

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What subjects does MCAS test?

- English Language Arts (ELA)
- Mathematics
- Science and Technology/Engineering (STE)

2. What types of questions are used on MCAS tests?

Multiple-choice questions are included on all MCAS tests except the ELA Composition and require students to select the correct answer from a list of four options.

Responses to multiple-choice questions are machine scored.

Short-answer questions are included only on Mathematics tests and require students to generate a brief response, usually a numerical solution or a brief statement.

Responses to short-answer questions are scored on a scale of 0-1 points by one scorer at grades 3-8 and by two independent scorers at grade 10.

Short-response questions are included only on the grade 3 ELA test and require students to generate a brief response to a reading comprehension question.

Responses to short-response questions are scored on a scale of 0-2 points by one scorer.

Open-response questions are included on all MCAS tests except the ELA Composition and require students to generate rather than recognize, a response. Students create a one-or two-paragraph response in writing or in the form of a narrative or a chart, table, diagram, illustration or graph, as appropriate. Students can respond correctly using a variety of strategies and approaches.

Responses to open-response questions are scored using a scoring guide and anchor papers (student work), for each question. The scoring guides indicate what knowledge and skills students must demonstrate. Open-response questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, with the exception of grade 3 Mathematics, which is scored on a scale of 0-2 points.

Answers to open-response questions are not scored for spelling, punctuation, or grammar. Responses are scored by one scorer at grades 3-8. Grade 10 ELA and Mathematics tests and high school Science and Technology/Engineering tests are scored by two independent scorers.

Writing prompts are included only on ELA Composition tests and require students to respond by creating a written composition. Student compositions are scored independently by two scorers for:

- topic development, based on a six point scale, with students receiving from 2 to 12 points (the sum of scores from each of the two scorers)
- standard English conventions, based on a four-point scale, with students receiving from 2 to 8 points (the sum of the scores from each of the two scorers)

Additional information is available on The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/>.

Student compositions that do not address the prompt are deemed non-scorable (NS), earning them 0 out of 20 possible points.

3. How are test results reported?

Results are reported for individual students, schools, and districts according to four performance levels defined by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education:

Performance Level General Description	Scaled Score Point Range
Advanced: Students at this level demonstrate a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of rigorous subject matter, and provide sophisticated solutions to complex problems.	260–280
Proficient: Students at this level demonstrate a solid understanding of challenging subject matter and solve a wide variety of problems.	240–258
Needs Improvement Students at this level demonstrate a partial understanding of subject matter and solve some simple problems.	220–238
Warning (grades 3–8)/Failing (high school): Students at this level demonstrate a minimal understanding of subject matter and do not solve simple problems.	200–218

4. How are test results used?

- Improvements in teaching and learning

Parents, students, and educators use the results to:

- Follow student progress
- Identify strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in curriculum and instruction
- Fine-tune curriculum alignment with the statewide standards (or align curriculum with the statewide standards)
- Gather diagnostic information that can be used to improve student performance
- Identify students who may need additional support services/remediation

- School and district accountability

As required by the Education Reform Law, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education established a rating system and standards for improving student academic performance that schools and districts must meet. In addition, under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) the Department reports on the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) of students in schools and districts based on MCAS results for groups of students.

- Student accountability

In order to be eligible for a high school diploma, students must fulfill all local requirements and are required to pass the following MCAS grade 10 tests:

- ELA
- Math

Additional information is available on The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/>.

- STE (one high school test in Biology, Chemistry, Introductory Physics, or Technology/ Engineering)

Students are provided with multiple opportunities, if necessary, to pass the tests.

5. Is a ranking of districts and towns by MCAS scores available?

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education does NOT rank cities or towns based on MCAS scores. While local media may use statewide results to create their own rankings, this practice is not encouraged nor endorsed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

6. Are all students required to participate?

The Massachusetts Education Reform Law of 1993 mandates that all students who are educated with Massachusetts public funds participate in MCAS testing for their grades, including

- students enrolled in public schools
- students enrolled in charter schools
- students enrolled in educational collaboratives
- students enrolled in private schools receiving special education that is publicly funded by the Commonwealth, including approved and unapproved private special education schools within and outside Massachusetts
- students enrolled in institutional settings receiving educational services
- students in military families
- students in the custody of either the Department of Social Services (DSS) or the Department of Youth Services (DYS)
- students with disabilities
- students with limited English proficiency
- students in high school

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