Spring 2011 MCAS/MEPA Administration
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

This informational resource provides responses to questions principals frequently ask during MCAS test administrations. It is intended to complement and supplement the Principal’s Administration Manual, which contains all the basic information needed for a smooth test administration. Answers to other questions can be found by searching for a keyword in the index or the PDF of the manual, which is posted on the Department’s website at http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/testadmin/manual.

Please contact the MCAS Service Center at 800-737-5103 for clarification on test administration procedures and with questions about MCAS materials. As always, contact the Department at 781-338-3625 with policy questions.

1. Scheduling and Staffing

Q. Must test sessions (not those on prescribed dates) be administered on consecutive days?
A. No. Principals have flexibility, within the parameters stated in the Principal’s Administration Manual, to schedule test sessions.

Q. May a student take a test earlier than the school’s scheduled administration date for that test if he or she plans to be out of school (e.g., on vacation)?
A. No. Students may not be tested before the prescribed testing window and dates. Students who are absent may make up the test(s) during the testing window according to instructions in the Principal’s Administration Manual. Principals should contact the Department to discuss any unusual situations.

Q. What are the Department’s recommendations for cases when the fire department has requested to schedule a time to test fire alarms during MCAS testing?
A. The Department recommends that principals contact their local fire departments to schedule fire alarm testing prior to MCAS test administration to minimize interruptions during testing.

Q. How should schools handle a situation when a student arrives late for a session?
A. If a student arrives after the test administrator has finished reading the script in the Test Administrator’s Manual to the class, another test administrator must read the script to the student before he or she begins work on the test. It is suggested that a test administrator be designated for a group of late students so that other students are not disrupted during testing while the script is being read.

Q. For the grades 7, 8, and 10 Mathematics tests, may a school administer session 2 before session 1, if there are not enough calculators for students?
A. No. Test sessions must be administered in the prescribed order.

Q. May substitute teachers administer MCAS tests?
A. Substitute teachers may be granted permission to administer tests if they are regular school employees and meet other qualifications.

Q. May students be scheduled to test in smaller groups, even if they are not students with disabilities who have the accommodation for a small group setting?
A. Yes. A principal has the flexibility to schedule students in appropriate groups and testing spaces other than regular classrooms, as long as all requirements for testing conditions and staffing are met.
2. Student Participation

Q. Are private school students permitted to participate in MCAS?
A. No. Only private school students whose tuition is publicly funded are allowed to participate in MCAS. Other private school students are not allowed to take MCAS tests, which are designed to measure the academic progress of students enrolled in publicly supported schools and the performance of those schools.

Q. Are home-schooled students permitted to participate in MCAS?
A. No. Students in approved home education programs are not enrolled in public schools. Consequently, they are neither required nor entitled to take the MCAS tests.

Q. Do home- or hospital-tutored students participate in MCAS?
A. Yes. Home-tutored students participate in MCAS. (A home- or hospital-tutored student is enrolled in a public school but receives instruction in the home or hospital due to a medical or other condition.) If possible, the student should be tested at the school under normal test administration conditions. When circumstances make it impossible to test the student at the school, the principal must contact the Department to determine how the student will participate in MCAS testing. Please refer to page 11 of the Principal’s Administration Manual for further instructions.

Q. Must foreign exchange students participate in MCAS?
A. No. Foreign exchange students are not required to participate in MCAS unless they are attempting to earn a Massachusetts high school diploma. When reporting student information to the Department’s Student Information Management System (SIMS), foreign exchange students must be coded as “11” under “reason for enrollment.”

Q. Must migrant students participate in MCAS?
A. Yes. Migrant students who are enrolled in a school temporarily are required to participate in MCAS tests.

Q. If a student becomes sick during a test session and is unable to complete the session, must he or she be scheduled for a make-up session?
A. Yes. Students who become ill mid-session need to be scheduled for a closely monitored make-up session to complete only the questions they have not yet answered. Students may not change answers or review responses to any questions that were answered before leaving the testing space.

