



Jeffrey C. Riley  
Commissioner

# Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Superintendents, Charter School Leaders, and Assistant Superintendents  
**Copy:** Principals and MCAS Test Coordinators  
**From:** Michol Stapel, Associate Commissioner for Student Assessment  
**Date:** September 29, 2020  
**Subject:** Update on MCAS Testing and Initial High School Testing Schedule for School Year 2020-21

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I am pleased to release the following information about MCAS testing for the coming year, along with an initial testing schedule for high school MCAS tests. We acknowledge that we are releasing the testing schedule later than usual, and we appreciate your patience. We are currently planning for in-person MCAS testing this year.

More information about spring MCAS testing plans and ACCESS for ELLs testing will be provided under separate cover, but **please note that schools should plan for spring 2021 MCAS testing in grades 3–8 to occur as usual in April and May.**

### COVID-19 Context

We are providing this initial schedule to help schools and districts plan, but we recognize that conditions may change because of the evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic. We will update our plans and schedules as needed.

As schools plan to administer statewide tests, administrators should follow [health and safety requirements](#), particularly around physical distancing.

In recognition of the fact that schools may not be able to test as many students as usual simultaneously, DESE will provide the following flexibilities:

- Longer testing windows so that districts have time to test students who may only be in school on certain days due to hybrid learning or other learning arrangements
- Suspending the requirement for concurrent testing on prescribed test dates for high schools

In addition, please note that Commissioner Riley has determined that for [MCAS performance appeals](#), he will approve all requests for a waiver of the three-test minimum requirement for ELA and mathematics for students in the classes of 2021 and 2022. Students in these classes must have taken the ELA and mathematics tests at least **twice** instead.

### High School ELA and Mathematics

As shown in the table below, DESE is planning to offer a different schedule than usual for ELA and Mathematics testing: In 2021, there will be administrations in **January and May**. The first administration

is planned for January 2021 instead of the usual November timing, giving schools time to focus on instruction and adjust to new learning environments during the fall semester. Retesting for students in grades 11 and 12, as well as first-time testing for students in grade 10, will take place in May.

<b>Type of Tests</b>	<b>Administration Mode</b>	<b>Test Administration Windows</b>	<b>Students Eligible to Participate</b>
Legacy	Computer-based*	January 14–February 5	( <i>Optional</i> ) Students in grades 11 and 12 and adults
Next-Gen	Computer-based*	May 18–27 (Projected. Depending on the public health situation, testing windows may be expanded.)	( <i>Required</i> ) Students in grade 10 ( <i>Optional</i> ) Students in grades 11 and 12 and adults
Legacy	Paper-based	May 18–27 (Projected. See above.)	( <i>Optional</i> ) Students in grades 11 and 12 and adults

\* Paper-based tests available as an accommodation

### **Special January Administration of ELA and Mathematics**

Since students in the class of 2022 (this year’s juniors) did not have the opportunity to earn their Competency Determination (CD) in the last school year due to statewide school closures, DESE is making a January testing opportunity available. The tests administered in January will be legacy tests (see the section below titled *Test Format and Standards Assessed* for more information about legacy testing).

#### ***Student Eligibility***

All students must be provided with the opportunity to earn their CD and qualify for the Adams and Koplik scholarships, and adults who have not earned their CD are encouraged to be permitted to return to school for testing (as noted in the table above). To the extent possible, schools should develop a plan that allows all eligible students to attend school in person for the purpose of taking scheduled tests. For the small number of students who are unable to attend in person (e.g., medical conditions or other unique circumstances), we will work with schools to find solutions on a case-by-case basis.

#### ***Specific Information/Policies for Grade 11 Students (Class of 2022)***

- Students who do *not* participate in the January administration should plan to try to earn their CD in May. If a family elects not to participate in testing, DESE will provide schools with a non-participation letter (and translated versions) that can be sent home to parents/guardians to inform them of the child’s options.
- Students will be provided with additional retest opportunities in their senior year.

#### ***Specific Information/Policy for Grade 10 Students (Class of 2023)***

- Students in the class of 2023 will take the May administration of the next-generation tests.

#### ***Test Format and Standards Assessed***

The January high school MCAS administration will be a computer-based version of the legacy tests in ELA and mathematics (students who need a paper-based version may receive one as an accommodation).

For ELA, the most significant difference between the legacy and next-generation tests is how writing is assessed. Students taking the legacy ELA test will be expected to write a composition (a literary analysis)

by responding to a prompt based on a work of literature they have read in or out of class prior to taking the test. Schools should prepare students accordingly, since compositions that do not address the writing prompt or are not based on a work of literature will be considered nonscorable. Educators may wish to view previously administered [writing prompts, scoring guides, and sample student work](#) to help prepare students.

In order to help schools prepare students, DESE will soon release a list of standards that the January tests will assess. The next-generation tests in May will fully align to the 2017 standards in [ELA](#) and [mathematics](#).

In the fall, schools will be asked to inform DESE if they need to do paper-based testing because of challenges related to technology constraints, a new COVID-19-related situation, or for other reasons (e.g., all students have a paper-based test accommodation). Schools are encouraged to consult with the [Office of Student Assessment Services](#) as needed.

### **High School Science and Technology/Engineering (STE)**

Due to the COVID-19 school closures in spring 2020, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education [voted](#) that the STE component of the CD for students in the classes of 2020–23 will be awarded upon demonstration of course credit in the relevant subject matter and competency in one of the four tested disciplines during their high school career.

As a result, the **only** students eligible to participate in STE testing this school year are:

- Students in grade 9 (Students in the class of 2024 must take a high school STE test by the end of grade 10.)
- Adults in the class of 2019 or earlier

The Department will offer tests in February (biology only) and June (all four subjects: biology, introductory physics, chemistry, and technology/engineering).

A **legacy, paper-based** biology test based on [“overlapping” standards](#) from both the 2006 and 2016 STE frameworks will be offered in February.

The Department is still making final determinations about whether to administer legacy or next-generation tests during the Biology and Introductory Physics testing windows that will be open in June; more information will be provided before January. Schools should be using the [2016 STE Framework](#) to prepare students for the Biology and Introductory Physics tests. The Chemistry and Technology/Engineering tests will remain legacy, paper-based tests and will align only to the [2006 STE standards](#).

The Department expects to offer the legacy, paper-based **Biology test between February 8 and 26, 2021**. The June STE schedule is still under development (again, with longer windows planned).

### **MCAS Alternate Assessment**

The submission deadline for the MCAS Alternate Assessment (MCAS-Alt) will be April 1, 2021. More information will be communicated through the [MCAS-Alt newsletters](#).

### **Additional Guidance**

As always, principals should be aware that [state and federal laws](#) require schools to make reasonable accommodations for the religious needs of students and employees in observance of holy days. Students who are absent from school may participate in a make-up session as soon after the regularly administered testing session as possible. Schools may contact DESE with questions.

Please contact the [Office of Student Assessment Services](#) with any questions regarding the 2021 MCAS testing schedule. Thank you.