



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

January 27, 2022

The Honorable Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner of Education
Massachusetts Department of Elementary
and Secondary Education
75 Pleasant Street
Malden, MA 02148-4906

Dear Commissioner Riley:

I am writing in response to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (Massachusetts DESE's) request on November 29, 2021, for a one-year extension of the State's waiver of section 1111(b)(2)(D)(i)(I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) which stipulates that a State may not assess using an alternate assessment aligned with alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS) more than 1.0 percent of the total number of students in the State who are assessed in the subjects of reading/language arts (R/LA), mathematics, and science. Massachusetts DESE's request is for the 2020-2021 school year in the subjects of R/LA and mathematics.

After reviewing Massachusetts DESE's waiver request, I am granting, pursuant to my authority under section 8401(b) of the ESEA, for school year 2021-2022, a one-year extension of the State's waiver of section 1111(b)(2)(D)(i)(I) of the ESEA so that the State may assess with an AA-AAAS more than 1.0 percent of the total number of students in the State who are assessed in R/LA and mathematics.

As part of this waiver, Massachusetts DESE assured that it:

- Will continue to meet all other requirements of section 1111 of the ESEA and implement regulations with respect to all State-determined academic standards and assessments, including reporting student achievement and school performance, disaggregated by subgroups, to parents and the public.
- Had assessed in the 2018-2019 at least 95 percent of all students and students with disabilities who are enrolled in grades for which an assessment is required. I note that while the State did not assess at least 95 percent of all students and students with disabilities in 2020-2021 due to disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it assessed students with disabilities at about the same rate as all students in 2020-2021. Therefore, consistent with information provided in the guidance to States on October 29, 2021,¹ I am also approving a one-year waiver of the requirement in 34 CFR § 200.6(c)(4)(ii)(B) that a State must have assessed at least 95 percent of students in the prior year.

¹ See: <https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/10/Memo-to-States-re-One-Percent-Waiver-Requirements-2021-2022.pdf>.

- Will require that a local educational agency (LEA) submit information justifying the need of the LEA to assess more than 1.0 percent of its assessed students in any such subject with an AA-AAAS.
- Will provide appropriate oversight of an LEA that is required to submit such information to the State.
- Will verify that each LEA that is required to submit such information to the State is following all State guidelines in 34 CFR § 200.6(d) – excluding (d)(6) and will address any subgroup disproportionality in the percentage of students taking an AA-AAAS.
- Will implement, consistent with the plan submitted in Massachusetts DESE’s waiver request, system improvements and will monitor future administrations of the AA-AAAS to avoid exceeding the 1.0 percent cap.

I want to remind you of the requirement in 34 CFR § 200.6(c)(3)(iv) that the State must make publicly available the information submitted by an LEA justifying the need of the LEA to assess more than 1.0 percent of its students on the AA-AAAS, provided that such information does not reveal personally identifiable information about an individual student. I also encourage you to make available your State’s plan and timeline and your progress to date in reducing the percentage of students taking the AA-AAAS. I would also like to remind you that this waiver does not alleviate any of the State’s obligations in meeting all of the requirements found in section 612(a)(16) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) which address assessment participation, assessment accommodations, alternate assessments, and reporting for children with disabilities.

I appreciate the work you have undertaken to reduce the percentage of students taking an AA-AAAS in the 2020-2021 school year when compared to the 2018-2019 school year. I am pleased to see the positive results from your workplan and I want to thank you for your continued efforts in achieving this. We hope this will be the last year that Massachusetts DESE believes it needs this waiver.

I appreciate the work you are doing to improve your schools and provide a high-quality education for your students. If you have any questions, please contact my staff at ESEA.Assessment@ed.gov.

Sincerely,

/s/

Ian Rosenblum
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Programs
Delegated the Authority to Perform the
Functions and Duties of the Assistant Secretary

cc: Michol Stapel, Associate Commissioner, Student Assessment



Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

75 Pleasant Street, Malden, Massachusetts 02148-4906

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Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner

November 29, 2021

Office of School Support and Accountability
Assessment Team
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

SUBJECT: Massachusetts “One Percent” ESSA Waiver Extension Request, submitted by email to ESEA.Assessment@ed.gov

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to request that the waiver referenced above, which was previously received by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) in December 2017, February 2019, January 2020, and September 2020, be extended for the 2021–2022 school year. This waiver pertains to states exceeding the one percent threshold for students who will take alternate assessments aligned with alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS), as described in section 1111(b)(2)(D)(i)(I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, and amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). In Massachusetts, the AA-AAAS is the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System—Alternate Assessment (MCAS-Alt).

I anticipate that Massachusetts will exceed the one-percent threshold in the 2021–2022 school year, although we have made steady and significant annual progress in lowering the number of students with disabilities who participate in alternate assessments. Approximately 1.3 percent of all students who took the general MCAS assessments in 2021 participated in the MCAS-Alt in ELA and mathematics in 2021. This is a 0.1 percentage point reduction from 2019, the most recent year in which MCAS assessments were administered and reported. Of students who took the general MCAS assessment in science and technology/engineering, 1.0 percent were assessed on the MCAS-Alt. On average, the number of students taking an alternate assessment in 2021 decreased by more than 900 since 2019.

I anticipate that we will continue to lower the percentage of students taking the statewide alternate assessment in the coming year. Department staff will continue to provide technical assistance, oversight, and training activities to meet the need to appropriately assess students with disabilities and will maintain frequent communication with districts, especially those that assess more than one percent of their students on the alternate assessment.

Resources on this topic are available on the [Department’s website](#), including:

- **guidance** for IEP teams and 504 plan coordinators
 - **criteria** for decision-making on alternate assessment participation
 - a **definition** of students who should be considered for alternate assessments

- a presentation to be used for the **annual training** of IEP teams and 504 plan coordinators on this topic
- publicly available data on MCAS-Alt **participation rates** (2017–2021) for each district and the state
- a sample **parent notification letter** translated into five major languages stating that 1) their child’s achievement will be measured using an alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards; 2) participation in an alternate assessment may delay or affect the child’s ability to complete the state’s requirements for a high school diploma; and 3) the decision to have their child take an alternate assessment will be revisited annually by their child’s IEP team.

On November 5, 2021, a **Notice of Intent** to apply for a waiver was posted to the Department’s web page and included in my Weekly Update (see the attachment to this letter), with an invitation for public comment through December 1. In addition, **letters** will be sent later this fall to 96 districts that assessed more than 1.0 percent of tested students on the MCAS-Alt with a request to complete a **statement of assurances** that the district will follow the Department’s guidance in continuing to reduce the number of students participating in the MCAS-Alt. I anticipate receiving completed statements of assurance from districts in mid-January 2022.

I am requesting a waiver extension of 34 CFR 200.6(c)(4) of the regulations of ESSA for the **MCAS-Alt participation rates in the subjects of English language arts and mathematics**. I am submitting as an attachment the additional required components of this waiver extension request, pursuant to section 8401 under Part D of ESSA, as amended through P.L. 114–95.

I am also requesting a waiver of 34 CFR 200.6(c)(4)(ii)(B), the **95 percent assessment participation requirement**, for all students and for students with disabilities due to the lingering effects of the pandemic and the option taken by many parents last spring to have their child continue to receive remote instruction, even after schools officially reopened. These factors made it difficult for many students, particularly those with complex and significant disabilities, to participate in the assessments. Massachusetts typically well exceeds 95 percent participation, and I have provided assessment participation data from spring 2018 and 2019, as well as 2021, in the attachment to this letter.

I appreciate this opportunity to inform the U.S. Department of Education of our accomplishments and activities and look forward to your consideration of our request to waive these ESSA provisions. Please contact Daniel Wiener, Administrator of Inclusive Assessment, at daniel.j.wiener@mass.gov with any additional questions you may have. Thank you for your attention to this information.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey C. Riley
 Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

Attachment:

Copies: Michol Stapel, Associate Commissioner for Student Assessment
 Rob Curtin, Chief Officer for Data, Assessment, and Accountability
 Russell Johnston, Deputy Commissioner, State Director of Special Education

ATTACHMENT

Massachusetts “One Percent” ESSA Waiver Extension Request

1. Waiver request submitted at least 90 days before start of testing window [§200.6(c)(4)(i)]

The MCAS-Alt “test window” informally begins on the first day of school, although teachers will begin the alternate assessment process at different points throughout the school year. The window will end with submission of the assessments on April 1, 2022. This would have necessitated submitting our request last June, when schools had barely reopened, but we opted instead to await reporting of the 2021 assessment results and submitting the waiver extension request in fall 2021 together with our participation data, as we did last year. We are submitting this waiver extension request in response to the USED memo to states dated October 29, 2021, that provided “Information Regarding the Requirements to Request a [One Percent] Waiver for the 2021–2022 School Year” outlining the terms and criteria for submitting waiver and waiver extension requests.

2. Assessment participation by all students, students with disabilities, and subgroups [§200.6(c)(4)(ii)]

Overall assessment participation data from spring 2021 is provided below indicating that Massachusetts narrowly missed assessing 95 percent of all students and students with disabilities in 2021. We respectfully request a **waiver** of 34 CFR 200.6(c)(4)(ii)(B), the **95 percent participation requirement** based on 2021 assessment participation due to extended absences caused by pandemic-related school closing, particularly by students with and without disabilities who remained in remote instruction in relatively high numbers throughout the 2020–2021 school year, even after schools had formally reopened in April–May 2021.

In spring 2018 and 2019, Massachusetts assessed well over 95 percent of all students and students with disabilities, as shown in the 2018 and 2019 participation data on the following page and expects to return that high level of participation in spring 2022.

2021 Overall Assessment Participation for All Students and Students with Disabilities

Content Area	Students Eligible for Assessment (Enrolled)	Students Assessed (Standard Test + MCAS-Alt)	Overall Percentage of Students Assessed	Students with Disabilities Eligible for Assessment (Enrolled)	Students with Disabilities Assessed (Standard test + MCAS-Alt)	Overall Percentage of Students with Disabilities Assessed
English Language Arts	488,109	462,141	94.7%	99,603	91,925	92.3%
Mathematics	488,133	461,450	94.5%	99,613	91,707	92.1%
Science and Technology/ Engineering	174,807	167,193	95.6%	34,920	32,574	93.3%

2018 Overall Assessment Participation for All Students and Students with Disabilities

Content Area	Students Eligible for Assessment (Enrolled)	Students Assessed (Standard Test + MCAS-Alt)	Overall Percentage of Students Assessed	Students with Disabilities Eligible for Assessment (Enrolled)	Students with Disabilities Assessed (Standard test + MCAS-Alt)	Overall Percentage of Students with Disabilities Assessed
ELA	507,557	496,888	98%	97,905	95,833	98%
Mathematics	507,378	496,732	98%	97,861	95,742	98%
Science and Technology/ Engineering	219,197	215,336	98%	41,156	39,795	97%

2019 Overall Assessment Participation for All Students and Students with Disabilities

Content Area	Students Eligible for Assessment (Enrolled)	Students Assessed (Standard test + MCAS-Alt)	Overall Percent of Students Assessed	Students with Disabilities Eligible for Assessment (Enrolled)	Students with Disabilities Assessed (Standard test + MCAS-Alt)	Overall Percent of Students with Disabilities Assessed
ELA	505,036	497,500	98.5%	99,610	97,620	98%
Mathematics	504,825	501,017	99%	99,536	97,734	98%
Science and Technology/ Engineering	219,703	218,436	99%	41,824	41,214	98.5%

Massachusetts subgroup participation in 2021 standard and alternate assessments in each subject is shown on the following pages.

