or rejects the nominations.  Analyzes campaign materials to explain how political parties shape elections by nominating candidates, creating party platforms, and fundraising to help a candidate win the election.  Compares and contrasts the powers of the federal government and the Massachusetts state government as outlined in the U.S. and Massachusetts constitutions.  Analyzes a scenario to distinguish between an enumerated power in either the U.S. or Massachusetts constitution, such as the power to tax, and an implied power, such as creating an agency to collect taxes.  Analyzes multiple sources to compare some of the individual rights protected under the U.S. Constitution, including the Bill of Rights and the 14th Amendment, and Article 1 of the Massachusetts Constitution.  Explains that the Tenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is important to state governments because it establishes that powers not granted to the federal government in the Constitution are reserved for state governments, such as the power to create laws about education.  Explains how the Massachusetts Constitution provides additional rights to residents than what is provided by the U.S. Constitution, such as the right to an education and the right to a clean environment.  Analyzes multiple sources to explain how the different branches within the Massachusetts state government fulfill their responsibilities.  Uses evidence and reasoning to explain how state and local governments use taxes to support public facilities and services.  Analyzes a scenario to explain how local governments in Massachusetts make decisions for the community, enact local laws, and provide services for residents. |

## Rights and Responsibilities (Topics 4, 5, and 7)

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| **Partially Meeting Expectations**  ***On MCAS, a student at this level:*** | **Meeting Expectations**  ***On MCAS, a student at this level:*** | **Exceeding Expectations**  ***On MCAS, a student at this level:*** |
| Recognizes that individuals who are born in the United States are U.S. citizens.  Identifies one right or responsibility of citizens, such as voting in federal elections.  Recognizes that individuals may engage in civic/political activities that relate to their communities and activities that relate to their personal lives.  Identifies examples of fundamental principles and values of U.S. political and civic life, such as equality and representative democracy.  Identifies some ways individuals can participate in the political process, such as voting or registering with a political party.  Interprets information from a source, such as an electoral college map, to identify a concept related to elections.  Recognizes leadership qualities when given information describing political leaders.  Identifies that individuals work with elected leaders to create policies.  Recognizes that public service positions support government responsibilities in carrying out laws and providing public services.  Based on a given scenario, identifies that liberty may be in conflict with equality/authority or that individual rights may be in conflict with the common good.  Recognizes that elected representatives reflect the views of their constituents in creating laws and making public policy.  Based on a scenario, identifies an example of political courage as an elected representative making a decision that is morally right but may be unpopular.  Identifies an example of political protest, such as a demonstration, based on a source.  Interprets a chart created by a policy research organization to identify perspectives related to a public policy or issue.  Recognizes that the U.S. Constitution has changed over time through amendments.  Recognizes that Congress has passed laws over time to expand protections for civil rights.  Recognizes that the U.S. Supreme Court can declare acts of Congress unconstitutional.  Identifies that the U.S. Supreme Court selects which cases to hear, primarily appeals from lower courts.  Recognizes that some U.S. Supreme Court cases have led to significant changes over time in individuals’ lives, such as in cases related to protecting First Amendment rights.  Identifies freedom of the press as a right protected under the First Amendment.  Recognizes that the free press can provide different information and views about government and politics.  Identifies the purpose of news articles to inform the public and the purpose of editorials to provide an opinion on an issue.  Recognizes that digital news and social media provide both benefits to a democratic society, such as increasing the availability of information, and challenges, such as making it more difficult to determine the credibility of sources.  Identifies a strategy for evaluating information, such as reading multiple sources on the same topic.  Uses information from an editorial or op-ed to identify the purpose of the source. | Uses information from a scenario to describe that an individual born outside of the United States must complete a process in order to become a U.S. citizen.  Describes some rights and responsibilities of citizens, such as serving as a juror and holding federal elected office.  Determines whether an activity is related to civic/political life or private life.  Describes fundamental principles and values of U.S. political and civic life, such as justice, liberty, and the rights of individuals.  Describes opportunities for citizens to participate in the political process through elections, political parties, and interest groups.  Interprets information or data from a source, such as a political party platform, to draw a conclusion about elections.  Uses information from sources to describe the qualities of good political leaders at local, state, or national levels.  Describes how policies that benefit the people are created when individuals work and cooperate with elected leaders.  Identifies some tax-supported public service positions and describes how some public servants help carry out laws or provide public services.  Uses information from sources to describe how liberty may be in conflict with equality/authority or how individual rights may be in conflict with the common good in a given scenario.  Describes one role of elected representatives, such as representing constituents in government and creating legislation.  Using information from a scenario, describes how an elected representative has demonstrated political courage.  Describes how political protest may lead to changes in policies or legislation in a democratic government.  Uses information or data from a chart or graph created by a policy research organization to identify next steps for a policy.  