

A BIG WIN FOR MASSACHUSETTS STUDENTS



Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics

Massachusetts' 4th and 8th graders continue to rank at the top of the national standings—either first place or tied for first—in reading and math on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP. Despite this exemplary ranking, on the 2011 and 2013 administrations, only about half of 4th and 8th graders demonstrated proficiency in reading and math. In 2010, a third of Massachusetts public high school graduates who enrolled in state colleges and universities had to take a remedial course because they lacked the skills to complete college-level work. To address this situation, in 2010 the State's Boards of Elementary and Secondary Education, Early Childhood Education, and Higher Education adopted and endorsed a set of college- and career-ready standards to better prepare students with the skills they need for success.

Massachusetts' Proficiency Performance on NAEP: Percent Proficient (Rank)

| Year | 4th Grade Math | 4th Grade Reading | 8th Grade Math | 8th Grade Reading |
|------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| 2011 | 51% (tied for 1st) | 44% (tied for 1st) | 47% (1st) | 45% (tied for 1st) |
| 2013 | 49% (tied for 1st) | 42% (tied for 1st) | 49% (1st) | 46% (tied for 1st) |

Massachusetts' previous state standards were rigorous and held students to high expectations. They were used as a model for the Common Core State Standards, which the *Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics* now include. The *Curriculum Framework* is a guide for what students should know and be able to do at every grade level. Curriculum experts and teachers from across the state developed and reviewed the Curriculum Frameworks to ensure that they made valuable additions to the previous standards. The revised Curriculum Frameworks build on the strengths of the previous standards and ensure that Massachusetts' students continue to excel and achieve success after high school.

With the adoption of college- and career-ready standards, Massachusetts is one step closer to ensuring that students will have the opportunity to reach their full potential. By 2020, more than 70% of jobs in Massachusetts will require a postsecondary credential. However, only 53% of adults in the state currently have such a credential, resulting in a significant skills gap. Higher standards are essential to helping close this gap.



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Updated Standards Call for Improved Assessments

Teachers across Massachusetts have been hard at work putting these higher academic standards in place since their adoption. It has been a significant undertaking involving countless hours of professional development, curricula alignment, and learning strategies to engage students more deeply than ever before.

The next phase of this work is to implement an improved high-quality assessment system that can help students, teachers, and parents determine which skills a student has or has not yet mastered. The state needs assessments that can measure the critical thinking and problem solving skills that our students need to succeed—and existing state tests only partially evaluate this level of learning. Next-generation assessments present an opportunity to move beyond tests that simply measure knowledge of math, reading, and writing concepts to ones that mirror the standards and provide teachers with valuable information on how effectively they are teaching and students are learning.

Assessments are part of a larger system of accountability that supports student achievement and holds schools accountable for successfully teaching the content and skills outlined in the standards. At the heart of accountability is the need to ensure that all students across Massachusetts receive a high-quality education. Meaningful tests serve as school-wide academic checkups that can identify struggling students and schools in need of extra support and interventions. In addition, next-generation assessments can identify high-achieving students who require support to maintain their academic engagement and provide them with the resources necessary to help them excel.

For the past four years, teams of academics, testing experts, and teachers have been collaborating to create two testing options aligned to the standards:

PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. These two tests were field tested in spring 2014 in 35 states, including Massachusetts, where students in multiple districts participated in the PARCC field test.

The test aims to do the following:

- Accurately measure student progress toward college and career readiness.
- Assess a wide range of real-world skills, including critical thinking, analytical writing, and problem solving.
- Provide real-time information on student progress to help guide teacher instruction and improve learning.

Massachusetts is a governing member of the PARCC consortium. PARCC's next-generation assessments are designed to build a pathway to college and career readiness by the end of high school, by measuring the full range of the standards. The assessments will provide teachers with information to help guide their instruction, allowing them to provide extra support to students when necessary.

In 2014–2015, Massachusetts school districts were given the option to administer the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) or the PARCC tests. Fifty-four percent of districts across the state chose to administer PARCC in grades 3–8 in ELA and math between March and May 2015. Some districts will also give the optional PARCC tests in grades 9 and 11. Through the class of 2019, all students in grade 10 will continue to take the MCAS in order to earn a Competency Determination. Students in grades 5, 8, and high school will continue to take MCAS in science and technology/engineering classes. In fall 2015, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education will decide whether to adopt the PARCC assessments. If PARCC is adopted, the Board will make a further determination about the graduation requirement for the class of 2020 and beyond.

