

## **Appendix: What should parents know about the next-generation MCAS tests?**

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) is in the process of upgrading the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests to better measure the critical thinking skills students need for success in the 21st century. The new tests, informally called “the next-generation MCAS,” will build on the best aspects of MCAS that have served the Commonwealth well for the past two decades.

### ***Why is Massachusetts changing to these next-generation tests?***

The MCAS tests were first administered in 1998 and had been given for 18 years, mostly unchanged. However, the MCAS was not designed to measure readiness for success in college or a career after high school. Data from our state higher education system showed a high number of students requiring remedial courses. And, as we upgraded our learning expectations through revising the curriculum frameworks, it was time to upgrade our state tests. The next-generation tests provide an opportunity for added focus on critical thinking skills and factual knowledge.

### ***What is the phase-in plan for computer-based testing?***

As part of the [transition to statewide computer-based testing](#), students in grades 4 and 8 are expected to take computer-based MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics tests in spring 2017, with exceptions for students who are determined to require a paper-and-pencil edition or the MCAS-Alt, and a small number of districts with exceptional circumstances. (Districts were able to apply for a waiver from the expectation for computer-based testing for grades 4 and 8, and decisions will be communicated back to superintendents by December 23.) In addition, districts may choose to administer ELA and Mathematics tests on computer for grades 3, 5, 6, and 7 this spring.

In spring 2017, the Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) tests at grades 5, 8, and high school, and the grade 10 ELA and Mathematics tests and retests will remain paper-based tests.

It is expected that districts will administer more grades and subjects on computer in spring 2018, and the goal is for full computer-based testing in spring 2019 for grades 3–8 ELA and Mathematics with exceptions for students with disabilities who require a paper-and-pencil test as well as for new ELL students unfamiliar with computers. Science and Technology/Engineering tests will move to computer-based testing on a different schedule.

### ***How are the next-generation tests different from traditional MCAS tests?***

- Next-generation tests are designed to assess students’ critical thinking skills, as well as signal students’ readiness for success in college or a career after high school.
- Next-generation tests will include existing MCAS questions, questions developed by the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), and new questions developed specifically for the new test.
- Next-generation tests will primarily be computer-based tests. Computer-based test questions can include richer content and a greater range of accessibility features; tests have the potential to be scored more quickly and at a lower cost; and computer-based testing reflects the reality that students in the 21st century are using technology in their classrooms and their daily lives.
- Next-generation tests will include writing on the ELA test in every grade; in the past, MCAS tests included a separate composition test in grades 4, 7, and 10 only. (Note that students in grade 10 in 2017 will continue to take the Composition test.)

### ***Will I need to buy a computer for my child to be tested?***

No. Computers or tablets will be provided by schools. In preparation, the ESE is providing information to schools regarding funding opportunities to upgrade their technology.

### ***How much time will students spend taking the next-generation tests?***

- Next-generation tests will remain untimed in spring 2017, and the ESE plans to study the amount of time that students actually use to plan for 2018 accordingly.
- The recommended amount of time for each session will be slightly longer than during the spring 2016 MCAS tests, but shorter than the spring 2016 PARCC tests (which were timed). The recommended session lengths are [posted on the Department's website](#).

### ***How will students with disabilities and ELL students participate in the next-generation tests?***

- The universal design of the next-generation tests is intended to reduce barriers to participation for all students, including students with disabilities. New accessibility and accommodations policies will also increase accessibility for these students.
- Students with disabilities will continue using accommodations that are documented in approved IEPs and 504 plans, and now ELL students will also be eligible for test accommodations.
- Students with severe disabilities will continue to be able to participate in the MCAS Alternate Assessment instead of the standard test.

### ***What will the next-generation tests assess?***

The spring 2017 next-generation tests will be based on the same learning standards as the traditional MCAS tests – those contained in the [Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks](#), which outline what students should know and be able to do for each grade level and subject area.

### ***Will my child be able to review sample next-generation test questions before testing?***

Yes. The ESE plans to post practice tests as well as student tutorials online in early 2017 for schools to practice with students.

### ***How will parents and educators know how students perform on the next-generation tests?***

Student performance will be reported using the same process as the traditional MCAS tests: students will receive a scaled score and an achievement level for each next-generation test they take. These results will be included on reports for parents/guardians.

### ***Where can parents/guardians find more information or get involved?***

- ESE welcomes input from parents, guardians, and other community stakeholders. You can email your comments to the [Office of Student Assessment Services](#).
- See below for the tests your child will take this coming spring.

Student's name

Grade

Contact if questions

ELA test dates & testing mode (computer or paper)

Mathematics test dates & testing mode (computer or paper)

STE test dates (grades 5 and 8 only, and paper only)