2021 Subgroup Participation in Standard and Alternate Assessments in Each Subject

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Subgroup	Number of Students Who Took Standard Assessments	Number of Students who took MCAS-Alt	Percentage of Students Who Took MCAS-Alt
All students	455,204	5,963	1.3%
Male	232,750	4,082	1.7%
Female	222,192	1,881	0.8%
English Learners	40,322	985	2.3%
African American	41,974	923	2.1%
Hispanic/Latino	99,812	1,762	1.7%
Asian	33,350	374	1.1%
White	259,806	2,643	1.0%
Economically Disadvantaged	175,331	3,910	2.2%
Students with Disabilities	85,929	5,963	6.5%

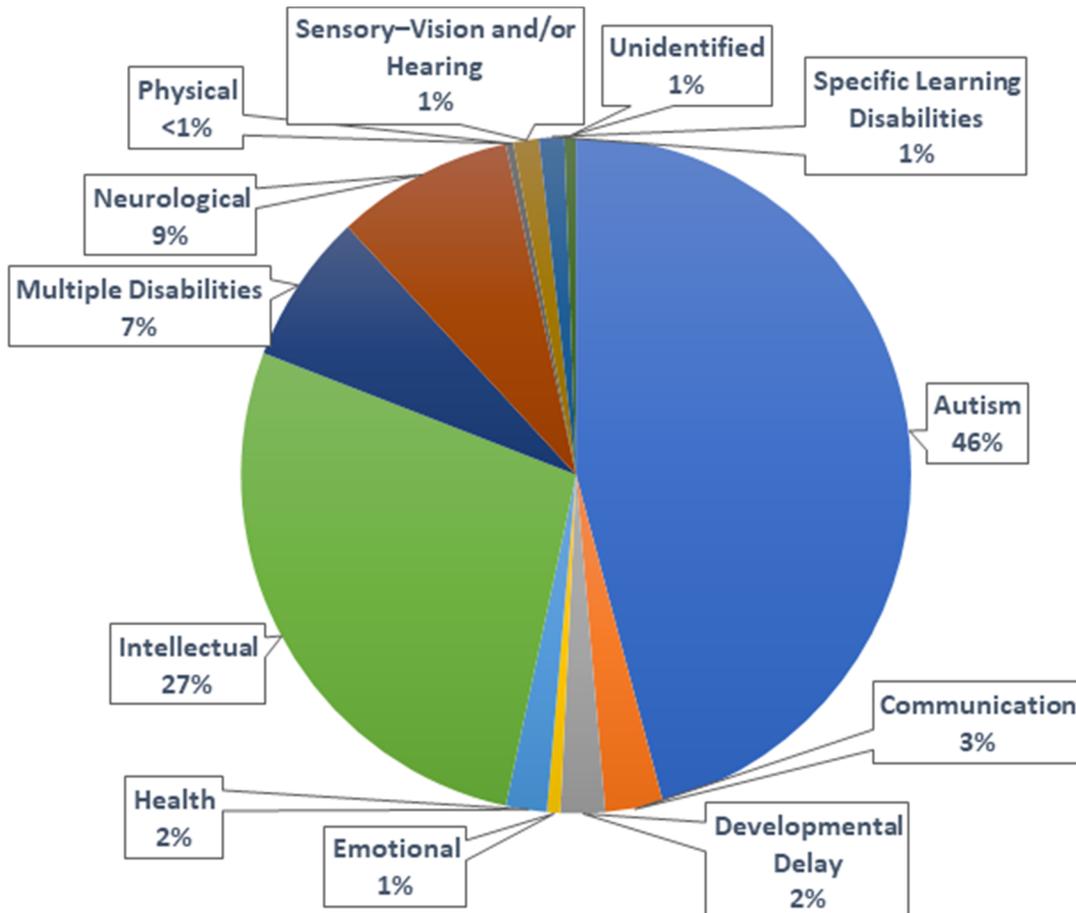
MATHEMATICS

Subgroup	Number of Students Who Took Standard Assessments	Number of Students Who Took MCAS-Alt	Percentage of Students Who Took MCAS-Alt
All students	455,469	5,981	1.3%
Male	233,025	4,064	1.7%
Female	222,181	1,917	0.9%
English Learners	41,205	977	2.3%
African American	42,083	927	2.2%
Hispanic/Latino	100,187	1,765	1.7%
Asian	33,498	357	1.1%
White	259,461	2,665	1.0%
Economically Disadvantaged	175,626	3,913	2.2%
Students with Disabilities	85,726	5,981	6.5%

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY/ENGINEERING

Subgroup	Number of Students Who Took Standard Assessments	Number of Students Who Took MCAS-Alt	Percentage of Students Who Took MCAS-Alt
All students	165,539	1,654	1.0%
Male	84,896	1,129	1.3%
Female	80,510	525	0.6%
English Learners	11,666	270	2.3%
African American	14,461	246	1.7%
Hispanic/Latino	33,578	480	1.4%
Asian	11,115	104	0.9%
White	99,450	760	0.8%
Economically Disadvantaged	59,047	1,074	1.8%
Students with Disabilities	30,920	1,654	5.1%

2021 MCAS-Alt Participation by Nature of Primary Disability



NOTE: Percentage may not total 100% due to rounding.

2021 MCAS-Alt Participants by Disability Category

Primary Disability ^b	A: <u>Number of All Assessed Participants in Disability Category^a</u>	B: <u>Number of MCAS-Alt Participants in Disability Category</u>	C: <u>Percentage of All Assessed Participants in Disability Category Who Took MCAS- Alt (B/A)</u>	D: <u>Percentage of MCAS-Alt Participants in Disability Category (B/6,186)</u>
Autism	11,756	2,843	24.2%	46.0%
Communication	11,989	169	1.4%	2.7%
Developmental Delay	2,222	133	6.0%	2.2%
Emotional	10,612	37	0.3%	0.6%
Health	18,536	121	0.7%	2.0%
Intellectual	4,033	1,703	42.2%	27.5%
Multiple Disabilities	917	449	49.0%	7.3%
Neurological	6,492	530	8.2%	8.6%
Physical	388	23	5.9%	0.4%
Sensory/Deaf and Blind	87	17	19.5%	0.3%
Sensory/Hard of Hearing or Deaf	602	37	6.1%	0.6%
Sensory/Vision Impairment or Blind	306	23	7.5%	0.4%
Specific Learning Disabilities	32,862	66	0.2%	1.1%
Unidentified Disability	217	35	16.1%	0.6%
Total	101,019	6,186	6.1%	100.0%

^a The number of all assessed participants includes all students who took MCAS-Alt for accountability purposes in at least one subject.

^b Primary disability data were reported by districts to the Department's Student Information Management System (SIMS) in March and June 2021.

3. Substantial progress on the state’s plan and timeline to reduce the number of students taking the AA-AAAS [(§200.6(c)(4)(v))]

DESE defines “substantial progress” as a reduction of at least 0.1 percent of students (or about 500 students) taking the AA-AAAS from the previous school year.

The overall number and percentage of students who participated in the **2021 MCAS-Alt** in each subject is shown below. It should be noted that the number of students taking *general* assessments also decreased significantly from about 490,000 in 2019 to just over 455,000 in 2021.

- **English Language Arts (ELA):** 5,963/455,204 = **1.3 percent**
 - a decrease of 924 students since 2019
- **Mathematics:** 5,981/455,469 = **1.3 percent**
 - a decrease of 1,002 students since 2019
- **Science and Technology/Engineering (STE):** 1,654/165,539 = **1.0 percent**
 - a decrease of 1,200 students since 2019

Based on the 2021 MCAS-Alt participation data shown on the previous page, we are requesting a

waiver extension of 34 CFR 200.6(c)(4) of the regulations of ESSA from the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education regarding MCAS-Alt participation in the subjects of **English language arts and mathematics**.

Data Highlights: MCAS-Alt Participation in the 2020–2021 School Year:

- In 2021, between 900–1,200 fewer students took the MCAS-Alt than in 2019, depending on the content area.
- The number of districts that alternately assessed more than 1.0 percent of students **decreased** from 115 districts in 2019 to 96 districts in 2021 (out of a total of 226 districts with 500 or more tested students). Using “500 or more tested students” as a criterion ensures that an increase or decrease in the number of students taking the MCAS-Alt in smaller districts will not skew the district percentage disproportionately.
- The number of districts with 500 or more tested students that alternately assessed higher than 1.3 percent (the state average) **decreased** from 78 in 2019 to 61 in 2021.

- 4 districts exceeded 3.0 percent of students taking the MCAS-Alt in 2019; only 2 districts exceeded 3.0 percent in 2021.
- The **three largest districts** alternately assessed students at the following rates:
 - Boston, 2.6 percent (a decrease from 2.8 percent in 2019);
 - Springfield, 3.1 percent (a decrease from 3.2 percent in 2019); and
 - Worcester, 2.1 percent in both 2019 and 2021.

These modest changes in the largest districts since 2019 suggest a need for continued intervention by the Department in these and other targeted urban districts.

- Three other large districts **decreased** their percentages significantly of students taking the MCAS-Alt between 2019 and 2021:
 - Framingham: -0.5 percent
 - Randolph: -1.2 percent
 - Lynn: -0.7 percent
- MCAS-Alt participation rates decreased in spring 2021 in 15 of the 22 districts that received intensive technical assistance from the Department since 2019 (See “Technical assistance provided by DESE” on page 10).
- A **memo from the Commissioner and statement of assurances** will be sent on December 1 to 96 districts that exceeded 1.0 percent of tested students taking the MCAS-Alt in 2021. (See the Exhibits section for a draft of this communication.)

4. Assurances that the state has verified that each LEA (A) followed the state’s participation guidelines; and (B) will address any disproportionality in the students taking the AA-AAAS [§200.6(c)(4)(iii)]

A) The state has reviewed the 2021 MCAS-Alt participation rates in 400 Massachusetts districts and identified those in need of additional assistance and oversight. We have made clear to *all* districts that, if they have exceeded the one-percent threshold, they should review and use the resources provided by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/essa/) to seek ways to lower their AA-AAAS participation rates. For

the 2021–2022 school year, Massachusetts is focusing on districts that had tested at least 500 students and assessed above 1.0 percent of students on the 2021 MCAS-Alt. In December 2021, the Department will send a memo from the Commissioner and a statement of assurances to 96 such districts requesting that they provide a justification if they expect to exceed one percent of their assessed students taking the MCAS-Alt in the 2021–2022 school year.

- B) The statement of assurances also focuses on whether the district is aware of any **disproportionate designation** of students in the following subgroups taking the MCAS-Alt and if so, what steps the district will take (or has already taken) to reduce the disproportionate representation of:
- English learners, who are 1.6 times more likely statewide to take the MCAS-Alt than non-ELs
 - African American students, who are 1.6 times more likely to take the MCAS-Alt than non-African American students
 - Hispanic/Latino students, who are about twice as likely to take the MCAS-Alt than non-Hispanic/Latino students
 - male students, who are about twice as likely to take the MCAS-Alt than female students
 - economically disadvantaged students, who are 2.5 times as likely to take the MCAS-Alt than students who are not economically disadvantaged

DESE will continue to closely monitor each district regarding 1) percentage of assessed students taking the MCAS-Alt; 2) progress and trends over two or more years in reducing the district’s overall MCAS-Alt percentage; and 3) whether the district has identified and is addressing any disproportionality in their student subgroup participation in the MCAS-Alt. See the Commissioner’s memo and statement of assurances on pp. 14–16.

