

# *MCAS: An Introduction for Lowell High School Parents & Students*



The Information in this introductory booklet contains the DESE requirements as of Sept. 2015.

The DESE is the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and was formerly known as the DOE or the Department of Education.

These notes are subject to being changed at any time. When you're in doubt, please check the DESE website for any updates: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/>

**Lowell High School**

Instructional Specialist Department  
September 2015

**Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System Overview**

The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) is designed to meet the requirements of the Education Reform Law of 1993. This law specifies that the testing program must:

- test all public school students in Massachusetts, including students with disabilities and English Language Learner students;
- measure performance based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework learning standards;
- report on the performance of individual students, schools, and districts.

As required by the Education Reform Law, students must pass the grade 10 tests in English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics and one of the four high school Science and Technology Engineering tests as one condition of eligibility for a high school diploma (in addition to fulfilling the requirements of Lowell High School).

**What subjects does MCAS test?**

- English Language Arts
- Mathematics
- Science and Technology/Engineering

**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	Scaled Score Point Range
Advanced	260–280
Proficient	240–258
Needs Improvement	220–238
Failing	200–218



**These Are the Facts You Need To Know About MCAS**

The State of Massachusetts' Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has made the decision that in order to receive a high school diploma, you must:

- Take and pass the MCAS **English language arts** test
  - Sophomore year (March)
- Take and pass the MCAS **Mathematics** test
  - Sophomore year (May)
- Take and pass the MCAS **Science** Test (Biology, Chemistry, Physics, or Technology)
  - Freshman or Sophomore year (June)

**What types of questions are used on MCAS tests?**

The following four types of questions are used on MCAS tests:

1. **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.
2. **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.
3. **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.
4. **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.
5. **Writing prompts** are included only on ELA Composition tests and require students to respond by creating a written composition.

**How will my written answers be graded?**

- Content will be graded on full topic/idea development, logical organization, strong details, and appropriate use of language.
- Standard English conventions, including control of sentence structure, grammar, usage, spelling, and punctuation will be graded.

***“You must pay attention in class and ask questions because your teachers will be giving you the same types of questions that the MCAS tests have in all of your classes.”***

***“To earn a Lowell High School diploma, you need to get lots of good report cards and you have to meet “Competency Determination” on all of the MCAS tests.”***

**What is Competency Determination (CD)?**

If you achieve a Scaled Score of 240 or higher on the MCAS ELA and Math tests, and a 220 on any of the four MCAS Science tests, you will be deemed to have achieved competency in all three of those subject areas.

English Language Arts (ELA)	Mathematics	Science and Technology/Engineering
Earn a scaled score of 240 ( <i>Proficient</i> ) or higher on the grade 10 MCAS ELA test <b>-or-</b> Earn a scaled score of 220–238 ( <i>Needs Improvement</i> ) <b>-and-</b> fulfill Educational Proficiency Plan (EPP) requirements for ELA	Earn a scaled score of 240 ( <i>Proficient</i> ) or higher on the grade 10 MCAS Math test <b>-or-</b> Earn a scaled score of 220–238 ( <i>Needs Improvement</i> ) <b>-and-</b> fulfill Educational Proficiency Plan (EPP) requirements for Math	Earn a scaled score of 220 ( <i>Needs Improvement</i> ) or higher on one of the four MCAS high school STE tests.  There is no EPP for Science.



If you have achieved a Scaled Score from 220 to 238 points (*Needs Improvement*), it is considered “meeting competency” for science, so, you have met CD in science.

Remember, this only applies to the science tests.

If you have achieved a Scaled Score from 240 to 258 points, (*Proficient*) you have met CD!



If you have achieved a Scaled Score from 260 to 280 points, (*Advanced*) you have met CD!

***“If you score “Advanced” in one test, and at least “Proficient” in the other tests, you may be eligible for state college scholarships!”***

**What happens if you fail a test?**

You immediately speak with your counselor, find out what you need to do, and then get tutored so that you can pass the retest. There is lots of help available!



If you have achieved a Scaled Score from 200 to 218 points (Failing), you have failed and you will be automatically rescheduled for a retest. Don't panic!

If you failed either ELA or Math, you will need an Educational Proficiency Plan (EPP).

If you have achieved a Scaled Score from 220 to 238 points, (Needs Improvement), and the test was either ELA or Math, you will need an Educational Proficiency Plan (EPP)



**When can I take the test again?**

- **English Language Arts**
  - Retests are offered every year in November and March.
  - You may take the test as many times as necessary to pass.
- **Mathematics**
  - Retests are offered every year in November and March.
  - You may take the test as many times as necessary to pass.
- **Science** (Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Technology)
  - If you do not pass the science test during your freshman year, you will be scheduled to take another science test in June of your sophomore year.
  - If you do not pass the science test in your sophomore year, you will be rescheduled for a retest in February of your junior year.

***“If you're on an EPP and you score 240 points on your ELA or Math retests, you will be taken off your EPP. 240 points is the highest score you can get on any MCAS retest.”***

***“If you're on an EPP, and unless you score 240 points in ELA or Math, you must continue to be on your EPP. You will continue to meet with your guidance counselor and continue to work on your Educational Proficiency Plan.”***

**What exactly is an EPP?**

An Educational Proficiency Plan (EPP) is a plan that is developed by you and your guidance counselor for the subject area(s) in which you did not score at least 240.

It includes...

- A review of your academic strengths and weaknesses based on MCAS and other assessment results, coursework, grades and teacher input.
- A list of the courses you will be required to take and successfully complete in grades 11 and 12 in the appropriate content area(s).
- A description of the assessments that Lowell High School will administer to you each year to determine whether you are making progress towards proficiency.

**Is it possible for me to “fail” my EPP?**

Yes, you can fail by not completing required courses in the content area (ELA or Math) and/or not participating in the annual assessment that have been identified in your EPP.

***“Failure to fulfill the terms of your EPP can result in your not getting a diploma.”***

**Write your own success story!**

You are in charge of which road you will follow, so only you can make the right choices.

**What do I need to do to get my Lowell High School diploma?**

- Be in school every day
- Pay attention and do your homework
- Work for good grades in your classes
- Take advantage of the extra help and tutoring that is always available here at Lowell High, and Middlesex Community College
- Be in school promptly on MCAS and all test days
- Work with your guidance counselor to create an EPP if you need one
- Ask your teachers for help if you need it. They will always help you!

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***“Getting your Lowell High School diploma is your choice!”***

***“Remember that your strong effort – above all else – will help you succeed in school and life!”***

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