Q. Must students who are repeating a grade take that grade’s MCAS tests again?
A. Students in grades 3–8 who are repeating the grade must take the MCAS tests scheduled for the grade in which they are currently enrolled. Refer to pages 9–10 of the Principal’s Administration Manual for information regarding the participation of retained students in the grade 10 ELA and Mathematics tests and the high school Science and Technology/Engineering tests.

Q. What procedures should be followed if a student transfers out of a school (e.g., a student in the temporary custody of DYS or a 45-day placement)?
A. Please refer to page 11 of the Principal’s Administration Manual for instructions.

Q. What procedures should be followed when a student enters a school or transfers out during the testing window?
A. The Change of Enrollment Status section of the answer booklet should be completed to indicate that a student’s enrollment status changed (i.e., the student transferred into or out of the school) and the student
completed at least one but not all of the sessions in the answer booklet. An answer booklet should not be returned for students who transfer out of a school before the first day of testing.

If a standard answer booklet is not submitted for a student, and the student is reported in both March and June SIMS as enrolled in the same grade and school, the student will automatically be reported as absent without medical documentation (exception: repeating grade 10 students who participated in the previous spring’s test).

3. Questions Related to Students with Disabilities and Students Who Are English Language Learners (ELL)

Students with Disabilities

Q. How do principals indicate that a student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP)?
A. Since a student’s IEP status is reported to SIMS by districts, principals do not report this information on answer booklets. Updates to a student’s IEP status from the October SIMS submission must be made in the March SIMS submission, or if that deadline has passed, in the June SIMS submission.

Q. Which students are eligible for test accommodations?
A. Students with disabilities served by either an IEP or 504 plan (or if a 504 plan is under development) with accommodation(s) listed for statewide assessment in their plan may receive those accommodation(s) during MCAS testing, provided that an accommodation does not alter the test or violate test security.

Refer to Appendix B of the Principal’s Administration Manual for a list of available accommodations. Prior to testing, principals must consult with the Department to discuss using any accommodation(s) not included on the approved list.

Q. How does a student with a broken arm or similar injury participate in testing?
A. A student with a broken bone or fracture in his or her writing hand or arm (or similar injury) at the time of testing is considered to have a “documented disability.” Therefore, the development of a 504 plan must be initiated if the student requires accommodations (e.g., use a scribe, use a word processor, take the test individually). The accommodation(s) provided and the “504 plan” circle on the student’s answer booklet must be completed.

Q. What special MCAS test editions are available to assist in administering the tests to students with disabilities?
A. The following editions are available:
   - Braille
   - Large-print
   - Pre-wrapped class packs of six test booklets, each of the same numbered test form for use when providing accommodation 16 or 26 (reading aloud the test to an individual student or to a small group)
   - Electronic text reader CD (Kurzweil 3000)
   - American Sign Language (ASL) DVD edition of grade 10 Mathematics test (an ASL VHS videotape edition is no longer available)
   - Individually shrink-wrapped test booklets labeled “Test Booklet for Signing to a Deaf Student” for use when providing accommodation 17 or 27
Q. Does the Department post sample individualized mathematics reference sheets, graphic organizers, or checklists for students with disabilities using accommodation 20?
A. These materials are meant to be individualized for students by their teachers. General guidelines for submitting individualized materials for approval are included in Appendix B of the Principal’s Administration Manual. New for spring 2011, sample pre-approved ELA graphic organizers for use with accommodation 20 are posted on the Department’s website at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/organizers.

Q. Can a student participate in the MCAS Alternate Assessment (MCAS-Alt) for one subject and the standard MCAS paper and pencil test for another? If so, how do principals indicate this?
A. Yes. IEP or 504 plan teams may decide that a student should be tested in one subject using the standard paper-and-pencil test and the MCAS-Alt in another. (Please note that a student must either take the ELA Reading Comprehension and ELA Composition tests; or all portions of the ELA MCAS-Alt.) The principal should submit an answer booklet containing the student’s responses to the standard test, and an MCAS-Alt Student Identification Form (SIF) for the subject in which the student took the alternate assessment. Instructions for completing student information on the answer booklet and the SIF are included in Appendix D of the Principal’s Administration Manual.

