

MCAS Test Security Requirements
(Part I, excerpted from the Fall 2025/Winter 2026 PAM)

Part I

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The purpose of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) is to elicit valid results showing what students know and can do in the tested subjects. The purpose of the MCAS Test Security Requirements is to protect the validity of those results.

Principals and school staff members must follow the requirements listed below and may not participate in, direct, assist in, encourage, or fail to report any testing irregularity or act of misconduct.

Principals are responsible for ensuring that all test administrators and school staff members authorized to have access to secure materials and test content are trained in and comply with the requirements and instructions contained in this part of the *Principal's Administration Manual* (PAM) and in the *Test Administrator's Manuals* (TAMs).

Please note the following definitions for the purposes of this section and this manual:

- **“Secure”** content and materials include the following:
 - › test questions not publicly released by DESE
 - › any onscreen test content (e.g., ELA passages)
 - › student responses to test questions
 - › student logins
 - › test administrator logins
 - › summary pages
 - › used scratch paper

The following secure testing materials must be tracked using internal tracking forms:

- › student logins
- › test administrator logins
- › used scratch paper (Scratch paper must be accounted for on tracking forms but individual sheets do not need to be counted.)
- **“Access”** refers to handling secure testing materials, but does not include viewing test content, which is prohibited (except when administering certain accommodations listed in Appendix C). Students may never transport secure testing materials, including from their initial testing room to a test completion room.

Note: Student testing devices are not considered secure unless they are actively signed in to the MCAS Student Kiosk. Students may transport testing devices as long as the students’ tests are paused, or devices are signed out of the MCAS Student Kiosk.

- **“Locked storage area”** refers to the central locked area that must be used to store all secure materials when they are not in use. Principals must restrict access to the locked storage area to only those school staff members authorized by the principal to handle secure materials. For example, custodial or cleaning staff may not enter or access the locked area where the principal stores secure materials.

Each principal must complete the Principal’s Certification of Proper Test Administration (PCPA) to certify that the school has followed proper MCAS test security requirements and test administration protocols. See www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/testadmin/retest/forms for the certification statements to which the principal must attest.

A Responsibilities of the Principal and Test Coordinator

1. **Before testing, review your plans for maintaining test security with your superintendent so that the superintendent is comfortable with the procedures in the school building.**
 - As part of your review, your superintendent may ask you to use the optional Superintendent's Assurance of Proper Test Administration form at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/testadmin/retest/forms to document your preparations. (A form is not required but the review is.)
 - The superintendent may assign another district employee (e.g., a district test coordinator) to be the liaison between schools and the central office. Districts are encouraged to take a hands-on approach to MCAS testing, to provide assistance and coordination (especially for new principals), and to visit schools and observe testing firsthand.
2. **Authorize specific staff members to serve as test administrators, and train them to properly administer MCAS tests. Designate other staff members for specific roles, as needed (e.g., hallway or restroom monitors, technology coordinators) and train them in MCAS security requirements.**
 - Before the training session, distribute
 - › a copy of the appropriate TAM to every test administrator, and
 - › a copy of the test security requirements to all school staff members who have access to secure materials (available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/testadmin/retest).
 - Document that all test administrators have received TAMs and that school staff members who have access to secure materials have received the test security requirements (see the sample form at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/testadmin/retest/forms).
 - Train test administrators prior to each test administration (i.e., November retests and February High School Science tests). See "Training Test Administrators, Technology Staff, and Other School Staff Members" on page 28 for more information about training.
 - For test administrators who provide accommodations to students with disabilities or English learners (EL students), provide training in the administration of accommodations in accordance with Appendix C and the *Accessibility and Accommodations Manual for the 2025–26 MCAS Test Administrations* (available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/accessibility).
3. **Instruct students in MCAS test security requirements.**
 - Students' test results may be invalidated if they engage in any of the following activities during a test session (including after submitting their tests, during a break, or during the transition to a test completion area):
 - › duplicating any portion of secure test content
 - › accessing prohibited materials such as cell phones or other electronic devices (see lists in "Materials PROHIBITED during Testing" on page 21) for any purpose, including accessing the internet
 - › communicating with other students (e.g., talking, whispering, writing notes)
 - › looking at any other student's booklet or computer screen
 - › asking for or receiving help from anyone