5. A plan and timeline by which the state will (A) improve the implementation of its participation guidelines, including if necessary, revising its definition of “students with the most significant cognitive disabilities”; and (B) take steps to support and provide appropriate oversight to districts anticipated to exceed 1.0 percent [§200.6(c)(4)(iv)]

- (A) Since 2016, the state has clarified the profile and characteristics of a “student with the most significant cognitive disabilities;” described the general characteristics of such a student’s program of instruction; and the criteria and conditions that would make it appropriate for such a student to take an alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS). The Department has also included a component in its guidelines describing “criteria that should *not* be used as the sole determining factor in designating a student for an alternate assessment” (see www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/essa/DesignatingStudents.html).

In fall 2019, DESE updated its *Decision-Making Tool for MCAS Participation* (see page 12) for IEP teams based on feedback from IEP team chairpersons and administrators of special education. The tool has been used by IEP teams across the state to make appropriate assessment participation decisions for students with disabilities.

- (B) **Technical assistance provided by DESE:** In the 2017-2018, 2018-2019, and 2019-early 2020 school years (prior to the pandemic-related school closing), DESE provided intensive, in-person technical assistance to staff in 22 urban and large suburban districts whose MCAS-Alt participation was well above the state average (i.e., between 2.1 and 3.5 percent). During the

pandemic, that technical assistance was continued virtually, though less intensively. Several districts received this training in multiple school years. The districts that received intensive intervention included:

- Boston, Randolph, Lynn, Springfield, Brockton, Fitchburg, Chelsea, Framingham, Fall River, Holyoke, Haverhill, Pittsfield, Everett, Lowell, Lawrence, Chicopee, Worcester, Methuen, Saugus, Ware, and Wareham

As stated on page 8, MCAS-Alt participation rates decreased in 2021 in 15 of the 22 districts that received intensive Department technical assistance.

During the 2021–2022 school year, the Department has already undertaken, or will undertake, the following:

- conduct six statewide virtual training sessions for educators and administrators on the guidelines and criteria for participation in the MCAS-Alt (October 2021)
- disseminate information on participation guidelines and criteria through periodic digital newsletters and web posting (October 2021 – present)
- convene meetings at regular intervals (every six weeks) between the State Director of Special Education, the Student Assessment Office, and Special Education Planning and Policy Office on the topic of alternate assessments and the one-percent threshold (ongoing)
- focus resources and intensive intervention with at least ten districts with the highest rates of alternate assessment participation (i.e., 1.5 percent or higher)
- coordinate with other Department offices on the topic of disproportionality so that we will recognize this when it occurs (ongoing)
- continue to collaborate as a member of the One Percent Community of Practice (CoP), coordinated by the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) (ongoing)

6. Notice of intent to apply for a waiver and opportunity for public comment

On November 5, 2021, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education posted a *Notice of Intent to Apply and Opportunity for Comment Regarding a Waiver Extension of the Federal Requirement Related to the Percentage of Students Who Participate in Statewide Alternate Assessments* on the following web pages to solicit public comment:

- [Notice of Intent](#)
- [Commissioner’s Weekly Update](#) (11/8/21)
- [MCAS Headlines](#) (11/5/21)
- [MCAS-Alt Headlines](#) (11/5/21)
- [MCAS-Alt News](#) (11/9/21)
- [Student Assessment Services Update](#) (11/16/21)

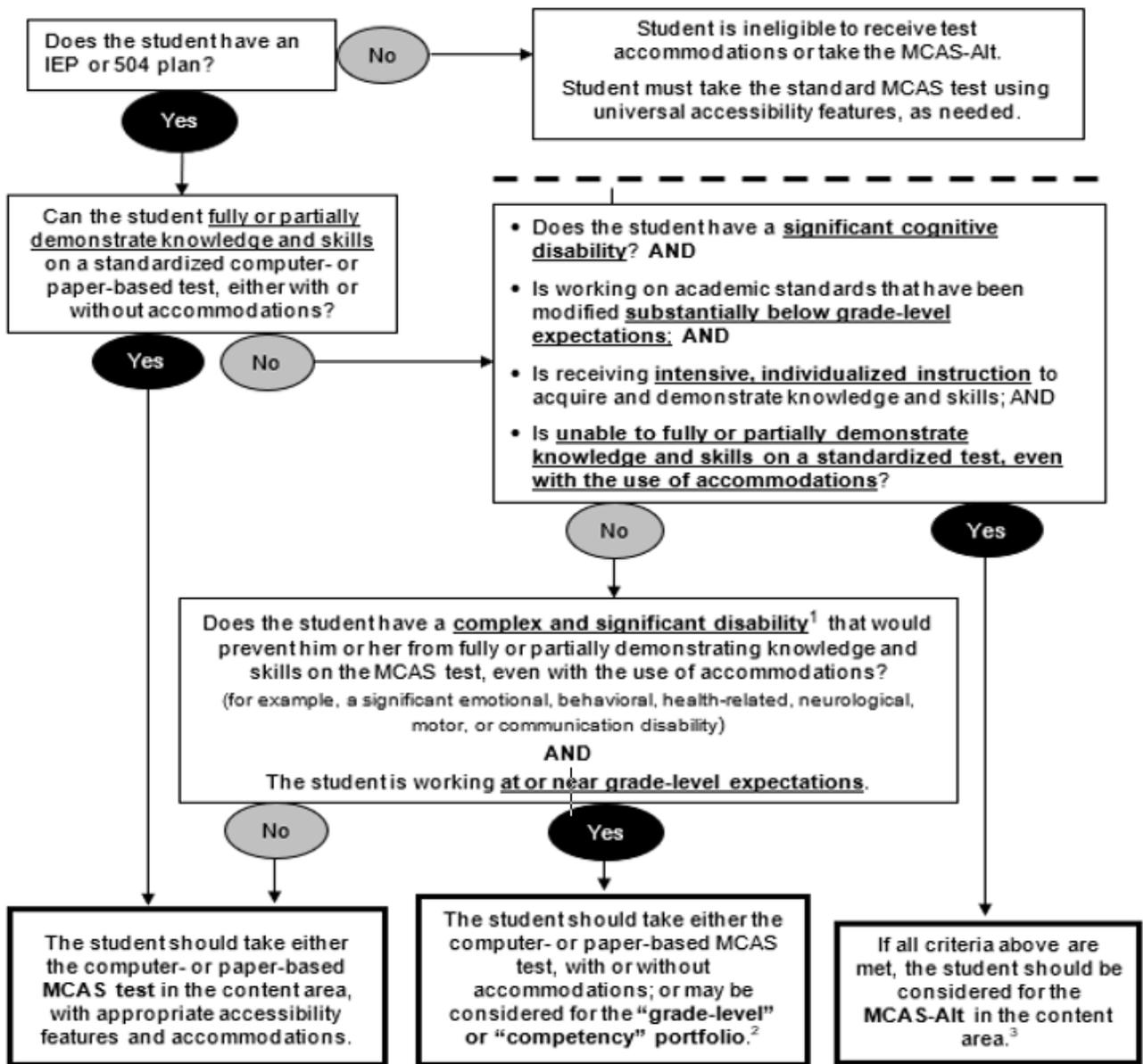
The posting of the Notice of Intent is documented on pages 18–29. Any additional comments will be forwarded to the US Department of Education – Office of Elementary and Secondary Education after December 1.

EXHIBITS

**IEP Team Decision-Making Tool
For MCAS Participation by Students with Disabilities**

Decision-Making Tool for MCAS Participation by Students with Disabilities

The decision chart shown below should be used by IEP teams and 504 plan coordinators to make annual decisions regarding appropriate student participation in MCAS in *each content area* being assessed: ELA, mathematics, and science and technology/engineering.



¹ See the [Educator’s Manual for the MCAS-Alt](#) for additional details on and examples of “complex and significant disabilities.”

² See the [MCAS Grade-level and Competency Portfolio Manual](#) for details on submission of “grade-level” and “competency” portfolios.

³ Students who take the MCAS-Alt in high school will not earn a Competency Determination in the assessed subject and therefore will not be eligible to earn a high school diploma.

Commissioner's Memo
and Statement of Assurances Request
to Districts That Exceeded One Percent Participation in the
Alternate Assessment (AA-AAAS)

(to be sent to 96 districts on or about December 1, 2021)



Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

75 Pleasant Street, Malden, Massachusetts 02148-4906

Telephone: (781) 338-3000
TTY: N.E.T. Relay 1-800-439-2370

MEMORANDUM

To: Superintendents in Selected Districts
Copy: Administrators of Special Education
From: Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner
Date: December 1, 2021
Subject: Number and Percentage of Students Taking the MCAS Alternate Assessment (MCAS-Alt) in Your District

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) restricts the number of students with disabilities who may participate in statewide **alternate assessments** each year (ESSA Section 1111(b)(2)(d)(i)) which may not exceed **one percent** of the number of students who take the MCAS test in each subject. This cap has been in effect since the 2016–2017 school year and applies to all states. Participation in alternate assessments is limited to students with *the most significant cognitive disabilities*.

A detailed memo clarifying the alternate assessment participation guidelines, plus additional relevant resources, including **participation data** for your district each year since 2017, is available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/essa/. As is apparent from this data, **your district has assessed more than one percent of the total number of assessed students on the MCAS-Alt**. I am making staff in your district aware of the need to closely examine which students are designated for those assessments and to gradually reduce that number. While the district may already have made progress in reducing the number being alternately assessed, the overall percentage is still above the one percent threshold.

I am requesting that you or your designee please respond to this memorandum with the information requested in the attached Statement of Assurances **no later than January 15, 2022**. The information you provide will be used to support the Massachusetts application for a waiver of the “one percent rule” from the U.S. Department of Education for the 2021–2022 school year.

It is important that IEP teams make defensible judgments for each student in determining whether he or she requires an alternate assessment in part because students who take alternate assessments based on *alternate achievement standards* will not earn a Competency Determination and will therefore not be eligible to receive a high school diploma.

This request is being sent by email rather than regular mail so that you (or your designee) can respond electronically and return your district’s response more efficiently. Please address your responses **by January 15** to Ms. Debra Hand, MCAS-Alt Coordinator, at debra.d.hand@mass.gov. If you have questions or wish to discuss this further, please contact Daniel Wiener or Debra Hand in Student Assessment at 781-338-3625 or by email at mcas@doe.mass.edu.

Thank you for your attention to this timely and important information.

Attachment.

ATTACHMENT: STATEMENT OF ASSURANCES

Please respond to the questions below if the district expects it will exceed one percent of the number of tested students taking the MCAS-Alt in the 2021–2022 school year. Your district’s MCAS-Alt participation data is available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/essa/participants-district.xlsx. (NOTE: Response boxes will expand to accommodate additional text.)