Q. How must a typed response be submitted for a student with a disability who is using accommodation 23?
A. Typed responses may be submitted as paper copies inserted in the student’s answer booklet and returned in the Special Handling Envelope. A student’s responses may be either single or double line spaced. The Typed Response Upload System (TRUS) is no longer available. Instructions are included in Appendix C of the MCAS Principal’s Administration Manual.

Students Who Are English Language Learners (ELL)

Q. Does an ELL student have to pass MCAS tests to be eligible for a high school diploma, even if the student recently arrived in this country?
A. Yes. All students, including ELL students who recently arrived in this country, must earn a Competency Determination (CD) and meet all local graduation requirements in order to receive a high school diploma.

Q. Are MCAS tests available in other languages?
A. The only MCAS tests produced in a language other than English are the grade 10 Mathematics test and Mathematics retests, which are available in an English/Spanish edition. The use of the English/Spanish edition is limited to Spanish-speaking ELL students who have been enrolled in school in the continental U.S. for fewer than three years and can read and write in Spanish at or near grade-level.

Q. May schools translate directions or any portion of the test into other languages for students?
A. No. Test administrators may not translate directions or any portion of an MCAS test into other languages for students. A Spanish script from the Test Administrator’s Manual must be read verbatim to students taking the English/Spanish edition of the grade 10 Mathematics test by a test administrator who is fluent in both English and Spanish.

Q. How are scores reported on MCAS tests for a first-year ELL student?
A. If a first-year ELL student earns a raw score equivalent to a scaled score of 220 or higher on any MCAS test, a scaled score and performance level will be reported for diagnostic and CD purposes. However, these students will not be included in school and district aggregations. If a student does not earn a raw score equivalent to 220 or higher, the student will be reported as limited English proficient (“LEP”).
Q. Are students who are no longer reported as LEP, or those who have chosen not to receive English language support services (e.g., sheltered English immersion classes), eligible to use a bilingual word-to-word dictionary?
A. Yes. Any student who is or was ever reported as LEP may use a bilingual word-to-word dictionary. A list of authorized bilingual word-to-word dictionaries (updated in fall 2010, including specialized terms for mathematics and science and technology/engineering) is posted at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/participation/?section=lep.

Q. My school has a student who speaks a language that does not have a bilingual word-to-word dictionary on the approved list. How can I submit a request for an update to the list?
A. Requests for updates should be submitted via email to mcas@doe.mass.edu.

Q. My school has a student who attended school in the U.S. for a short time, then returned to her native country for a year. The student has returned to my school and is still reported as LEP. May we classify the student as a first-year LEP student?
A. No. The student may be reported as LEP but is no longer first-year LEP since the student was previously reported to SIMS in his or her first year of enrollment in a U.S. school.

4. Providing Student Information/Using Student ID Labels

Q. Instead of writing the school and district name on each student’s answer booklet or test booklet, could a school print this information on a label?
A. Yes. The label must fit designated sections (other sections of answer booklets must not be covered) and the label must be of regular thickness (e.g., Avery labels).

Q. How are Student ID Labels for each test administration generated and what are some uses for SIMS data?
A. Student ID Labels are based on information provided by districts in the October SIMS submission.

Labels for the high school Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) tests are provided for each student in grades 9–12 reported in October SIMS who has not yet met the STE requirement for earning a CD.

March SIMS data are the source of demographics (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, low-income status) used in final data reports. March and June SIMS data are the source of program status (e.g., special education, limited English proficiency).

Q. Should a school use a Student ID Label if the SASID is correct, but other information provided on the label is incorrect?
A. Yes. The school should use the label if the student’s SASID is correct. The labels are used to ensure that a student’s MCAS results are connected to the state’s official SIMS database. If the student’s name or date of birth is incorrect, it is likely that this information was incorrectly reported to SIMS. The school should report the problem to the district contact and request that the information be corrected in June SIMS.