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- › providing help to another student
 - › consulting notes, books, or instructional materials during testing
 - Students' test results may also be invalidated if they discuss secure test content or their responses to questions with anyone, including teachers, with the exception of reporting a concern about a test question to their test administrator.
- 4. Develop local policies and procedures to ensure proper test security at all times.**
 - Schedule tests to avoid conflicts with lunch (see "Scheduling Test Sessions" on page 22 for more information).
 - Ensure that tests are administered during the prescribed administration window.
 - Ensure that hallways are properly monitored during testing so that students are supervised at all times when they leave testing rooms (e.g., to use the restroom or transition to a test completion room).
 - 5. Keep secure MCAS materials in locked storage when MCAS tests are not being administered.**
 - Account for all secure materials at the end of each test session and keep them in the locked storage area when not in use.
 - Restrict access to the locked storage area to a small number of school staff members who need access.
 - 6. Monitor printing, distribution, and collection of materials for testing.**
 - Student logins must be printed, securely distributed before testing, and collected after testing.
 - Internal tracking forms must be used to maintain the chain of custody of secure materials.
 - Used scratch paper must be accounted for and tracked during testing.
 - 7. Destroy secure materials after testing.**
 - Student logins, summary pages, and used scratch paper (i.e., written on by students) must be securely destroyed (e.g., shredded) following testing.
 - Used scratch paper must be stored securely until it is shredded. It may not be viewed by school staff members.

B Shared Responsibilities of Principals, Test Coordinators, Test Administrators, Technology Staff, and Other School Staff Members Authorized to Have Access to Secure Materials

- 1. Receive training in test security requirements and test administration protocols.**
 - Test administrators, test coordinators, and other school staff members authorized to have access to secure materials must attend a school training session. See www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/testadmin/retest/forms for a sample form that principals may use to document participation, and see www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/testadmin/retest for sample training slides that can be used (and adapted) to train test administrators. More information about training can be found in "Training Test Administrators, Technology Staff, and Other School Staff Members" on page 28.

2. Document the location of secure materials at all times.

- Track secure materials using the sample Secure Materials Internal Tracking Form at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/testadmin/retest/forms or a similar document (principals keep these forms on file for three years). See “Establishing a Chain of Custody for Testing Materials” on page 16 for more information about requirements for internal tracking forms.
- The principal/test coordinator and each test administrator must independently count student logins and sign the tracking form before transferring custody of the logins.
- Do not leave student logins, summary pages, or other secure MCAS materials unattended at any time unless they are locked in the secure storage area.
- Testing materials should be returned to the principal or test coordinator immediately following the end of the test session.

3. Ensure the security of testing rooms.

- Do not allow unauthorized persons to enter the testing room. This includes parents, researchers, reporters, students not scheduled to be testing at the time, and any school staff members (including teachers) not assigned to the room as test administrators.
- School administrators (including the test coordinator even if they do not have a formal administrative role at the school), district staff, and DESE observers may enter testing rooms to monitor and observe testing procedures.
- Technology staff may enter testing rooms to troubleshoot problems with computer-based testing, but are not permitted to photograph or otherwise duplicate secure test content onscreen.
- See “Ensuring Appropriate Testing Spaces” on page 26 for more information about setting up appropriate and secure testing spaces.

4. Ensure the security of test content.

- Do not discuss or in any way reveal the contents of test questions or student responses to test questions before, during, or after test administration. Because MCAS test questions are secure and confidential until DESE releases them publicly, school staff members should not discuss or review test questions with students or adults even after testing has been completed, with the exception of reporting a student’s concern about a test question to DESE.
- Do not duplicate any secure test content, including but not limited to audiotaping, videotaping, photographing, photocopying, typing, or copying by hand.
- Do not remove testing materials from the school.¹
- Do not allow scratch paper to be retained, discarded, or otherwise removed by students.
- Be sure that student logins, summary pages, and used scratch paper have been securely destroyed after testing (this step is done by the principal or test coordinator).
- Do not allow students access to secure test questions prior to testing.
- Do not read or view any secure test content or student responses (except when administering certain accommodations listed in Appendix C).

