

Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

Letter to Parents about the Next-Generation MCAS Results

October 18, 2017

Dear Parent,

You will soon receive your child's MCAS scores, which include results from the next-generation MCAS tests that were given in English language arts and mathematics to students in grades 3-8 in spring 2017. Due to the new testing format and scoring, the Department writes to share some important information for parents and students to understand the scaling and context of the results.

The new MCAS assessment was created with input from teachers following a thorough review and update of our curriculum frameworks. Both the frameworks and the next-generation MCAS were developed with the active involvement of hundreds of experienced Massachusetts teachers and educators from all over the Commonwealth to ensure we provide every child with the opportunity they deserve to graduate high school ready for college or career. We are deeply grateful for their participation and expertise.

Even though Massachusetts has the highest performing public education system in the nation, we have to keep improving to remain globally competitive. Equally important, too many of our high school graduates are not fully prepared for post-secondary education or training. That's why we embarked on this vital project to take responsibility for improving our own standards and assessments.

The next-generation MCAS is a reformatted test from the old MCAS, and the scores are not comparable to the prior tests your child has taken. On the legacy MCAS, the four scoring categories were Advanced, Proficient, Needs Improvement, and Warning/Failing. On the next-generation MCAS, the four scoring categories are Exceeding Expectations, Meeting Expectations, Partially Meeting Expectations, and Not Meeting Expectations. The new categories emphasize readiness for higher-level work at the next grade level.

Roughly half of Massachusetts grades 3-8 students are already scoring in the Meeting Expectations category or above, but many students will find that they scored in the Partially or Not Meeting Expectations categories. As you look at these scores and help your child understand them, please note:

- The next-generation MCAS establishes high expectations to better reflect whether students are on track for the next grade level and ultimately for college and a career.
- 2017 is the baseline year - the first year of a new assessment - and we expect that over time, more students will score Meeting Expectations or above. (When the original MCAS debuted in 1998, relatively few students scored Proficient, but that changed as students and teachers adjusted to the new expectations.)
- Students in grades 3-8 do not face any negative consequences as a result of their scores.
- Students in 10th grade will not begin taking the next generation MCAS until 2019, so they are not affected by any of these changes.

- The next-generation MCAS is a new test with a different approach to assessing student performance in grades 3-8, and this year's results cannot be compared to last year's.
- MCAS results are only one measure of your child's growth and achievement. Your child's teacher can also talk to you more broadly about your child's academic growth and about his or her social and emotional development.
- In some subjects and grades, fewer students scored Meeting or Exceeding Expectations this year than scored Proficient or Advanced in previous years. This does NOT mean that students learned less; it reflects the fact that the next-generation MCAS measures more rigorous standards in a different way.

Massachusetts has the best public school system in the country, and giving students a clearer signal of their readiness for the next grade level is an important part of that. Please see the attached FAQ sheet for more details on the tests.

Learn more about the [next-generation MCAS and your child's score](#).

If you have questions or concerns about your child's results, I encourage you to talk with his or her teacher or principal. General questions about MCAS results and supplemental resources can be directed to the Office of Student Assessment at mcas@doe.mass.edu or by phone at 781-338-3625.

Sincerely,

Jeff Wulfson
Acting Commissioner