



Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

PRE- ADMINISTRATION GUIDE

Tasks for the 2025–26 MCAS Tests



This document was prepared by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)

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Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Important Contact Information and Resources

| Contact | MCAS Service Center |
|--------------------------|--|
| For questions on: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • general test administration support • MCAS Portal and MCAS Student Kiosk such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › user accounts › technology support and readiness › student registration process and loading files › viewing student data › scheduling tests • locating resources • shipments of materials |
| Hours | 7:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday–Friday |
| Web | <p><u>mcas.onlinehelp.cognia.org</u></p> <p>Use this website to access training modules and other materials to support test administration, including a link to the MCAS Service Center website (<u>mcasservicecenter.com</u>) where schools will access the PCPA and order additional materials.</p> |
| Email | <u>mcas@cognia.org</u> |
| Telephone | 800-737-5103 TTY: 888-222-1671 |

| Contact | DESE Office of Student Assessment Services |
|--------------------------|---|
| For questions on: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • policy, such as assigning accessibility features and accommodations • student participation • testing irregularities, including test security incidents and technology failures • reactivating tests for CBT <p>Questions regarding SIMS data should be directed to the district's SIMS contact (go to profiles.doe.mass.edu/search/search.aspx?leftNavID=11239, select SIMS Contact from the Function menu, and click Get Results).</p> |
| Hours | <p>8:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday–Friday during test administration windows</p> <p>Schools that need logistical support between 7:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m. should call the MCAS Service Center at 1-800-737-5103.</p> |
| Web | www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/admin.html |
| Email | <u>mcas@mass.gov</u> |
| Telephone | 781-338-3625 |

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MCAS Pre-Administration Guide

A. Using This Document

This document provides instructions and roles/responsibilities for the tasks that schools need to complete prior to MCAS test administration. This document is meant to supplement the manuals and resources posted on each [administration-specific webpage](#) by describing the activities that should be completed in the fall and winter.

Tasks in this document are organized by timeframe and are listed first for the principal/test coordinator in sections A–G, followed by tasks for the technology coordinator in sections H and I. Principals and test coordinators are encouraged to review the entire document and then meet with their technology coordinator to discuss the steps in sections H and I.

Below is a list of acronyms that are used in this document and other MCAS test administration resources.

- **CBT:** Computer-based testing
- **PBT:** Paper-based testing
- **SIMS:** Student Information Management System
- **SIF:** School Interoperability Framework
- **EL:** English learner
- **ELA:** English Language Arts
- **STE:** Science and Technology/Engineering

The table below describes the components of computer-based testing that are referenced throughout this guide.

Components of Computer-Based Testing

| Component | What is it used for? |
|--|--|
| MCAS Portal: The online test management system for principals, test coordinators, technology coordinators, and test administrators | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Managing user accounts• Completing Student Registration• Managing computer-based test sessions |
| MCAS Student Kiosk: The online testing platform for students | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Used by students for taking computer-based MCAS tests |
| MCAS Training Site: A training version of the online test management system for principals, test coordinators, technology coordinators, and test administrators | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conducting practice tests through the MCAS Training Site• Practicing tasks required in the MCAS Portal |

B. General Timelines of Tasks

The table below describes the tasks for principals and test coordinators to complete prior to test administration.

General Timeline for MCAS CBT Pre-Administration Tasks

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| September and October | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Ongoing) Read bi-weekly Student Assessment Updates. • Identify the school test administration team and establish a communication plan. • Update contact information with DESE. • Review participation guidelines (high schools). • Confirm access to the MCAS Portal and MCAS Training Site and create/edit staff accounts as needed. • Begin planning for accessibility features and accommodations. • Provide student information to district SIMS contact. <p><i>Tasks for new principals</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarize yourself with resources and webpages. • Find contact information for certain district/school staff members. • Become familiar with CBT components. |
| At least 2 months before testing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • View online modules and participate in training sessions. • If your school has extenuating circumstances, request a waiver from the MCAS CBT expectation. |
| One to two months before testing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete Student Registration. • Prepare students for online testing. • Meet with the technology coordinator, who will review the technology guidelines and prepare the school's technology. |
| Winter 2026 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive the 2026 password for the MCAS Service Center website. • Plan for the receipt of test administration manuals. |
| At least 2 weeks before testing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare devices and materials. • Prepare students for online testing. • Review instructions in the <i>Principal's Administration Manual</i>. (Refer to section G.2 of this document for details.) |
| At least one week before testing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train test administrators in protocols and security requirements. |

The following table describes the general timeline for tasks to be completed in the MCAS Portal and MCAS Student Kiosk by all staff. (A description of the MCAS Portal and MCAS Student Kiosk can be found on page 1.)