Q. Is it possible to obtain an additional Student ID Label for a student who recently transferred to my school?
A. No. If a student does not have a label, schools must provide all of the requested student identification information on the student’s answer booklet. See the Test Administrator’s Manuals for instructions.
Q. One of our school’s students has moved to another school in our district. May the school send his or her Student ID Label to the new school?
A. No. MCAS test materials, including Student ID Labels, must not be moved from one school to another. The student’s information needs to be updated in the next SIMS submission. The new school where the student attends will need to fill in all information requested on the student’s answer booklet. The school the student no longer attends will return the unused Student ID Label according to instructions in the Principal’s Administration Manual.

Q. If a student with a Student ID Label completes the front cover of his or her answer booklet in pen, may the answer booklet still be used by the student?
A. Yes. If a student has a Student ID Label, the label will override information completed in pen on the answer booklet.

Q. Can a school use a student’s Student ID Label from the standard MCAS administration on the student’s MCAS-Alt SIF?
A. Yes. Standard MCAS Student ID Labels and MCAS-Alt labels are interchangeable.

5. High School Tests

Q. When will students be notified that they are eligible for an Adams Scholarship?
A. Eligible students will be notified in the fall of their senior year.

Q. A student moved to Massachusetts and enrolled in my school in spring 2010 as a grade 10 student. He was reported as “TRN” because he entered the school too late into the testing window to participate. Is the student required to take the grade 10 tests in ELA and Mathematics in spring 2011?
A. No. The student may participate in the spring 2011 MCAS tests in an attempt to qualify for the Adams Scholarship or the Koplik Certificate of Mastery with Distinction. The student may also choose to participate in the retests.

Q. If a student participated in the February MCAS Biology test and did not meet the STE requirement for earning his or her CD, may he or she participate in an STE test in June?
A. Yes. A student may participate in any of the four June high school STE tests, based on the participation requirements stated in the Principal’s Administration Manual on page 10.

Q. May a high school administer different subject area high school STE tests in the same room (e.g., Biology and Chemistry)?
A. Yes. However, test administrators should pay close attention when monitoring students and when reading the scripts, since there are different materials for each subject area test.

Q. Are students who are enrolled in a physical science course eligible to take the Introductory Physics test?
A. Students are eligible to take the Introductory Physics test if they have taken a course based on the High School Introductory Physics standards in the Massachusetts Science and Technology/Engineering Curriculum Framework. If a school offers a physical science course that corresponds to the standards, then the students should be offered the test.
Q. Is there an opportunity to submit an MCAS-Alt portfolio binder in February for Biology?
A. No. MCAS-Alt portfolios are submitted in the spring only. If a portfolio is completed earlier, it should be securely stored until spring.

6. Completing Student Information on Answer Booklets and Returning Shipments of Materials

Q. How does a school account for a student who is absent without a medically documented reason?
A. If the school already assigned the student’s answer booklet by writing the student’s name and SASID on the front cover and by affixing a Student ID Label on the front, the school should mark the booklet void (write “void” across the front cover and fill in the void circle on the back cover, and return the booklet in the Void Envelope). If the school did not assign a booklet to the student, no action is required. The Department will report the student as absent based on SIMS. Note that a student for whom an answer booklet is submitted and who did not respond to a single test question in any one test session will be reported as absent for that subject area test.

Q. The school has an alternative program in another location. How can the program receive Student ID Labels and shipments of test materials directly, so that the program does not need to request permission from the Department to transport materials?
A. Contact the Student Assessment Services Office at 781-338-3625 or MCAS@doe.mass.edu to make arrangements.

