



# Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Jeff Wulfson  
Acting Commissioner

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Dear Parent,

You have just received 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 10<sup>th</sup> 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.

To learn more about the next-generation MCAS and your child's score, go to:  
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/parents/>.

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](mailto:mcas@doe.mass.edu) or by phone at 781-338-3625.

Sincerely,



**Jeff Wulfson**  
**Acting Commissioner**

## **Frequently Asked Questions on Your Child's MCAS Scores**

### **Why have I received this letter?**

You have just received your child's MCAS scores from the test he/she took in spring of 2017.

- These include results from the new version of MCAS, called next-generation.
- These were given in English language arts and mathematics for grades 3 to 8.

### **Why does my report look different?**

Since the test has been updated, so has the report, both in the way it looks and in the information it contains.

As you know, your previous report had four categories for the level of the score:

- Advanced
- Proficient
- Needs Improvement
- Warning/Failing

Again, because the test changed, we have created new categories to help you better understand your child's readiness for the higher level of work in their next grade. They are now:

- Exceeding Expectations
- Meeting Expectations
- Partially Meeting Expectations
- Not Meeting Expectations

### **Why did the test have to change?**

- Even though Massachusetts has the highest performing public education system in the nation, too many of our high school graduates are not fully prepared for higher education or training.
- The goal is to improve student achievement through better standards and tests.

### **How were these changes made and who was involved?**

Hundreds of experienced educators from all over the Commonwealth were actively involved.

- They reviewed grade-by-grade academic standards and updated curriculum frameworks to guide classroom teachers in developing courses and lesson plans.
- Those updates helped to design a test that measures more accurately to provide every child with the opportunity to graduate high school ready for college and career.

We are deeply grateful for their hard work and expertise.

### **Is the new MCAS harder?**

- In general, the new standards for Meeting Expectations are **more rigorous** than the standards for reaching the Proficient level on the legacy MCAS. The goal is to set expectations higher to make sure students are on track for the next grade level and ultimately for college and a career.

- The new tests focus on student’s ability to think critically about what they are learning and on apply their knowledge to make clear connections between reading and writing and to develop problem-solving skills.

**How does this compare to my child’s scores from last year and years before?**

2017 is the first year for this new MCAS.

- This “next-generation” test will set the level for the coming years. Therefore, your child’s scores are not comparable to their previous scores. We feel this is an exciting opportunity to look forward and to provide every child with the opportunity to graduate high school ready for college and career.
- We expect that over time, more students will score in the **Meeting Expectations** category or above.
- It’s important to remember that when the original MCAS debuted in 1998, relatively few students scored **Proficient**. The results improved as students and teachers adjusted to the new expectations. We are confident that that will also be the case here.

**How do I explain these scores to my child?**

Here are some simple points to help you communicate:

- First, it’s important to note that students in grades 3-8 do not face any negative consequences as a result of their scores.
- (If your child is moving on to 10<sup>th</sup> grade, please note that he/she will not begin taking this new MCAS until 2019.)
- Roughly half of grades 3-8 students are already scoring in the **Meeting Expectations** category or above.

However, many students will find that they scored in the Partially or Not Meeting Expectations categories.

- If your child is in one of these categories, it does not mean that they learned less. It is just a different way of measuring these new expectations.
- We want to stress again, this is the first year of this new test. We have full confidence that the scores will improve over time as students and teachers become accustomed to the new standards.

Remember! MCAS results are only one measure of your child’s growth and achievement!

**What do I do if I have more questions?**

We encourage you to talk with your child’s teacher or principal.

- They can help you understand how these test results relate to your child’s academic growth, and they can also talk to you about your child's social and emotional development.

If you still have questions about the test itself you can:

- Email us at: [mcas@doe.mass.edu](mailto:mcas@doe.mass.edu).

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