Timeline of Tasks in the MCAS Portal and MCAS Student Kiosk

| Timeline | Tasks | Staff Responsible |
|---|---|---|
| At least two months before testing (available September 15) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Download and install the updated MCAS Student Kiosk onto student testing devices. | Technology coordinators |
| One to two months before testing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submit Student Registration. Verify that Site Readiness has been completed by technology coordinators. | Principals/test coordinators |
| After the initial Student Registration submission, through the testing window as needed. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to update student information in the MCAS Portal. Complete Enrollment Transfer Requests in the MCAS Portal (as needed). | Principals/test coordinators |
| Two weeks before testing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create and assign students to classes in the MCAS Portal. Verify accommodations in the MCAS Portal. If necessary, create test administrator logins for Human Read-Aloud and Human Signer sessions. Track delivery of materials through Materials Management. | Principals/test coordinators (recommended), but these tasks can also be done by a district test coordinator. Technology coordinators may also complete the tasks listed in the first three bullets. |
| One week before testing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule classes in the MCAS Portal. | Principals/test coordinators |
| Up to one week before testing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Print student logins, summary sheets, and (if administering human read-aloud or human signer sessions) test administrator logins. | Principals/test coordinators |

C. Tasks for New Principals/Test Coordinators: Fall 2025

1. Familiarize yourself with these resources and bookmark these webpages.

• General resources

- [Student Assessment Update newsletter](#), sent biweekly throughout the school year.
 - Principals, MCAS test coordinators, special education directors, and EL program directors automatically receive the Update based on contact information submitted to DESE. Refer to the instructions at the top of the newsletter page (linked above) to change your email address, add another staff member who serves in one of these roles, and subscribe.
- [Test designs](#) (underneath the “Simplified Review Process of an MCAS Question” infographic, click on the subject area, and then click on “Test Design”).
- [Test administration resources](#), including links to manuals, sample forms, training resources, and other guidance documents, which will be posted as available.
- [MCAS Resource Center](#), which provides a link to the MCAS Portal and MCAS Portal guidance documents, training modules and recordings of previous trainings, a link to the MCAS Service Center, technology resources, the student tutorial and subject-specific practice tests, test administration guidance, and released test items.

• Secure websites

Note: These websites provide access to confidential student data, so be sure to file the MCAS Service Center password memorandum and other passwords in a secure location.

- [MCAS Service Center secure website](#), used during test administration to order additional materials, complete the Principal’s Certification of Proper Test Administration (PCPA), schedule a UPS pickup request (for paper-based testing), and report discrepancies in results.
 - If your predecessor did not leave the password for you, call the MCAS Service Center at 800-737-5103 to request it. You will need to provide your school’s name and your 8-digit school code (found on your [School and District Profile](#)).
- [MCAS Portal](#)
 - New principals and school test coordinators should contact their district test coordinator to create a new account.
 - District test coordinators can contact another district test coordinator within their district in order to create a new account.
 - If you are the only district test coordinator in your district and need an MCAS Portal account, please contact the MCAS Service Center at 800-737-5103. Prior to calling, please be sure your contact information has been updated in [School and District Profiles](#).
- [Edwin Analytics](#), which provides authorized district and school personnel with access to students’ test results and reports that support

improvements in teaching, learning, and educational outcomes. New users can review these [resources](#) to ensure they have [Security Portal](#) access and the security role needed to view student data.

2. Find contact information for certain district/school staff members and save for later use.

You should know how to contact the following people:

- the [district-level Directory Administrator](#)
 - Confirm with your district-level Directory Administrator whether you are listed in DESE’s Directory Administration application in your new role, and confirm whether your school’s mailing address and email address are correct.
 - Test sites, adult education programs, out-of-state schools, SEIS-DYS programs: Email your updates to ESEDirectoryAdministrator@mass.gov (be sure to include your 8-digit school code and school name).
- the district test coordinator (found at [profiles.doe.mass.edu](#); submit any updates to your district-level Directory Administrator)
- the district technology coordinator (found at [profiles.doe.mass.edu](#); submit any updates to your district-level Directory Administrator)
- the district-level SIMS contact, who submits data for the entire district to DESE’s Student Information Management System (SIMS)
 - To find your district’s SIMS contact, go to the [School and District Profiles “People Search” page](#), select **SIMS Contact** from the **Function** menu, and click **Get Results**.