During this transition, it is important to advocate for key criteria that will ensure that the Massachusetts assessment system effectively measures how our students are doing on the path to college and careers. Many education and business leaders are enthusiastic about the PARCC assessments because they include so many of the components of a high-quality assessment system. As advocates, we need to ensure that our state tests accurately measure college and career readiness and have these characteristics to benefit students.

A High-Quality Assessment System

- Is developed with input from teachers, scholars, and assessment experts.
- Is field tested and reviewed before full implementation.
- Assesses a wide range of real-world skills using a variety of question formats.
- Provides detailed and timely feedback that acts as an academic checkup.
- Sends an early warning signal to teachers if students are not on track so that interventions can be put in place.
- Is comparable across states.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the difference between standards and curriculum?

- Standards are a set of guidelines for what students are expected to know and be able to do at specific points in their education. Standards provide the foundation for key components of the education system, including curricula, instructional materials, teacher training, and assessments.
- A curriculum is the course of study covering the standards. It is set by local school districts and includes the lesson plans, district and classroom assessments, programs, and textbooks that teachers use to teach and assess the content and skills outlined in the standards.

2. If students are learning with different curricula, how can they take the same test?

- Although teachers use different materials and curricula, students still learn the same skills outlined in the

The Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics:

- Focus on reading and writing across the curriculum.
- Emphasize speaking, listening, and vocabulary development.
- Develop student understanding of math and skill in computation.
- Set the expectation that students will use computers and other digital tools for research, communication, and problem solving.

Next-generation assessments:

- Give us an honest, objective report of how our students are doing.
- Ensure that all students are held to the same expectations.
- Evaluate student progress.
- Identify where a student needs extra support or experiences challenges so teachers and parents are able to personalize instruction to meet individual student needs.

PARCC:

- A group of states working together to develop high-quality, computer-based assessments that measure college and career readiness in both math and English language arts.

standards. Teachers can be creative in their instruction, designing lessons to best reach their students and establishing a classroom where all students can achieve.

3. Will the PARCC tests replace the MCAS tests?

- In fall 2015, the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education will decide if the PARCC tests will replace the MCAS in ELA and math. If the PARCC assessments are not adopted, the MCAS will continue to be used.

4. How will test scores impact schools and districts?

- Test results will be used as one measure for school and district accountability. Just as tests are used as academic checkups for individual students, they are used as checkups for schools. Districts need to identify low-performing schools so that interventions can be put in place to ensure that all students across Massachusetts will receive a high-quality education.

5. How will test scores have an impact on teachers?

- Teachers routinely analyze results from state assessments to improve instruction for students. Student growth on the state assessments is one measure used in teacher evaluations.

6. How will test scores affect students?

- Currently in Massachusetts public schools, students are required by law to pass statewide assessments to graduate from high school. If the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adopts the PARCC assessments, it will revise the graduation requirements to include the PARCC tests. Through the class of 2019, students will be required to meet minimum scores on the grade 10 MCAS in ELA and math as well as a high school science assessment in order to graduate.

7. What kind of professional development did teachers receive in preparation for the standards and the assessments?

- Professional development has been provided at the state, district, and school level since

teachers had access to the standards in early 2011. Massachusetts' Race to the Top grant enabled teachers to develop and implement more than 150 aligned curriculum units.

Teachers and administrators have also attended sessions to review and discuss the PARCC practice tests, guidelines for accommodations, accessibility, and test administration.

8. What kind of data will be collected? Will it be released?

- Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Massachusetts is required to collect data on school and district performance. Aggregate data collected includes student test scores and information such as attendance, support services, and academic growth. *The state will not release any personally identifiable student information.* Only individuals, who are responsible for educational planning—such as curriculum coordinators, teachers, and parents—are permitted to see student-specific information.
- Federal law protects the privacy of student information and education records through the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The only information that will be publicly available will contain aggregate data for schools, districts, and subgroups.

9. Do students need to be computer literate?

- Students need to be computer literate. Paper and pencil versions will be available for schools that cannot meet the technology requirements.
- While it may take some time to ensure that every school has the necessary hardware and meets the technology requirements, this is a smart investment. Technology is not going away. Ensuring that all students, regardless of geography or household income, have equal access to technology is critical to preparing students for a 21st century competitive workforce.

10. Where can I go for more information?

- www.parcconline.org
- www.doe.mass.edu/parcc/
- www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/
- www.BusinessForCore.org
- Email: parcc@doe.mass.edu