*Please complete the information on this form and return by email no later than **January 14, 2022** to: Debra Hand, Office of Student Assessment, at debra.d.hand@mass.gov*

District:	
Person completing this attachment:	Role:
The superintendent has reviewed and approved submission of your responses to the Department. ___ Yes ___ No	

1. Does the district provide IEP teams with **annual training** using the Department’s training materials and presentation (available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/essa/) on the ESSA requirement to limit the number of students taking the MCAS-Alt to one percent statewide? Provide evidence and documentation that this training has occurred and list the staff who have attended the most recent training.

2. Do IEP teams consistently follow the **state’s guidelines and criteria** available online at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/essa/ regarding which students should take the MCAS-Alt? Provide evidence and documentation below (e.g., review of guidelines; use of Decision-Making Tool by teams.)

3. Is **professional development** provided to general and special education staff to:
- a. identify appropriate accommodations for instruction and assessment;
 - b. implement universal design for learning principles;
 - c. apply effective co-teaching strategies; and/or
 - d. develop and use strategies to include students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in the general academic curriculum?

If so, provide evidence and documentation of having conducted this training over the past two years and list staff who attended.

4. Does the district provide ample opportunities for **interaction and collaboration** among general and special educators to meet the need to adapt the academic curriculum for students with significant cognitive disabilities? If so, provide evidence and documentation below.

5. Are there **unique circumstances in the district** (e.g., specialized schools or programs) that might draw large numbers of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities to live in the district and which

might result in an excess of one percent of students taking the MCAS-Alt? If so, provide a description of those unique circumstances.

6. Describe the steps the district will take in the coming year to **reduce the number of students taking alternate assessments**.

7. Is the district aware of any **disproportionate representation** of students in the following subgroups taking alternate assessments? If so, what steps will the district take in the coming year (or the steps already taken) to reduce the impact of any disproportionate representation of students in the following subgroups among those taking the MCAS-Alt?
- a. English learners, who are 1.6 times more likely statewide to take the MCAS-Alt than non-ELs;
 - b. African American students, who are 1.6 times more likely to take the MCAS-Alt than non-African American students;
 - c. Hispanic/Latino students, who are twice as likely to take the MCAS-Alt than non-Hispanic/Latino students;
 - d. male students, who are twice as likely to take the MCAS-Alt than female students; and
 - e. economically disadvantaged students, who are 2.5 times as likely to take the MCAS-Alt than students who are not economically disadvantaged.

For more further information, the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) provides an outline of specific steps for examining disproportionality in alternate assessments in the publication available at nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/NCEOBrief18.pdf.

8. Provide assurances that **parents have been and will continue to be informed in writing** when their child is designated to take an alternate assessment, including the likely impact this will have on their child's ability to eventually meet the state's graduation requirements. Provide a sample of the letter or notice that is sent or given to the parent of a student who has been designated to take the MCAS-Alt. (Notification of parents is required under ESSA. Sample Parent Notification Letters with translations are available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/essa/).

9. Provide assurances that designating a student to take the MCAS-Alt is not based *solely* on whether the student:
- a. was absent excessively
 - b. performed poorly (or for whom a poor performance was anticipated) on MCAS tests
 - c. took MCAS-Alt previously (since this is an annual decision by the team in each subject)
 - d. is in a specific disability category
 - e. is an English learner
 - f. is from a low-income family or is a child in foster care
 - g. would contribute positively to the school's accountability rating if the student took the MCAS-Alt.

NOTICE OF INTENT to Apply for One-Percent Waiver

Documentation of Posting

Public Comments Received



Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

75 Pleasant Street, Malden, Massachusetts 02148-4906

Telephone: (781) 338-3000
TTY: N.E.T. Relay 1-800-439-2370

Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner

TO: Interested Educators and Members of the Public

FROM: Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "J.C. Riley".

SUBJECT: Notice of Intent to Apply and Opportunity to Comment on the Department's Waiver Extension Request Related to the Percentage of Students Who Participate in the MCAS Alternate Assessment

DATE: November 5, 2021

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education intends to seek an extension of its existing waiver of the federal requirement that would limit the number of students in the state who take alternate assessments to one percent of students who take the general MCAS tests.

The purpose of this notice is to provide you with an opportunity to comment on the request for a waiver by the Department for the 2021–2022 school year. A waiver of the one-percent requirement was previously granted to Massachusetts by the U.S. Department of Education on December 28, 2017 for the 2017–2018 school year; waiver extensions were granted on February 25, 2019 for the 2018–2019 school year; on January 2, 2020 for the 2019–2020 school year; and on September 8, 2020 for the 2020–2021 school year.

Under the requirements of the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as the [Every Student Succeeds Act](#) (ESSA), states must limit the total number of students designated to participate in an *alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards* (i.e., the MCAS-Alt) to one percent of the total number of students who participate in general state assessments. The aim of the legislation is to prevent designation of an excessive number of students with disabilities for alternate assessments, since this may lower academic expectations unnecessarily and limit access by those students to the full range of grade-level academic content standards. As a result, this could delay or prevent those students from eventually meeting their state or district graduation requirements. Students with *significant cognitive disabilities* receive an academic curriculum that has been substantially modified, and they are administered alternate assessments because they cannot participate in standard assessments, even with accommodations. A waiver, if granted, means the state has continued to move closer each year to the one-percent threshold, although it has not yet reached that goal.

The number of Massachusetts students who participated in the MCAS-Alt (in English language arts, mathematics, and/or science and technology/engineering) compared with the number who

took the general MCAS assessments during the last five school years is shown below:

- In 2016–2017, 1.6 percent
- In 2017–2018, 1.5 percent
- In 2018–2019, 1.4 percent
- In 2019–2020 (estimate), 1.35 percent would have participated in the MCAS-Alt if the spring 2020 MCAS and MCAS-Alt administrations had not been cancelled due to extended school closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic. (Projection based on district pre-enrollments and pre-orders of materials.)
- In 2020–2021, 1.3 percent

As these data indicate, Massachusetts has made steady and substantial progress in reducing the number of students taking the MCAS-Alt. Reaching the one-percent threshold set by ESSA, however, will likely take several more years. In pursuit of this goal, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has posted a [memo](#) containing guidance and resources on this topic for Massachusetts schools and districts, and will continue to promote awareness of the need for appropriate assessment participation by students with disabilities through statewide training and district oversight.

The U.S. Department of Education is permitting states to apply for a renewal of their “one-percent” waivers for the 2021–2022 school year. To be eligible for a waiver, states must demonstrate progress and continued efforts to lower the number of students taking alternate assessments, as well as maintain an overall high overall participation rate of students in statewide assessments. The waiver, if granted, will permit Massachusetts to gradually reduce the number of students participating in the MCAS-Alt while continuing to provide oversight, resources, and training to assist IEP teams in making informed assessment decisions for students with disabilities.

We welcome your comments regarding our intent to apply for this waiver. Comments may be submitted via email to mcas@doe.mass.edu until December 1.

(Notice of Intent posted to
<https://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=26606>)

A message from the
Massachusetts Department of
Elementary and Secondary Education

[View this email in your browser](#)

November 8, 2021

Commissioner's WEEKLY UPDATE

News from Commissioner Jeffrey C. Riley and the Massachusetts Department of
Elementary and Secondary Education

Contents:

1. [Drop-In PD on Learning Acceleration](#)
2. [Early College Full School Impact and Expansion Grant Opportunities](#)
3. [Assistance Filling Vacant Positions](#)
4. [COVID-19 FAQ on Pooled Testing During Short School Weeks](#)
5. [COVID-19 and Flu Vaccination Resources](#)
6. [P-EBT Reimbursements for Districts](#)
7. [DESE Resource Corner: EdTech insights from the UMass Donahue Institute](#)
8. [Intent to Seek Waiver to 1 Percent Limit on Alternative Assessments](#)
9. For Your Info:
 - o [Welcome poster from the UMass Amherst Translation Center](#)
 - o [Citizen Schools Virtual Coffee Hour with Teach Plus](#)
 - o [Resources from Girls Who Code](#)

8. Intent to Seek Waiver to 1 Percent Limit on Alternate Assessments:

The Department [intends to seek an extension of its waiver](#) from the federal 1 percent limit on the number of students who can take alternate assessments (the [MCAS-Alt](#)). The waiver, if granted, will permit Massachusetts to gradually reduce the number of students participating in the MCAS-Alt while continuing to provide oversight, resources, and training to help Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams make informed assessment decisions for students with disabilities.

Massachusetts has made steady and substantial progress in reducing the number of students taking the MCAS-Alt, but reaching the 1 percent threshold will likely take several more years. In pursuit of this goal, DESE has posted a [memo](#) containing guidance and resources on this topic and will continue to promote awareness of the need for appropriate assessment participation by students with disabilities through statewide training and district oversight.

The Department welcomes the public's comments regarding its intent to apply for this waiver. Comments may be submitted via email to mcas@doe.mass.edu until **Wednesday, December 1**.

(Notice posted to <https://mcas-alt.org/News/1121SE.htm> (11/8/21) and emailed to 11,600 current and past DESE training participants)

MCAS-Alt

Same Standards • High Expectations for ALL Students

Special Edition

Volume 19, Issue SE

www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt



This newsletter is published by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and will provide Massachusetts educators with information, advice, and support to teach the Massachusetts learning standards to students with significant cognitive disabilities, and to conduct the MCAS Alternate Assessment.

Intent to Seek a Waiver to the One Percent Limit on Alternate Assessments

The Department intends to seek an extension of its waiver from the federal one percent limit on the number of students who can take alternate assessments (i.e., the MCAS-Alt). The waiver, if granted, will permit Massachusetts to gradually reduce the number of students participating in the MCAS-Alt while continuing to provide oversight, resources, and training to help Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams make informed assessment decisions for students with disabilities.

Massachusetts has made steady and substantial progress in reducing the number of students taking the MCAS-Alt, but reaching the one percent threshold will likely take several more years. In pursuit of this goal, DESE has posted a [memo](#) containing guidance and resources on this topic and will continue to promote awareness of the need for appropriate assessment participation by students with disabilities through statewide training and district oversight.

The Department welcomes the public's comments regarding its intent to apply for this waiver. The Notice of Intent to Apply is posted [here](#). Comments may be submitted via email to mcas@doe.mass.edu until Wednesday, December 1.

We'd love to hear from you.

Please [let us know](#) if there is a topic you'd like us to address in a future MCAS-Alt newsletter.

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Published during the school year by the
[Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education](#)

(Notice posted to <https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/updates.html> - 11/16/21)

A message from the
Massachusetts Department of
Elementary and Secondary Education

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November 16, 2021

 Student Assessment Update banner/logo

News from DESE Student Assessment Services

For All Schools

1. Intent to Seek a Waiver to the One Percent Limit on Alternate Assessments

The Department intends to seek an extension of its waiver from the federal one percent limit on the number of students who can take alternate assessments (i.e., the [MCAS-Alt](#)). The waiver, if granted, will permit Massachusetts to gradually reduce the number of students participating in the MCAS-Alt while continuing to provide oversight, resources, and training to help Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams make informed assessment decisions for students with disabilities.

Massachusetts has made steady and substantial progress in reducing the number of students taking the MCAS-Alt, but reaching the one percent threshold will likely take several more years. In pursuit of this goal, DESE has posted a [memo](#) containing guidance and resources on this topic and will continue to promote awareness of the need for appropriate assessment participation by students with disabilities through statewide training and district oversight.

