

RIGHTS OF MASSACHUSETTS YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES REGARDING MCAS

Prepared by the Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee
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What are the rights of students with IEPs with respect to the MCAS?

IEP Teams must ensure that students with disabilities have the resources necessary to pass the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). A student's IEP should annually determine how the student will participate in the MCAS.¹ Students with disabilities might take the standard MCAS, the standard MCAS with accommodations, or the MCAS-Alt. All students must meet MCAS passing requirements in order to receive a high school diploma, so it is crucial that the IEP Team determine how the student will best prepare for and pass the MCAS.²

Can students receive accommodations when taking the MCAS?

Some students take the MCAS with accommodations. Standard accommodations are changes in the test administration that do not change what the test measures. Non-standard accommodations, intended for a smaller group of students, may change the way the test measures student responses or alters a portion of what the test should measure.³ IEP Teams must decide if a student needs accommodations on the MCAS for each subject the student will be tested on.⁴ For example, a student may require accommodations on the writing component of the MCAS but not for the multiple choice section. If an IEP Team determines that a student needs an accommodation on the MCAS, the school district must provide it.⁵ An accommodation should be one that the student uses routinely, and that he or she requires to participate in the MCAS.⁶

¹ DESE, Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System: Overview,
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/overview.html?faq=8>.

² DESE, Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System: High School Graduation Requirements, Scholarships, and Academic Support Opportunities,
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/graduation.html>.

³ DESE, Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System: Requirements for the Participation of Students with Disabilities in MCAS, Spring 2010 Update 10,
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/participation/sped.pdf>.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ DESE, Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System: Requirements for the Participation of Students with Disabilities in MCAS, Spring 2010 Update 7,
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/participation/sped.pdf>.

⁶ DESE, Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System: Requirements for the Participation of Students with Disabilities in MCAS, Spring 2010 Update 8,
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/participation/sped.pdf>.

What if accommodations are not enough?

If accommodations to the regular MCAS are not enough, a small number of students with significant disabilities may also take the MCAS Alternate Assessment (MCAS-Alt) in one or more subjects.⁷ This alternative to the MCAS is not an administrated test, but a portfolio compiled over the course of the year that shows data, samples of student work and other evidence that the student's performance is being assessed.⁸ The MCAS-Alt assesses students in this way according to learning standards of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Although the MCAS-Alt is usually reserved for students with severe cognitive disabilities, in certain cases students with emotional, behavioral, health-related, motor, communication or other disabilities may be eligible.⁹

What should happen if a student scores badly on the MCAS?

Poor MCAS results should trigger revisions to the IEP stating how the student will improve his score in the future. These revisions might include more intensive MCAS preparation, accommodations on the regular MCAS, or application to take the MCAS-Alt. An unsatisfactory score on the MCAS should persuade school districts to pay closer attention to the special education needs of the student in question.

If your child fails the MCAS, it is possible to submit an appeal to show that your child meets the state's Competency Determination Standard. DESE has a guide for parents about this process (see resources below),

Resources:

DESE, Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas>

DESE, A Guide to the MCAS Performance Appeals Process (Jan. 2011),
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcasappeals/filing/guide.pdf>

⁷ DESE, Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System: Requirements for the Participation of Students with Disabilities in MCAS, Spring 2010 Update 3, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/participation/sped.pdf>.

⁸ DESE, *Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System: Requirements for the Participation of Students with Disabilities in MCAS, Spring 2010 Update 22*, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/participation/sped.pdf>.

⁹ DESE, Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System: Requirements for the Participation of Students with Disabilities in MCAS, Spring 2010 Update 5, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/participation/sped.pdf>.