7. Other

Q. How do principals stay well informed about upcoming MCAS activities, such as ordering MCAS and MEPA test materials?
A. All testing and reporting activities and test administration milestones are announced on the Department’s website well in advance. It is very important that principals familiarize themselves with the Department’s website and the calendar of events for MEPA and MCAS. Notices of upcoming events, including dates for ordering materials and reporting results, are posted in the Commissioner’s Update and MCAS News Headlines (www.doe.mass.edu/mcas). Also, since faxes are sent to schools with important updates, principals are requested to update contact information with their District-level Directory Administrator (listing posted at www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/data/direnp/admin/list.asp).

Q. Does the Department have suggestions for inventorying packets of secure test booklets, which must remain shrink-wrapped?
A. The Department recommends that principals count the spines of test booklets in the shrink-wrapped packets. A small box is printed on the spine of each booklet, and the boxes appear in descending order for the booklets in each shrink-wrapped packet to assist in counting.

Q. The Test Administrator’s Manuals state that students’ test booklets will be destroyed following test administration. Students are concerned about this. What does this really mean?
A. Booklets are securely shredded and recycled. Scanned images are retained by the testing contractor for a specified amount of time.
Q. May students write on pages that say “No test materials on this page” in their test booklets (except grade 3, which has combined test & answer booklets)?
A. Yes. Students may write or do any pre-writing activities in their test booklets. However, all of their responses for scoring must be marked in the appropriate spaces in their answer booklets (or test & answer booklets).

Q. Displays that provide information related to the content being assessed or to test-taking strategies are not allowed in the classroom. Must these displays also be removed from the hallways?
A. No.

Q. May students use mechanical pencils that contain #2 lead in their answer booklets?
A. Yes, mechanical pencils may be used, provided test administrators confirm they contain #2 lead.

Q. Are STE results included in AYP results?
A. No. AYP calculations under NCLB include ELA and Mathematics only. However, a Composite Performance Index (CPI) is calculated for STE.

8. Questions from the Spring 2011 MCAS/MEPA Administration Workshops

Q. New this year, students are requested to write the name of the test administrator on the cover of their test booklets for each MCAS test session. My school uses more than one test administrator to proctor each test session. What should students do?
A. Students may write the names of all test administrators on the appropriate line on the test booklet cover and in the space below that line.

Q. A student takes the grade 7 ELA test because he is enrolled in my school and is reported in SIMS as a seventh grader. However, the guidance counselors will transition the student to grade 8 so that he will be in the eighth grade by the time of May testing. Which Mathematics test should he take?
A. The student must take the grade 7 Mathematics test. (Students can only take tests from one grade level per year).

Q. If a regular education student is tested in a smaller group or separate setting (see related question on page 1), but the student does not have these accommodations specified in an IEP or 504 plan, do we need to indicate this on the student’s answer booklet?
A. Do not fill in accommodation circles on an answer booklet unless a student has a disability and accommodations listed in an IEP or 504 plan.

Q. Students request to stay after school to complete their ELA Compositions. May we allow them to stay, if the test administrator is willing to stay?
A. The test administrator must read scripts that guide students on the remaining time available in session
B. Principals may provide students, upon student request, with up to an additional 15 minutes to review and complete their work.

Q. A student with a disability at my school will use an ELA graphic organizer because she has accommodation 20 specified in her IEP. The graphic organizer does not contain any text. Do I need to send it to the Department for prior approval?
A. Graphic organizers that do not contain any words do not require prior Department approval.
Q. A student with a disability at my school has accommodation specified in his IEP. Must the graphic organizer, checklist, or individualized math reference sheet be included in my return shipment of test materials?
A. Yes. All graphic organizers, checklists, and/or math reference sheets that are provided to students with disabilities who have accommodation specified in their IEPs must be included in the return shipment, regardless of whether the material has any student handwriting on it, whether the student refused the accommodation, or whether it is one of the sample graphic organizers posted on the Department’s website.

Q. Can a student who participates in the February Biology test participate in a June STE test as well?
A. Yes. If a student participated in the February Biology test but did not earn a CD in STE, he or she may participate in any of the STE tests in June. February Biology test results are expected to be posted at DropBox Central around March 22.