¹ The only exception is for principals who receive prior written permission from DESE to test a student in an alternate setting. Alternate setting requests must be resubmitted to DESE for approval for each test administration, even if approved for a previous administration.

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C Responsibilities of Test Administrators

1. Receive training from the principal or test coordinator in how to administer MCAS tests.

- Review the TAMs and all relevant test security requirements before administering test sessions.
- Attend the training session led by the principal or test coordinator before each test administration (i.e., November retests and February High School Science tests).
See www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/testadmin/retest/forms for a sample form that principals may use to document participation in training and receipt of TAMs.
- Understand and follow the protocols related to administering tests to students with disabilities and EL students (if applicable), and protocols related to administering accessibility features.

2. Administer all tests according to appropriate protocols.

- Administer tests during the prescribed testing window.
- Follow the directions and read the scripts in the TAMs (and in any subsequent updates provided to principals by DESE) verbatim to students.
- Remove or cover any classroom displays that provide information related to the content being assessed or to test-taking strategies (see “Materials That Must Be Covered/Removed” on page 26).
- Provide students with all required test materials as listed in the TAMs.
- Prevent the use of prohibited materials (see “Materials PROHIBITED during Testing” on page 21 for lists of required/permitted and prohibited materials). Note that results may be invalidated for students who use cell phones or other electronic devices during a test session, including after submitting their tests, during a break, and during the transition to a test completion area.
- Return all testing materials to the secure central storage area immediately following each test session.
- A test administrator may view students’ tests onscreen only for the purpose of reading aloud selected words during the high school Science tests or the Mathematics retest as part of Universal Accessibility Feature 11 (UF11), or in order to assist a student who is having difficulty with the computer interface. See Part II, section D of the CBT TAM for more information about assisting students with the computer interface.
- Students must work only on the test session being administered, and test administrators may not provide session access codes for a session other than the one being administered.

3. Focus full attention on the testing environment at all times.

- Monitor the testing process by circulating around the room frequently. When not circulating around the room, test administrators should maintain a clear view of the students and keep their attention focused on them.
- Ensure that students are not left unsupervised during testing, including during breaks and during transitions to test completion locations.

4. Ensure that students provide answers that are strictly their own and do not participate in any form of cheating.

- Students must not
 - › copy answers from anyone else
 - › use notes, books, extra reference sheets, or any kind of class materials
 - › write notes to, or talk to other students
 - › provide help or answers to any other student
 - › ask for or receive help from anyone else in answering the questions
 - › access cell phones or other electronic devices other than their testing device
 - › access any applications other than the MCAS Student Kiosk during testing

5. Do not give students any assistance or make suggestions for responding to any test question.

- Test administrators must not coach students during testing or alter or interfere with students' responses in any way. Examples of coaching include
 - › providing answers to a student
 - › indicating that a student has answered a question incorrectly or left a question blank
 - › indicating that a student has bookmarked or skipped questions
 - › defining words or providing synonyms
 - › spelling words
 - › influencing a student's responses by offering hints, cues, gestures, facial expressions, nods, or changes in voice inflection or body language
 - › monitoring or evaluating whether students are using their scratch paper or using specific testing strategies
 - › altering, explaining, simplifying, or paraphrasing any test question, reading passage, writing prompt, or multiple-choice answer option
 - › providing any manner of assistance that could impact a student's answers, including testing strategies
 - › suggesting that a student write more on a question, check a previous question, or review or reconsider a question
- At any time during a test session, a test administrator may repeat a portion of the TAM script if necessary for clarification.
- Test administrators may remind the entire class to check their work before submitting their tests (the scripts contain language instructing students to do this).
- Statements of encouragement such as "Just do your best" or "Answer it as well as you can" are permitted.

6. Follow proper procedures for administering accommodations to students with disabilities and EL students.

- Ensure that students are only provided accommodations that are listed specifically for use during MCAS testing in an approved IEP or a 504 plan, or that were documented as accommodations for EL students.