The Department welcomes the public's comments regarding its intent to apply for this waiver. The Notice of Intent to Apply is posted [here](#). Comments may be submitted via email to mcas@doe.mass.edu until **Wednesday, December 1**.

CONTACT

MCAS Service Center
for logistical support, including tech support for PearsonAccess Next and TestNav

Email: mcas@cognia.org
Phone: 800-737-5103

Student Assessment Services
for policy questions, including student participation

Email: mcas@doe.mass.edu
Phone: 781-338-3625

(Notice posted to [MCAS](#) and [MCAS-Alt](#) Headlines –11/5/21)

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY
EDUCATION

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Most Requested: Licensure Learning Standards MCAS Educator Evaluation MTEL

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MCAS

- Student Participation

Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

MCAS News Headlines

11/05/2021 Notice of Intent to Apply and Opportunity to Comment on the Department's Waiver Extension Request Related to the Percentage of Students Who Participate in the MCAS Alternate Assessment

Most Requested: Licensure Learning Standards MCAS Educator Evaluation MTEL

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MCAS Alternate Assessment

- About the MCAS-Alt

MCAS Alternate Assessment (MCAS-Alt)

MCAS-Alt News Headlines

11/08/2021 November 2021 MCAS-Alt Newsletter

11/05/2021 Notice of Intent to Apply and Opportunity to Comment on the Department's Waiver Extension Request Related to the Percentage of Students Who Participate in the MCAS Alternate Assessment

Public Comments:

From: Catherine Zinni <zinni_catherine@mybps.us>

Sent: Tuesday, November 9, 2021 9:17 AM

To: MCAS <mcas@doe.mass.edu>

Subject: MCAS Alt decision making and 1%

While I applaud the intent of the 1% MCAS participation cap, I have a few comments to share based on my 30+ years in education from Prek-college level working with students with and without disabilities, and as a parent of now adult children who have journeyed through the MA public schools.

1. MA provides amazing, comprehensive educational and medical services. This has led to students, with their families, enrolling here from other states and countries to receive these services. In turn, this has led to more students with complex needs who are surviving medical/health challenges who may have become deceased otherwise. While here and there a student can demonstrate knowledge and progress on MCAS when given almost all the accommodations (leading really to a modified MCAS based on modification definitions), many students are only able to demonstrate their entry level progress through the ALT. If the 1% cap is not flexible based on student enrollment and individual profile, then we could come to a point when someone would have to decide which students would participate in an assessment that gives no knowledge and meaningful data about student progress as well as cause undue stress on the student, staff, and family who resides with the student in this stressful situation.

2. Maybe we should reclassify MCAS assessments into 4 options: MCAS as is, MCAS with accommodations, MCAS with modifications (such as the small numbers with read aloud), MCAS Alt. It is confusing to parents of students who participate in MCAS with multiple accommodations who then have their children participate in other school assessments labeled as modified rather than accommodated when using the same adjustments to testing.

Catherine Zinni, M. Ed.

Barnstable Director of Special Education PK- Grade 5

230 South Street

P.O. Box 955

Hyannis, MA 02601

zinni_catherine@mybps.us

508 862 4953 ext 1740

Please visit our Special Education department's website as it has information you may find helpful.

<https://www.barnstable.k12.ma.us/Domain/393>

From: Jessica Pugliesi <pugliesj@bc.edu>
Sent: Wednesday, November 10, 2021 1:42 PM
To: MCAS <mcas@doe.mass.edu>
Subject: MCAS-ALT Waiver

Good Afternoon-

I am the Assistant Director of the Campus School at Boston College, a small private school for students with complex educational and healthcare needs. Due to the nature of students' diagnoses, time-on-learning and spent in the classroom is already reduced, and teachers are managing not only instruction but the overall safety of students. MCAS-ALT adds a tremendous amount of stress to an already stressful job. It also is another reminder to parents of the significant delays their children face. This waiver would prevent that.

Thank you,

Jessica

--

Jessica Pugliesi M.Ed, BCBA LABA

Assistant Director

Campus School at Boston College

Boston College, Campion Hall

140 Commonwealth Avenue

Chestnut Hill, MA 02467

phone: 617-552-1083

pugliesj@bc.edu

www.bc.edu/campusschool

From: Judy H. <jheap17@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, November 11, 2021 1:17 PM
To: MCAS <mcas@doe.mass.edu>
Subject: MCAS waiver

I am the parent of a special education student, currently in enrolled in the 8th grade. I do not support the 1 percent waiver.

My child, and every child, is entitled to a real education in this state. I am currently upset that his MCAS scores are trending downward, and he is now only partially meeting expectations. The staff set low expectations and are not taking any action!

A 1 percent waiver only encourages these low expectations, and I oppose the waiver. Thank you.

.

Judy Heap, Sharon, MA

From: tberkowitz <tberkowitz@charter.net>
Sent: Thursday, November 11, 2021 1:45 PM
To: MCAS <mcas@doe.mass.edu>
Subject: Against waiver

Hello,

I am writing against this waiver. In now waybdoes lowering expectations help our special education students.

Talia Berkowitz
590 church st
Whitinsville, MA 01588

From: Amanda Gossman <agallag2@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, November 11, 2021 2:35 PM
To: MCAS <mcas@doe.mass.edu>
Subject: We do not support a waiver

Section 1111(b)(2)(D)(i)(I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) has a requirement that a State may not assess using an alternate assessment aligned with alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS) for more than 1.0 percent of the total number of students in the State. This requirement helps to ensure that students with disabilities (SWD) receive equal access and equal benefit from education. More specifically, it is designed to ensure that with very rare exception SWDs are presumed to have competence and potential.

A waiver means more SWD could receive an education that is less than the education students without disabilities receive. This is true because the district knows they can use alternate strands and not the state standards to assess progress.

Every student should have a team that presumes competence and potential. A waiver encourages neither. We do not support a waiver!

Sincerely,

The Gossman Family

Brian, Amanda, Farren, and Myles

From: Candace Cortiella <Candace@advocacyinstitute.org>
Sent: Thursday, November 11, 2021 10:25 AM
To: MCAS <mcas@doe.mass.edu>
Subject: link to the waiver extension request URGENT

On the page at <https://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=26606> the link to the waiver extension request does, instead, to a 2017 memo from USED. Please provide correct link.

Candace Cortiella
The Advocacy Institute
www.AdvocacyInstitute.org
@AdvocacyInst
PH: 540.364.0051

From: Ben Tobin <bztobin0968@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, November 12, 2021 8:34 AM
To: MCAS <mcas@doe.mass.edu>
Subject: Public comment waiver

I would like to comment on the waiver that the department of ed is seeking, and voice that I do not feel the department should support this waiver!

MA DESE has requested a waiver from the Federal Department of Education. Section 1111(b)(2)(D)(i)(I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) has a requirement that a State may not assess using an alternate assessment aligned with alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS) for more than 1.0 percent of the total number of students in the State. This requirement helps to ensure that students with disabilities (SWD) receive equal access and equal benefit from education.

A waiver will mean that more students with disabilities could receive an education that is less than the education students without disabilities receive. This is true because the district knows they can use alternate strands and not the state standards to assess progress. Every student should have a team that presumes competence and potential. A waiver encourages neither.

Additionally, the department does not collect the MCAS results for students who are warehoused in the out of district placements. This information is not aggregated or collected in a meaningful way. Their scores are not treated equally or fairly, and a waiver would also encourage more of this discriminatory behavior. These children deserve to be assessed fairly and equally with their peers...and that they be given the same opportunities regardless of disability.

Best,
Ben Tobin

From: Robert Johnson <rjohnson@miltonps.org>
Sent: Tuesday, November 16, 2021 2:17 PM
To: MCAS <mcas@doe.mass.edu>
Subject: Waiver to the One Percent Limit on Alternate Assessment

As a teacher, administrator, and parent of a student with significant cognitive disabilities, I find the idea of an arbitrary numerical limit on which students may take the Alternate Assessment to be offensive and extremely problematic. Whether or not my son or any other student should take the Alternate Assessment should be based on each student's need. If the number of students who are in need of such an assessment is greater than 1%, so be it. To limit the students who may take the alternate assessment based on an arbitrary number rather than on which students need such as an assessment in order to be fairly, accurately, and equitably assessed would be unfair, inaccurate, and inequitable.

Stay safe and healthy,
Robert Johnson
District-wide ELE Coordinator
Milton Public Schools

From: [Wiener, Daniel J \(DOE\)](#)
To: [OESE.ESEA.Assessment](#); [Banks, Kathleen](#); [Peasley, Donald](#)
Cc: [Stapel, Michol \(DOE\)](#); [Hand, Debra D \(DOE\)](#)
Subject: Fw: Massachusetts 1% Cap Waiver Request
Date: Friday, January 7, 2022 11:55:45 AM

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Kathy--Below please find Massachusetts' responses to your questions about our one percent waiver request submitted last November. Please let us know if you have additional questions or need further clarification.

Q1. The waiver mentions that DESE asked districts to indicate steps they use to reduce disproportionality in participation. What is the State doing aside from monitoring districts? I see that on an ongoing basis DESE offices coordinate on the topic of disproportionality. Can you tell us more about how the DESE offices coordinate on the topic of disproportionality?

A1. We meet regularly with the state director of special education and the staff in the Special Education Planning and Policy Office and have discussed on several occasions how their office determines "disproportionality," how it can be recognized, and the steps they have taken to alleviate it. We are interested in how the special education office applies this standard to districts and at what threshold disproportionality is considered to exist. Since no uniform threshold exists for the different disproportionality determinations, districts appeared confused by our use of the term and the way in which this was addressed for other issues in special education by other Department offices. In any event, we proceeded with assistance from NCEO and other member states in the "One Percent Community of Practice" to establish an agreed-upon method for establishing disproportionate representation of subgroups in the AA-AAAS. We agreed a limit of 2.0 (or twice the percentage represented in the general student population) for the number of alternately assessed students in each subgroup.

Q2. What additional steps is DESE taking to support and provide appropriate oversight to districts?

A.2 The Commissioner recently sent a memo to each district that exceeded 1.0 percent of tested students taking the alternate assessment in 2021, requesting that each superintendent (or designee) provide a justification

for exceeding the one-percent threshold; a plan of action for reducing the number of students taking the alternate assessment in the future; and assurances regarding disproportionality, training of IEP teams, parent notification when students are designated for the MCAS-Alt, and the use of the “MCAS Decision-making Tool.” This tool (submitted with initial waiver request) was developed by the Department as a flow chart for making assessment participation decisions based on uniformly understood criteria.

Districts have been provided a data summary each year since 2017 on the number and percentage of students taking alternate assessments in each subject in a posted spreadsheet available to the public. In the Commissioner’s memo mentioned above, districts are required to review their assessment participation data summaries each year.

Each year, we have targeted the 25 districts with the highest overall frequency of students taking the MCAS-Alt for presentations to special education administrators, supervisors, and Team chairpersons showing a profile of the students who should be considered for potential designation to the general, rather than the alternate, assessment and why this is important.

During annual training sessions for school and district administrators and supervisors, we continue to emphasize the importance of reducing the number of students taking alternate assessments.

Q3. I read that in 2021 between 900-1,200 fewer students took the MCAS-Alt than in 2019, depending on the content area. Can you be more specific and/or explain what you mean by “depending on the content area”?