3. Become familiar with the components of computer-based testing (CBT).

| Component | Resources |
|---------------------|---|
| MCAS Portal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guide to the MCAS Portal |
| MCAS Student Kiosk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MCAS Student Kiosk Technology Guide |
| MCAS Training Site: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guide to Conducting a Practice Test through the MCAS Training Site • Guide for Reviewing Reports of Results for Practice Tests Conducted in the MCAS Training Site |

D. Tasks for Principals/Test Coordinators: Fall 2025

1. Begin determining local responsibilities, and identify which staff members will be part of your test administration team to help with the planning and management of CBT tasks including the following:

- Coordinating test administration, including who will create and manage the school’s test administration schedule
- Identifying which students will use accessibility features (available to all students), reviewing IEPs and 504 plans for accommodations for students with disabilities, and reviewing which accommodations are needed for English learners (ELs)

- Completing tasks in the MCAS Portal, including updating user account information and providing student information in the Student Registration file
- Setting up the school's technology, including configuring devices and the network for testing (refer to tasks for technology coordinators beginning on page 10 of this document)
- Creating a communication plan, including determining how information from the [Student Assessment Update](#) biweekly newsletter will be shared across the team (whether to sign up multiple individuals, or if one person will have the responsibility of communicating information across the team)

2. Provide DESE the school's correct contact information to receive important notices via email during test administration.

DESE provides important program updates, timely test administration-related deadlines, and links to register for training sessions via the Student Assessment Update. Confirm whether you receive the update by following the instructions in step C.1.

Review your [School and District Profile](#), and click on the "people" tab to confirm whether the names and contact information are correct for the principal, district and school-level test coordinator(s), and the district technology director. Make sure your school's main profile page lists the principal's name and email address correctly.

3. High schools: Review participation guidelines for the high school tests.

Participation guidelines are posted on the [Student Participation Guidelines webpage](#).

4. Confirm access to the MCAS Portal and MCAS Training Site and create/edit staff accounts as needed.

Principals should review the [MCAS Portal User Management Guide](#) to confirm that school and district staff have the appropriate MCAS Portal accounts. Principals should designate a member of their team to add/remove accounts for each administration. This task can be done manually or by uploading a file (the latter is best for creating large numbers of new accounts). For support, refer to the [MCAS Portal User Management Guide](#). Contact the MCAS Service Center with questions.

5. Review accessibility features (for all students) as well as accommodations for students with disabilities and ELs, and begin planning which supports students will use during MCAS testing.

Review the [Accessibility and Accommodations Manual for the 2025–26 Test Administrations](#).

Accommodations must be listed in students' IEPs or 504 plans and should be noted in local records for EL students. Certain accessibility features and accommodations need to be assigned in the MCAS Portal.

Test administrators who will administer accommodations to students with disabilities or EL students should receive additional training beyond that offered at the school-wide test administrator training to ensure that accommodations are correctly provided. Additional information will be provided in each administration-specific *Principal's Administration Manual*.

A small number of accommodations must be designated in the Student Registration file. These accommodations require school staff to set up the student's test correctly to ensure that the student receives the correct accommodation(s). Details are provided in the [MCAS Student Registration Guide](#) and the *Accessibility and Accommodations Manual*; principals should designate staff to add students' accessibility features and accommodations when completing the Student Registration process, and also to set up students' devices before testing so that students will receive the correct edition of their test (e.g., so that students can access the text-to-speech edition, which needs to be designated in the Student Registration file). Refer to Appendix A of the *Accessibility and Accommodations Manual* for more information.

6. By October 1, 2025: Provide student information to your district SIMS contact.

Inform your district's SIMS contact of updates to student demographic information since the last SIMS collection in June 2025, such as name change, grade change, enrollment status, EL status, and IEP status. Refer to step C.2 for instructions on finding your district's SIMS contact.

Outplacement organizations such as collaboratives and special education schools should report updated demographic information to the student's sending district.