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- Follow guidelines on proper provision of MCAS accommodations as prescribed in Appendix C and in the *Accessibility and Accommodations Manual for the 2025–26 MCAS Test Administrations*.
- Test administrators for students using certain accommodations must sign an MCAS Nondisclosure Acknowledgment prior to their receipt of secure test materials. Principals must keep signed Nondisclosure Acknowledgments in the school files for three years. See “Nondisclosure Acknowledgment Forms” on page 91 for the list of accommodations this requirement applies to, and see www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/testadmin/retest/forms and Appendix E of this manual for the MCAS Nondisclosure Acknowledgment.

D Testing Irregularities

Testing irregularities are incidents that represent a deviation from prescribed testing procedures. Testing irregularities may include student impropriety, errors in providing accommodations, educator misconduct, or the mishandling of secure test materials.

1. School Observations

In order to ensure the security and proper administration of the MCAS program, DESE conducts announced and unannounced monitoring visits to schools to observe the procedures followed during test administration. This may include entering testing rooms to observe students and test administrators directly. Principals and test coordinators should be prepared to meet observers upon their arrival and also be available during the observation to answer questions. School staff may contact DESE’s Student Assessment Services Unit at 781-338-3625 to verify the identity of DESE observers.

DESE observers will confirm that all test security requirements are being met, including the following:

- Materials are stored properly.
- Staff have been trained.
- Test administrators are administering tests appropriately.
- The testing environment is secure.

2. Mandatory Reporting of Irregularities by All Staff Members

Principals must contact their superintendent and DESE at 781-338-3625 immediately after an irregularity occurs. Test administrators and other school staff members must contact their principal or superintendent. If any school or district employee with knowledge of a test irregularity has questions about reporting obligations, DESE can be consulted at 781-338-3625. Failure to report irregularities may result in sanctions.

It is recommended that parents/guardians be informed when a student-specific irregularity is reported to DESE.

Before reporting an irregularity to DESE, gather the following information:

- a description of the incident and the date it occurred (be sure to speak to any students and test administrators involved)
- the name(s) of the individual(s) involved in the incident
- the specific test(s) and specific session(s) affected

- copies of documents if needed (e.g., notes that were passed, unauthorized reference materials)
- any accommodations used by the students
- in student-specific reports: the student's name, date of birth, grade, and State-Assigned Student Identifier (SASID)

See "Monitor your school's test administration by conducting the following tasks." on page 47 for information about certain irregularities that do not need to be reported to DESE, but can be addressed locally.

3. Anonymous Reporting of Testing Irregularities

Individuals sometimes contact DESE anonymously to allege that testing irregularities have taken place. These allegations are investigated if sufficient information is provided. Testing irregularities can be reported anonymously in the following ways:

- calling the Student Assessment Services office at 781-338-3625
- emailing information about the irregularity to mcas@mass.gov

4. Investigations into Irregularities

In response to a report of a serious irregularity, DESE may contact the school principal or district superintendent to ask that the school or district conduct a local fact-finding investigation into the alleged irregularity and report back to DESE in writing. DESE may also perform its own independent investigation. Once DESE determines whether an irregularity has taken place, DESE will notify the school and district about any potential consequences which may follow from this determination.

5. Investigations Based on Statewide Data Analysis

In order to ensure the validity of MCAS data and the integrity of the assessment system, DESE performs statewide data analysis on all schools' and districts' MCAS test results. Anomalous results are examined more closely and may be investigated. A school's MCAS test results may be placed temporarily under review until the investigation is concluded.

6. Consequences

Testing irregularities or misconduct may result in any or all of the following:

- delay in the reporting of district, school, or student results
- invalidation of district, school, or student results
- prohibition of school staff members from participating in a future MCAS test administration, with required training from DESE staff prior to administering MCAS tests again
- formal letter of reprimand for licensed educators
- licensure sanctions for licensed educators
- criminal sanctions

Consequences imposed by DESE or law enforcement do not limit a local district's authority to impose its own sanctions up to and including termination.