A3. In **English Language Arts (ELA)**, a decrease of 924 students since 2019 in **Mathematics**, a decrease of 1,002 students since 2019 in **Science and Technology/Engineering (STE)**, a decrease of 1,200 students since 2019

Q4. What kind of support and appropriate oversight is DESE providing to each district?

A4. See responses to question 2 above.

Q5. Are the justifications for exceeding the 1% cap posted on the DESE website?

A5. We have not posted district justifications on the Department's website but recently added the following highlighted language to our "[MCAS-Alt and ESSA](#)" web page:

"If you wish to review a district's justification and statement of assurances, or have additional questions about the MCAS-Alt or about statewide assessment for students with disabilities, please contact Student Assessment by [email](#) or phone at 781-338-3625."

In addition, each district's alternate assessment participation data are posted and made publicly available for each year 2017-2021, at <https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/essa/participants-district.xlsx>.

Thank you.

Dan

Daniel Wiener

Administrator of Inclusive Assessment

W: 781-338-3625 | **Fax:** 781-338-3630

daniel.j.wiener@mass.gov

[Student Assessment Services](#)

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA 02148

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This school year, we all have a role to play to keep each other healthy. [Learn more.](#)

From: Banks, Kathleen <kathleen.banks@ed.gov>

Sent: Thursday, December 30, 2021 12:35 PM

To: Stapel, Michol (DESE) <Michol.Stapel@mass.gov>

Cc: OESE.ESEA.Assessment <ESEA.Assessment@ed.gov>

Subject: Massachusetts 1% Cap Waiver Request

Hello Michol,

I am in the process of reviewing Massachusetts DESE's request to extend the 1% alternate assessment participation waiver. It appears that all of the requested data has been provided, thank you. In reviewing some specific parts of the request, however, I have some clarifying questions.

1. The waiver mentions that DESE asked districts to indicate steps they use to reduce disproportionality in participation. What is the State doing aside from monitoring districts? I see that on an ongoing basis DESE offices coordinate on the topic of disproportionality. Can you tell us more about how the DESE offices coordinate on the topic of disproportionality?
2. What additional steps is DESE taking to support and provide appropriate oversight to districts?
3. I read that in 2021 between 900-1,200 fewer students took the MCAS-Alt than in 2019, depending on the content area. Can you be more specific and/or explain what you mean by “depending on the content area”?
4. What kind of support and appropriate oversight is DESE providing to each district?
5. Are the justifications for exceeding the 1% cap posted on the DESE website?

In essence, waiver extension requests should look different from each previous year’s request and be clear on the steps that DESE is taking to reduce the percentage of students taking the MCAS-Alt. These steps may include reaching out to districts and asking them to justify why they exceeded the 1% cap and to provide a plan to the State, the steps must also include things that the State is proactively doing to reduce MCAS-Alt participation.

If you could address these questions (in a response to this email or in an updated 1% cap waiver request) it would assist us in determining if the State’s waiver request meets all of the requirements for this extension request. Please provide answers to these questions within the next 10 business days, or by January 14, 2022.

Thanks,
Kathy

Don Peasley donald.peasley@ed.gov
Kathleen Banks kathleen.banks@ed.gov

State Assessment Team, School Support and Accountability (SSA)
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE)
US Department of Education
Email the OESE Assessment Team at oease@doe.mass.gov

From: [Wiener, Daniel J \(DOE\)](#)
To: [OESE.ESEA.Assessment](#); [Peasley, Donald](#)
Cc: [Stapel, Michol \(DOE\)](#); [Hand, Debra D \(DOE\)](#)
Subject: Re: Massachusetts 1% Cap Waiver Request
Date: Monday, January 10, 2022 10:40:28 AM
Attachments: [MA District One Percent Presentation redacted.pdf](#)

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Kathleen--I will attempt to clarify the Department's recent intensive intervention with 22 large districts (not 25, as I had originally stated) with the highest alternate assessment frequencies. The intervention consisted of a large-group presentation by DESE staff to the district's IEP team chairpersons, special education director and supervisors, principals, and superintendent regarding alternate assessment participation criteria, ESSA requirements (e.g., parent notification, training for teams, etc.), and the one-percent threshold for states on the number of students taking the MCAS-Alt.

As stated in our one-percent waiver request:

"In the 2017-2018, 2018-2019, and 2019-early 2020 school years (prior to the pandemic-related school closing), DESE provided intensive, in-person technical assistance to staff in 22 urban and large suburban districts whose MCAS-Alt participation was well above the state average (i.e., between 2.1 and 3.5 percent). During the pandemic, that technical assistance was continued virtually, though less intensively. Several districts received this training in multiple school years. The districts that received intensive intervention included:

- Boston, Randolph, Lynn, Springfield, Brockton, Fitchburg, Chelsea, Framingham, Fall River, Holyoke, Haverhill, Pittsfield, Everett, Lowell, Lawrence, Chicopee, Worcester, Methuen, Saugus, Ware, and Wareham

As of 2021, MCAS-Alt participation rates decreased in 15 of the 22 districts that received intensive Department technical assistance."

You asked for an explanation of DESE "showing a profile of students who took the MCAS-Alt but who actually should be taking the general MCAS." This activity was part of DESE's presentation to the district and involved sharing a data analysis of students in the district who took the MCAS-Alt.

I am attaching a PDF of a redacted presentation to one district to show the information DESE provided to the district, including statewide "nature of disability" data (slides 19 and 20); and individualized data for the district (slides 23 and 24).

- The proportion of students taking the alternate assessment statewide in each disability category is shown on **slide 19**.

- The percentage of students in each disability category who were designated for the alternate assessment is shown on **slide 20**.
- **Slide 23** shows a table of the district's percentages in ELA and mathematics over the past three years (in this case, 2017, 2018, and 2019).
- **Slide 24** is more complicated, and shows the following information:
 - **Primary disability categories** of students who took the MCAS-Alt in the most recent year, shown as a percentage in the district and for the state.
 - **Level of Need** for students who took the MCAS-Alt in the most recent year. Level of Need is shown for the district and for the state for students in each disability category who took the MCAS-Alt.
 - Level of Need is defined as: "The amount and type of service that a student receives inside and outside of the general education environment as determined by the school district upon review of the student's IEP." One of four levels of need (1 through 4) is reported for each student in special education by districts to DESE each year, together with other student demographic data. We expect the vast majority of students taking the alternate assessment would be in Level of Need 4.
 - Categories for which the district and state percentages differed widely are encircled in orange. During the presentation, districts were directed by DESE to notice the circled disability and level of need categories and consider whether those students would be more appropriately designated for the general assessment with accommodations, rather than the alternate assessment.

I hope this information responds to your questions. Please let me know if you need further clarification.

Dan

Daniel Wiener

Administrator of Inclusive Assessment

W: 781-338-3625 | **Fax:** 781-338-3630

daniel.j.wiener@mass.gov

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From: OESE.ESEA.Assessment <ESEA.Assessment@ed.gov>

Sent: Saturday, January 8, 2022 6:33 PM

To: Wiener, Daniel J (DESE) <daniel.j.wiener@mass.gov>; OESE.ESEA.Assessment <ESEA.Assessment@ed.gov>; Peasley, Donald <Donald.Peasley@ed.gov>

Cc: Stapel, Michol (DESE) <Michol.Stapel@mass.gov>; Hand, Debra (DESE) <Debra.D.Hand@mass.gov>
Subject: RE: Massachusetts 1% Cap Waiver Request

CAUTION: This email originated from a sender outside of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts mail system. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Hello Daniel,

Thank you for your answers to my questions. I am unclear about the paragraph below. And have two questions.

Each year, we have targeted the 25 districts with the highest overall frequency of students taking the MCAS-Alt for presentations to special education administrators, supervisors, and Team chairpersons showing a profile of the students who should be considered for potential designation to the general, rather than the alternate, assessment and why this is important.

1. Are you saying that the 25 districts make presentations to special education administrators, supervisors, and team chairpersons?
2. Are you saying that the presentations involve these districts showing a profile of student who took the MCAS-Alt but who actually should be taking the general MCAS? Can you explain this a little more? You provided this information as evidence that the State takes additional steps to support and provide appropriate oversight to districts.

Kathy

From: Wiener, Daniel J (DOE) <daniel.j.wiener2@state.ma.us>
Sent: Friday, January 7, 2022 11:55 AM
To: OESE.ESEA.Assessment <ESEA.Assessment@ed.gov>; Banks, Kathleen <kathleen.banks@ed.gov>; Peasley, Donald <Donald.Peasley@ed.gov>
Cc: Stapel, Michol (DOE) <michol.stapel@state.ma.us>; Hand, Debra D (DOE) <debra.d.hand2@state.ma.us>
Subject: Fw: Massachusetts 1% Cap Waiver Request

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Kathy--Below please find Massachusetts' responses to your questions about our one percent waiver request submitted last November. Please let us know if you have additional questions or need further clarification.

Q1. The waiver mentions that DESE asked districts to indicate steps they use to reduce disproportionality in participation. What is the State doing aside from monitoring districts? I see that on an ongoing basis DESE offices coordinate on the topic of disproportionality. Can you tell us more about how the DESE offices coordinate on the topic of disproportionality?

A1. We meet regularly with the state director of special education and the staff in the Special Education Planning and Policy Office and have discussed on several occasions how their office determines “disproportionality,” how it can be recognized, and the steps they have taken to alleviate it. We are interested in how the special education office applies this standard to districts and at what threshold disproportionality is considered to exist. Since no uniform threshold exists for the different disproportionality determinations, districts appeared confused by our use of the term and the way in which this was addressed for other issues in special education by other Department offices. In any event, we proceeded with assistance from NCEO and other member states in the “One Percent Community of Practice” to establish an agreed-upon method for establishing disproportionate representation of subgroups in the AA-AAAS. We agreed a limit of 2.0 (or twice the percentage represented in the general student population) for the number of alternately assessed students in each subgroup.

Q2. What additional steps is DESE taking to support and provide appropriate oversight to districts?

A.2 The Commissioner recently sent a memo to each district that exceeded 1.0 percent of tested students taking the alternate assessment in 2021, requesting that each superintendent (or designee) provide a justification for exceeding the one-percent threshold; a plan of action for reducing the number of students taking the alternate assessment in the future; and assurances regarding disproportionality, training of IEP teams, parent notification when students are designated for the MCAS-Alt, and the use of the “MCAS Decision-making Tool.” This tool (submitted with initial waiver request) was developed by the Department as a flow chart for making assessment participation decisions based on uniformly understood criteria.

Districts have been provided a data summary each year since 2017 on the

number and percentage of students taking alternate assessments in each subject in a posted spreadsheet available to the public. In the Commissioner's memo mentioned above, districts are required to review their assessment participation data summaries each year.

Each year, we have targeted the 25 districts with the highest overall frequency of students taking the MCAS-Alt for presentations to special education administrators, supervisors, and Team chairpersons showing a profile of the students who should be considered for potential designation to the general, rather than the alternate, assessment and why this is important.

During annual training sessions for school and district administrators and supervisors, we continue to emphasize the importance of reducing the number of students taking alternate assessments.

Q3. I read that in 2021 between 900-1,200 fewer students took the MCAS-Alt than in 2019, depending on the content area. Can you be more specific and/or explain what you mean by "depending on the content area"?