E. Tasks for Principals/Test Coordinators: At least 2 months before testing

1. Participate in training sessions on MCAS test administration and test security topics and view online training modules.

All principals and test coordinators, especially those who are new, are encouraged to participate in a training session on MCAS test security protocols scheduled for January 2026. In addition, sessions will be offered on topics such as computer-based testing, accessibility and accommodations, and tasks to complete for testing.

Details will be provided in fall editions of the Student Assessment Update, and schools will be able to register on the [DESE website](#) for sessions as they become available.

[Online training modules](#) providing guidance on completing tasks before, during, and after testing are available. In addition, to assist principals and test coordinators in training their test administrators, administration-specific slide templates will be posted to DESE's website (the availability of the slides will be announced in future

Student Assessment Updates).

2. If your school has extenuating circumstances: Request a waiver from the MCAS CBT expectation.

Schools are expected to administer the MCAS tests on a computer (except for students who meet the criteria in the [Accessibility and Accommodations Manual](#) for a paper-based test). Schools with unique, extenuating circumstances may apply to administer paper-based testing instead if technology constraints or related issues make computer-based testing unfeasible. Instructions on how to apply for a waiver will be provided in upcoming Student Assessment Updates. Requests will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

F. Tasks for Principals/Test Coordinators: One to two months before testing

1. Provide student information in the MCAS Portal during the Student Registration window.

The Student Registration file is a collection of student-level data that includes student demographic data, test registration information, and information on selected accessibility features and/or accommodations that a student will use during testing. The accuracy of Student Registration is important because it provides a record after testing of certain accessibility features and accommodations used by students. In addition, for CBT, Student Registration determines the test form that students will take (e.g., Human Read-Aloud). Form-dependent accommodations **must** be assigned correctly during Student Registration. If not assigned correctly, a student's test will need to be stopped, a new test will need to be set up, and the student may need to retake a portion of the test. Refer to Appendix A of the [Student Registration Guide](#) for a list of form-dependent accommodations.

For PBT, the Student Registration file provides the basis for the initial shipment of test materials to schools (e.g., Student ID Labels, test booklets, answer booklets, large-print booklets). The Student Registration file is also the basis for schools' orders for test administration manuals for both CBT and PBT.

On the first day of each Student Registration window, DESE will post a pre-populated file in DropBox Central in DESE's [Security Portal](#) containing information on students, based on the most recent SIMS or SIF data.

Review the dates for the Student Registration windows (refer to [the schedule for testing and administration deadlines](#)) and add them to your calendar. Designate an individual to complete Student Registration during this timeframe.

DESE will hold training sessions on Student Registration in early 2026 (registration will be announced in the Student Assessment Update). Previously recorded Student Registration training webinars are available on the [MCAS Resource Center](#). An updated MCAS Student Registration Guide covering all of the 2025–26

administrations is available on the [MCAS Resource Center](#).

2. Prepare students for online testing.

Ensure the curriculum incorporates digital learning; review the [DLCS Curriculum Framework](#).

- Resources for preparing students for computer-based testing:
 - [Student Tutorial](#)
 - Demonstration of the navigation, tools, and features for CBT
 - Students complete it independently (no audio).
 - [Practice tests](#)
 - Simulation of the tools and features for CBT
 - Tests include accessibility features and special edition text-to-speech accommodated test forms
- Additional resources for students
 - [Sample student work and scoring guides](#)
 - [Released items](#)
 - [Answer keys and scoring rubrics](#) for practice tests
 - Click on the subject, and then click on the grade.
 - [Equation editor guides and symbol keys for Math](#)
 - [Reference sheets for Math](#) (for all students)
- [Resources for parents/guardians](#)

3. Meet with the technology coordinator.

Meet with the technology coordinator to review tasks and timelines for preparing the school's technology. Refer to sections H and I of this document.

G. Tasks for Principals/Test Coordinators: Winter 2025–26

1. Receive the 2026 password for the MCAS Service Center secure website.

School and district passwords for the [MCAS Service Center](#) are changed at the close of each calendar year to maintain the site's security.

Memos containing passwords for use in 2026 will be posted in early January 2026 in DESE's [Security Portal](#). Passwords are provided for school principals, and district superintendents will receive a list of passwords for all the schools in their district.

Additional details will be provided in a winter edition of the Student Assessment Update.

