

CAMBRIDGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

159 THORNDIKE STREET CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02141



March 24, 2017

Dear CPS Families & Guardians,

As you may know, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) has completed an extensive process to improve how it measures student progress in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math. This assessment, referred to as “MCAS 2.0,” places greater emphasis on the critical thinking skills students need to be successful in the 21st Century.

How are schools preparing for MCAS 2.0?

MCAS 2.0 is a measure of how students are doing overall, and while schools are not engaging in extensive “test prep,” staff have worked thoughtfully to appropriately prepare students for the style and format of the test. ESE recently released practice tests for the paper-based and computer-based versions of the assessments. Teachers are familiarizing themselves with these materials to ensure that students will be comfortable with the way questions are asked on the test. You can find these tests at: <http://mcas.pearsonsupport.com/tutorial/>.

How will students be taking MCAS 2.0?

This spring, students in grades 4 and 8 across the state are required to take MCAS on the computer, with the goal of all grades transitioning to computer-based testing by 2019. Some schools have chosen to assess by computer in additional grades. Please contact your school directly if you’d like to know whether additional grades will be using computers to take the test at your school.

We feel confident that our students are prepared to use computers for this test. All schools in Cambridge use technology regularly in their classrooms, and schools are doing “practice runs” to familiarize students and teachers with technical details such as logging in, navigating the test interface, and completing example questions. We are hopeful that this will ensure a smooth transition to computer-based assessment.

Will the Science MCAS change this year?

No. Science will continue to be tested on paper, and continue to be tested only in grades 5 and 8.

Is my child required to participate in MCAS 2.0?

Yes. Schools are required to administer the test and all students are required to participate. MCAS is considered a mandatory part of the curriculum, designed to measure whether students have mastered the material expected at their grade level.

Low participation in MCAS can cause school districts to receive a low rating from the State, and this can affect State and Federal funding. The reason for this is that the law protects the Civil Rights of all students to learn, and statewide assessments are the way that student learning is measured. Making participation mandatory protects vulnerable students by preventing schools from excluding them from the test in order to get better overall scores. The law states that schools must be accountable—held responsible—for the learning of all students. Because it is so important, our express policy is that testing is mandatory for all students. By state law, students must be able to pass the 10th Grade MCAS in order to graduate from high school.



When will students be taking MCAS 2.0?

The state provides testing windows that begin in early April and run through May. Each school selects test dates within these windows. All tests are untimed.

	English Language Arts	Math
Grades 3, 4, 5	3 sessions approximately 45-75 minutes per day	2 sessions approximately 65-70 minutes per day
Grades 6, 7, 8	2 sessions approximately 100-110 minutes per day	2 sessions approximately 65-70 minutes per day

Science for grades 5 and 8 is also tested on two separate days with sessions that run about 45 minutes each. If your school has yet to inform you of their selected dates, they will communicate this information in the next few weeks.

What about students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs)?

ESE has set extensive testing guidelines for English Language Learners and for students with disabilities who may be on an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a 504 Plan. District and school staff know these guidelines and will make sure that all needed accommodations are followed so that we can accurately assess all students based on their skills and learning.

How will MCAS scores impact my student and my school?

MCAS scores have no impact on students in grades 3-8. However, scores do impact schools in terms of the statewide accountability system. This year, participation rates are expected to be even more significantly factored into the accountability framework than in the past. School staff actively work to minimize any stress or anxiety students may feel. If your child expresses any anxiety about the test, we invite you to consider explaining that testing is a measure of schools—not a measure of students. There is no reason for students to worry about how they do on this test. The best advice is for students to get plenty of rest and try their best.

When will I find out how my student or school performs on MCAS 2.0?

Scores are expected to be released by ESE and sent to families and guardians in early fall 2017.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

We encourage you to contact your school's principal with any questions or concerns you may have about MCAS 2.0.

We know how much incredible work goes into teaching and learning every day in CPS and we are confident that our students are prepared to successfully demonstrate what they know—on this assessment as well as in their ongoing work at school. Thank you for being continued partners with us in this important work.

Sincerely,



Dr. Kenneth Salim, Superintendent
Cambridge Public Schools