A3. In **English Language Arts (ELA)**, a decrease of 924 students since 2019 in **Mathematics**, a decrease of 1,002 students since 2019 in **Science and Technology/Engineering (STE)**, a decrease of 1,200 students since 2019

Q4. What kind of support and appropriate oversight is DESE providing to each district?

A4. See responses to question 2 above.

Q5. Are the justifications for exceeding the 1% cap posted on the DESE website?

A5. We have not posted district justifications on the Department's website but recently added the following highlighted language to our "[MCAS-Alt and ESSA](#)" web page:

"If you wish to review a district's justification and statement of assurances,

number and percentage of students taking alternate assessments in each subject in a posted spreadsheet available to the public. In the Commissioner's memo mentioned above, districts are required to review their assessment participation data summaries each year.

Each year, we have targeted the 25 districts with the highest overall frequency of students taking the MCAS-Alt for presentations to special education administrators, supervisors, and Team chairpersons showing a profile of the students who should be considered for potential designation to the general, rather than the alternate, assessment and why this is important.

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Q4. What kind of support and appropriate oversight is DESE providing to each district?

A4. See responses to question 2 above.

Q5. Are the justifications for exceeding the 1% cap posted on the DESE website?

A5. We have not posted district justifications on the Department's website but recently added the following highlighted language to our "[MCAS-Alt and ESSA](#)" web page:

"If you wish to review a district's justification and statement of assurances,

or have additional questions about the MCAS-Alt or about statewide assessment for students with disabilities, please contact Student Assessment by [email](#) or phone at 781-338-3625.”

In addition, each district’s alternate assessment participation data are posted and made publicly available for each year 2017-2021, at <https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/essa/participants-district.xlsx>.

Thank you.

Dan

Daniel Wiener

Administrator of Inclusive Assessment

W: 781-338-3625 | **Fax:** 781-338-3630

daniel.j.wiener@mass.gov

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From: Banks, Kathleen <kathleen.banks@ed.gov>

Sent: Thursday, December 30, 2021 12:35 PM

To: Stapel, Michol (DESE) <Michol.Stapel@mass.gov>

Cc: OESE.ESEA.Assessment <ESEA.Assessment@ed.gov>

Subject: Massachusetts 1% Cap Waiver Request

Hello Michol,

I am in the process of reviewing Massachusetts DESE’s request to extend the 1% alternate assessment participation waiver. It appears that all of the requested data has been provided, thank you. In reviewing some specific parts of the request, however, I have some clarifying questions.

1. The waiver mentions that DESE asked districts to indicate steps they use to reduce disproportionality in participation. What is the State doing aside from monitoring districts? I see that on an ongoing basis DESE offices coordinate on the topic of disproportionality. Can you tell us more about how the DESE offices coordinate on the topic of disproportionality?
2. What additional steps is DESE taking to support and provide appropriate oversight to districts?
3. I read that in 2021 between 900-1,200 fewer students took the MCAS-Alt than in 2019, depending on the content area. Can you be more specific and/or explain what you mean by “depending on the content area”?
4. What kind of support and appropriate oversight is DESE providing to each district?
5. Are the justifications for exceeding the 1% cap posted on the DESE website?

In essence, waiver extension requests should look different from each previous year's request and be clear on the steps that DESE is taking to reduce the percentage of students taking the MCAS-Alt. These steps may include reaching out to districts and asking them to justify why they exceeded the 1% cap and to provide a plan to the State, the steps must also include things that the State is proactively doing to reduce MCAS-Alt participation.

If you could address these questions (in a response to this email or in an updated 1% cap waiver request) it would assist us in determining if the State's waiver request meets all of the requirements for this extension request. Please provide answers to these questions within the next 10 business days, or by January 14, 2022.

Thanks,
Kathy

Don Peasley donald.peasley@ed.gov
Kathleen Banks kathleen.banks@ed.gov

State Assessment Team, School Support and Accountability (SSA)
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE)
US Department of Education
Email the OESE Assessment Team at oease@doe.gov



Next-Generation MCAS and MCAS-Alt

Winter 2020

Dan Wiener
Administrator of Inclusive Assessment





MCAS Overview

MCAS Participation Requirements

- **All publicly-funded students** must participate in the MCAS assessments required for their grade. Districts should ensure that:
 - all in- and out-of-district students are assessed.
 - all ELs and students with disabilities are assessed.
 - students' grades are reported accurately in SIMS, especially those placed out-of-district.
- Participation in MCAS ensures that all students
 - receive instruction based on the MA Curriculum Frameworks.
 - are included in statewide reporting and accountability.
 - receive district resources, as needed, to achieve the standards.



Reporting MCAS Results Using a New Test Scale and Achievement Levels

- “Next-Generation” [MCAS Test Scale:](#)

Not Meeting Expectations (NM)	440-469
Partially Meeting Expectations (PM)	470-499
Meeting Expectations (M)	500-529
Exceeding Expectations (E)	530-560

- **Interim grade 10 passing standard on next-gen MCAS:**

- for classes of 2021, 2022, and 2023, “a level of achievement equivalent to the required standard on legacy MCAS tests.”
 - “Next-gen” **ELA** (455) and **Math** (469) equivalent to “legacy” 220 (*Needs Improvement*), plus fulfillment of an EPP.
 - “Next-gen” **ELA** (472) and **Math** (486) equivalent to “legacy” 240 (*Proficient*).
 - “Next-gen” **ELA** (501) and **Math** (504) equivalent to “legacy” 260 (*Advanced*).
- A new graduation standard is possible for classes of 2024 and beyond.



Decision-Making Guidelines for Students with Disabilities

- IEP teams annually determine how each student with a disability will participate in MCAS in each subject.
 - Options include:
 1. computer-based MCAS testing (with or without accommodations)
 2. paper-based MCAS testing (an accommodation)
 3. MCAS-Alt
 4. Grade-level (grades 3-8) / Competency portfolios (high school)
- IEPs and 504 plans must list all assessment decisions, including accommodations and alternate assessments.
 - IEP must be approved before assessment decisions are in effect.
- MCAS beyond grade 10 is optional; IEP team should determine whether student is expected to graduate.
 - If so, student should continue to take **MCAS retests**, submit an **MCAS appeal**, and/or submit a **competency portfolio**.

Important Team Decisions Prior to Spring 2020 Testing

- Teams should:
 - Review next-gen MCAS participation guidelines and accessibility/ accommodations policies at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/accessibility.
 - Determine whether student will take the test, or meets criteria to take MCAS-Alt.
- **Team decisions needed** for each student with a disability:
 1. Can student take the test on a computer?
 - Review Tutorial and take Practice Tests at mcas.pearsonsupport.com.
 - List “paper-based test” as an accommodation, if needed.
 - Students may be well-suited for computer-based testing if they need: **typed responses, large print, answers written in test booklet, or monitor placement of responses.**
 2. If so, which computer-based features and accommodations will be needed?
 - For **read-aloud**, can student use **text-to-speech** (TTS) with headphones, or does student require a **human reader**?





Who Should Take the MCAS-Alt?

Which students should take the MCAS-Alt?

- Students with *significant cognitive disabilities* who are....
 - Working on learning standards that have been substantially modified due to the severity of the disability, **and** are
 - Receiving intensive, individualized instruction in order to acquire, generalize, and demonstrate knowledge and skills, **and** are
 - Unable to demonstrate knowledge and skills on a standardized paper or online test, even with accommodations,
- ... should take the **MCAS-Alt** in that subject.

(Teams decide annually in each content area)



Which students should not take the MCAS-Alt

A student should not take MCAS-Alt based solely on whether he/she:

- has previously failed the MCAS test;
- has previously taken an alternate assessment (since this is an annual decision);
- was absent from school excessively;
- has a specific disability (e.g., all students with intellectual disabilities should not automatically take the MCAS-Alt);
- attends a program where it is expected that students will take the MCAS-Alt;
- is an English learner (EL);
- is from a low-income family or is a child in foster care;
- requires an alternative augmentative communication system;
- would have a positive impact on a school's accountability rating if he/she took the MCAS-Alt.





MCAS-Alt and the Statewide “One Percent” Cap

ESSA “1% Cap” on MCAS-Alt Participation

- Beginning in 2016-2017, the Every Student Succeeds Act imposed a **cap of 1 percent of all assessed students statewide** taking the MCAS-Alt.
- MA has received a statewide waiver for the past three years.
- This is an opportunity to **revisit and refine our decision-making** on which students should take the MCAS-Alt.
- ***How many students take the MCAS-Alt?***
 - In 2019, 7,000 students (1.4% of tested students) took ELA and Math MCAS-Alt.
 - 1,240 fewer students than in 2017 (1.6%)
 - 1,600 fewer students than in 2015 (1.7%)
 - Highest total was 9,386 in 2012 (1.8%)

Plans to reduce the number of students taking MCAS-Alt

- In districts that exceed one percent of tested students, DESE requests that IEP teams re-examine decisions for students currently taking the MCAS-Alt and make determined effort to reduce the number.
- This year, letters were sent to 69 districts that exceeded statewide average of 1.4%, requesting:
 - **Justification**, if district will exceed one percent in 2020.
 - Steps the district will take in the coming year to **reduce the number** of students taking alternate assessments (Districts do not have to reach 1 percent).
 - How district will address any **disproportionate designation** (i.e., bias) of subgroups (e.g., male/female, economically disadvantaged, Hispanic, African-Amer).
 - Timeline for **training IEP teams** on this requirement.
 - Assurance that **district will inform parents** in writing that their child will take the MCAS-Alt.

Guidance on the statewide “One Percent Cap”

Materials are available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/essa:

- **Participation Guidelines** on which students should take the MCAS-Alt
- **Decision-making tool**
- **Data** on percent taking MCAS-Alt in each district in 2017 and 2018
- **Sample Parent Notification Letter** for students taking MCAS-Alt
 - Written notification of parents is required.
 - Photocopy the sample letter on school or district letterhead
 - Translations available in 5 languages
- **Training presentation** for IEP teams on meeting this requirement
 - Annual district training of teams is required.

MCAS-Alt, Including ESSA Requirements

www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt

The screenshot shows the website for the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). The top navigation bar includes links for Students & Families, Educators & Administrators, Teaching, Learning & Testing, Data & Accountability, Finance & Funding, About the Department, and Ed. The left sidebar contains a list of navigation options, with 'MCAS Alternate Assessment' selected. The main content area is titled 'Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System' and 'MCAS Alternate Assessment (MCAS-Alt)'. Under 'MCAS-ALT HEADLINES:', it states 'There are no MCAS-Alt Headlines at this time' and provides a link to 'MCAS-Alt Headlines Archives'. A 'Background:' section explains that MCAS-Alt is for students with significant disabilities and consists of a portfolio of materials. A list of resources follows, with the first item, 'Commissioner's Memo: Information and Resources for MCAS-Alt and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)', highlighted with a red box.