2. Plan for the receipt of test administration manuals.

Paper copies of the spring *Principal's Administration Manual* (PAM) and *Test Administrator's Manuals* (separate manuals for CBT and PBT) are shipped for receipt prior to test administration according to the [detailed schedule](#) posted in the fall. In addition, prior to the delivery of hardcopy manuals to schools, PDFs of the manuals will be posted on [DESE's website](#), along with excerpts of different sections, which may be distributed to different staff members as appropriate (e.g.,

ELA scripts for an ELA test administrator, the security requirements for a hallway monitor).

Each school receives one copy of the *Principal's Administration Manual*. Each school also receives one copy of each *Test Administrator's Manual* for every 15 students, based on the school's Student Registration file. Additional copies of manuals can be downloaded from the website linked above or, alternatively, a school may contact the MCAS Service Center to request additional copies.

H. Tasks for Technology Coordinators: Fall 2025

1. Review the technology specifications.

The [MCAS Student Kiosk Technology Guide](#) provides

- the minimum and recommended specifications for computer hardware and operating systems for student devices. Schools should review the system requirements linked above and update operating systems as necessary.
- instructions for configuring the school network to allow for student devices to access secure test content through the MCAS Student Kiosk and information bandwidth and screen settings.

2. Prepare the school's infrastructure.

- Identify any gaps in technology capacity (e.g., test-taking devices that do not meet technology specifications, potentially insufficient bandwidth) and address those gaps.
- Plan to have enough devices for test administrators and students, including back-up devices if needed.
 - Schools may want to use this [device planner](#) to determine the number of devices needed.

3. Review cybersecurity guidance and establish a cybersecurity plan for your school.

Technology teams are encouraged to review resources for cybersecurity planning to avoid issues that could arise during MCAS testing. Districts are highly encouraged to review the [Massachusetts Municipal Cybersecurity Roadmap](#) and the [Cybersecurity Best Practices](#) page to take full advantage of all of the embedded resources. Additional resources include:

- [Protecting Our Future: Partnering to Safeguard K–12 Organizations from Cybersecurity Threats](#)
- [National Institute of Standards and Technology \(NIST\) Cybersecurity Framework](#)
- [K12 SIX Essentials Series](#)
- [CISA Cyber Essentials Starter Kit](#)

Schools and districts should consider information as it relates to their technology infrastructure for MCAS testing and overall district plans, and email DESE's Office of Educational Technology at k12edtech@mass.gov with any questions.

4. Determine whether your school will participate in “Bring Your Own Device” (BYOD) for MCAS testing.

A BYOD policy allows students to use their own devices for instruction. Schools with students using their own devices for instruction that would also like to use these devices for MCAS testing will need to inform DESE of this decision because there may be additional steps to complete in preparation for MCAS testing. Look for announcements in the Student Assessment Update for more information.

I. Tasks for Technology Coordinators: At least 2 months before testing

1. Verify access to the [MCAS Portal](#) and the [MCAS Training Site](#).

If you are new to your role, or if you are unable to sign in to your account, contact your principal or test coordinator.

2. Ensure that all testing devices have the updated MCAS Student Kiosk installed and familiarize yourself with updates to the MCAS Portal and the MCAS Student Kiosk.

The latest annual MCAS Student Kiosk release became available on September 15, 2025. Districts must install it prior to testing. Once complete, schools will not need to update the MCAS Student Kiosk again prior to testing. Refer to instructions in the [MCAS Student Kiosk Technology Guide](#).

3. Conduct Site Readiness.

Administer the Site Readiness test on each device configuration (i.e., device type and operating system) that will be used for testing, and then certify the school in the MCAS Portal to indicate to school and district test coordinators that the school’s technology is ready for testing. DESE recommends that schools conduct Site Readiness directly after installing the updated MCAS Student Kiosk, and again about two weeks prior to test administration, if your school has made any technology changes since the last time Site Readiness was completed. Refer to the step-by-step instructions in the [MCAS Student Kiosk Technology Guide](#).

4. Plan to attend DESE training webinars.

DESE hosted an Overview of MCAS Administration Tasks for Technology Coordinators in fall 2025. A recording of the training is available on the [MCAS Resource Center](#). Additional training webinars for technology coordinators are expected to be held in winter 2025–26. Registration links are available on the [Training Opportunities webpage](#).

Notes