Uses information from a source to describe that the U.S. Congress has the power to stretch its authority to make laws that are necessary for the country even if the laws are not listed in the U.S. Constitution.  Describes how some amendments to the U.S. Constitution expanded rights, such as extending the right to vote in federal elections to African Americans, women, and young adults.  Identifies the institution of slavery as the main cause of the Civil War and describes how changes to the U.S. Constitution after the war helped to expand civil rights and the power of the federal government to enforce those rights.  Uses information from sources to describe how some laws passed by Congress have expanded protections for civil rights over time to include groups that were not previously included.  Describes the principle of judicial review as the power of the U.S. Supreme Court to review Congressional laws that are challenged.  Completes a diagram to describe the process of how cases go through the U.S. Supreme Court and how the Court issues decisions.  Based on a scenario, describes how Supreme Court cases have made changes in individuals’ lives, such as in cases related to the equal protection clause.  Describes freedom of the press as the right to express and publish views without government censorship.  Uses information from two print sources with different views on a civic issue to explain how the free press affects public discourse.  Compares and contrasts the differences between news articles and editorials, op-eds, or political cartoons.  Analyzes a source to describe how digital news and social media affect public discourse about a civic issue.  Uses information from a source to describe specific methods for evaluating information, such as comparing an editorial to a news article.  Analyzes an editorial, op-ed, or political cartoon to describe the point of view of the source. | Analyzes a scenario to explain at least one way how an individual may become a citizen of the United States, including the naturalization process.  Analyzes a scenario to distinguish between civic/political activities and private activities.  Analyzes a scenario to explain how fundamental principles and values, such as the common good or due process, are part of U.S. political and civic life.  Explains how citizens participate in the political process through elections (voting, running for office), through political parties (registering with a party, supporting a campaign), or through interest groups (raising awareness on an issue, joining an organization).  Analyzes information or data from multiple sources and uses evidence to support a conclusion about elections.  Analyzes a scenario and evaluates the leadership qualities of political leaders at local, state, or national levels.  Explains why public policies may be more effective when individuals work with elected leaders to create those policies.  Based on a scenario, explains why some public service positions are necessary to help carry out laws or provide public services at local, state, and national levels.  Analyzes sources related to conflicts that occur in democratic governments, such as liberty in conflict with equality/authority or individual rights in conflict with the common good, to explain why these tensions may occur in a given scenario.  Explains that elected representatives engage in multiple job functions, such as creating legislation, communicating with constituents, and campaigning in elections.  Based on a scenario about an elected representative, determines how the individual has either demonstrated political courage or demonstrated actions that have failed to live up to the ideals of the U.S. Constitution.  Analyzes sources to explain how political protest may influence public policy by drawing attention to injustice, mobilizing support for a cause, and persuading elected officials to pass new laws.  Analyzes information and data from a policy research organization and uses evidence to support a conclusion about a public policy or issue.  Explains how the “necessary and proper” clause allows the U.S. Congress to stretch its powers and make laws that are needed for the country, even if the issue is not listed as a power in the U.S. Constitution, and that this is often referred to as the “elastic clause.”  Explains why some amendments were added to the U.S. Constitution and how those amendments helped to expand rights to individuals, such as the 14th Amendment (citizenship rights, equal protection of laws), the 19th Amendment (women’s right to vote), and the 26th Amendment (lowers voting age in federal elections).  Analyzes sources to explain that unresolved debates about slavery at the nation’s founding led to the Civil War and that postwar amendments to the U.S. Constitution abolished slavery and helped to expand both civil rights and the federal government’s power to enforce those rights.  Uses evidence and reasoning to explain how some laws enacted by Congress, such as the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act, expanded civil rights and equal protection by prohibiting legal discrimination based on race, gender, or disability.  Uses information from a source to explain how the U.S. Supreme Court uses judicial review to review Congressional legislation when challenged.  Analyzes a U.S. Supreme Court case to explain how cases reach the Supreme Court after an appeal from a lower court, that the Supreme Court chooses which cases to hear, and that the Supreme Court issues a majority decision that may also include a dissenting opinion.  Analyzes multiple U.S. Supreme Court decisions to support a claim about how the Court’s decisions affected people’s lives, such as in cases where individual rights may be in conflict with other national interests.  Analyzes a scenario to explain the role of freedom of the press in maintaining a healthy democracy.  Analyzes multiple sources to draw conclusions about how the free press helps citizens keep government power accountable to the people.  Analyzes sources, including news articles, political cartoons, editorials, and op-eds, to support a claim about a civic issue.  Evaluates the benefits and challenges of digital news and social media on how policy decisions are made in a democratic society.  Analyzes multiple sources to evaluate the claims and evidence in information presented in various formats, including political cartoons and commentaries.  Analyzes an editorial, op-ed, or political cartoon related to a public policy issue and uses evidence and reasoning to construct an explanation about the issue. |