Students & Families Educators & Administrators Teaching, Learning & Testing Data & Accountability Finance & Funding About the Department Ed

> Student Assessment Home
> Next-Gen MCAS
> Graduation Requirements
> MCAS
> MCAS Alternate Assessment
About the MCAS-Alt
Resources and Training
Sample Portfolio Strands
Scoring & Reporting Results
> Performance Appeals
> ACCESS for ELLs
> National/International Tests
> Growth Model
> Parent/Guardian Information
> Training Opportunities

Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

MCAS Alternate Assessment (MCAS-Alt)

MCAS-ALT HEADLINES:

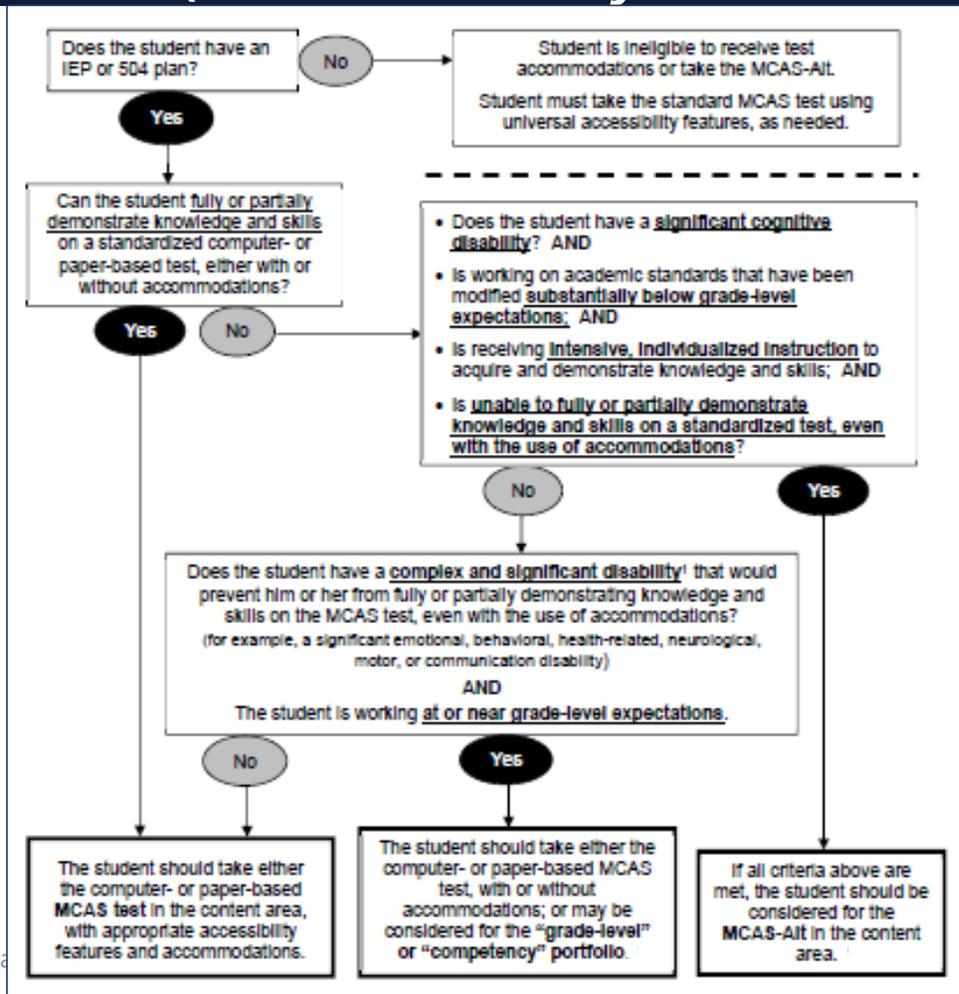
There are no MCAS-Alt Headlines at this time

[MCAS-Alt Headlines Archives](#)

Background:
MCAS is designed to measure a student's knowledge of key concepts and skills outlined in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. As with the most significant disabilities who are unable to take the standard MCAS tests even with accommodations participate in the MCAS (MCAS-Alt). MCAS-Alt consists of a portfolio of specific materials collected annually by the teacher and student. Evidence for the portfolio includes student work samples, instructional data, videotapes, and other supporting information.

- Commissioner's Memo: [Information and Resources for MCAS-Alt and the Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#)
- Learn [about the MCAS-Alt](#). View an overview and frequently asked questions.
- Access [resources for conducting MCAS-Alt and on upcoming training sessions](#), including MCAS-Alt Newsletters, the Resource Guide, MCAS-Alt Forms and Graphs, and registration information.
- See [sample portfolio strands](#) from students' MCAS-Alt portfolios.
- Find information on [scoring portfolios and view reports of results](#). Also view information on the MCAS-Alt score appeals process.

Decision-making tool to help IEP teams determine who should take the MCAS-Alt (See *Accessibility and Accommodations Manual*)



Use this tool to start the assessment conversation at the Team meeting.

Available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/essa/

Grade-level and Competency Portfolios

A student with a significant disability can submit a **grade-level** or **competency** portfolio if he or she:

- performs classroom work **at or near grade-level;**
- is attempting to earn an equivalent score to a student who took the test; but
- cannot demonstrate knowledge and skills on the MCAS test in that grade and subject.
- See [Educator's Manual for MCAS-Alt](#) or visit DESE website (www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/cd-reqs/) for these portfolio requirements.

A score of *Progressing* on the MCAS-Alt is not “Passing”

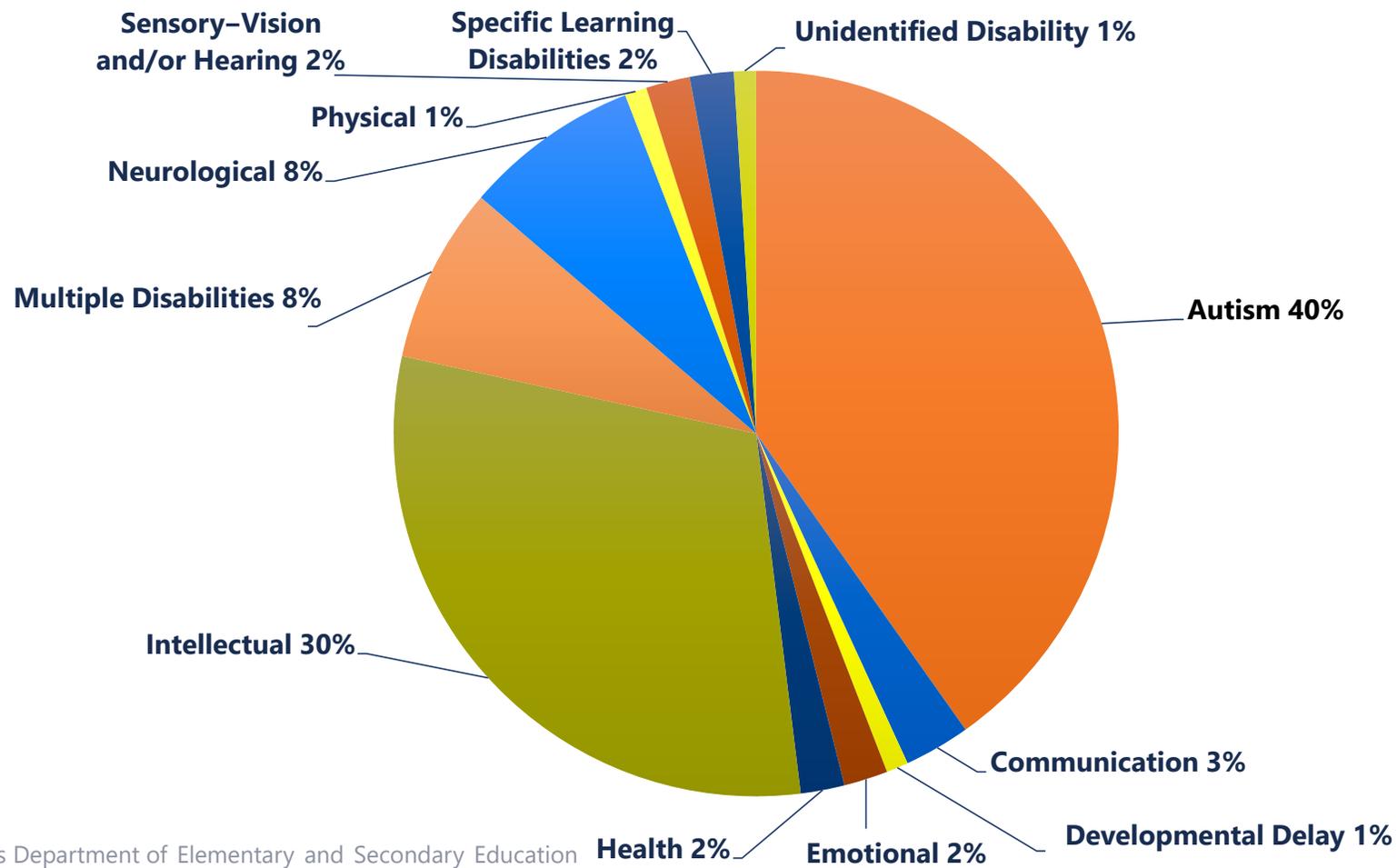
- ***Progressing*** is the highest possible MCAS-Alt score.
- A score of ***Progressing*** means the student is
 - steadily learning new knowledge, skills, and concepts
 - requires minimal prompting and assistance
 - performance is basically accurate, BUT
 - Student is still achieving below grade-level expectations.
- ***Progressing*** does not mean a student has earned a Competency Determination.
 - Scores included in ***Warning/Failing*** or ***Not Meeting Expectations*** level in school/district results.
 - Not eligible to earn a diploma.



MCAS-Alt Data for:

- State
- Your District

Which Students Took the 2019 MCAS-Alt by Disability?



Percent of Students in Each Disability Category Taking MCAS-Alt

- Autism, 26.8%
- Communication, 1.6%
- Emotional, 1.0%
- Health, 1.1%
- Intellectual, 48.7%
- Multiple Disabilities, 41.7%
- Neurological, 8.0%
- Sensory—Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing, 10.5%
- Sensory—Blind/Visually Impaired, 5.9%
- Specific Learning Disabilities, 0.3%



Likelihood of a student being designated for the MCAS-Alt

- ***How likely are students from a particular subgroup to be designated for MCAS-Alt, compared with students NOT in that subgroup?***
 - **English learners** are 1.6 times more likely than non-EL students;
 - **African-American** students are 1.7 times more likely than non-Afr-Amer students.
 - Students who are **economically disadvantaged** are 2.8 times more likely than students who are not economically disadvantaged.
 - **Male students** are 2.0 times more likely than female students.
- **Level of Need** (SIMS Data Element #38), based on number of hours of SPED services (Levels 1–4):
 - 86% of students taking MCAS-Alt are Level of Need **4** (High); 12% are Level **3** (Moderate); less than 1% are Levels **1** and **2** (Low).
- Check the patterns in your district.



Questions to Consider for Students Currently Taking the MCAS-Alt

- Can this student demonstrate at least *some* knowledge and skills on standard MCAS?
 - The test, with or without accommodations, is the **default** decision.
 - Many more standards are assessed on the test than on MCAS-Alt.
 - Would test results provide any **meaningful information**?
- Could this student eventually achieve grade-level standards, given appropriate instruction with support? (The MCAS-Alt assesses below grade-level expectations.)
- Are IEP teams making defensible decisions (i.e., making the “most optimistic/least dangerous assumption” about each student)?

MCAS-Alt Participation: 2007, 2018, and 2019

2019

Admin Year	District	ELA Standard MCAS	ELA MCAS-Alt	ELA Total	ELA pct MCAS-Alt	Math Standard MCAS	Math MCAS-Alt	Math Total	Math pct MCAS-Alt
2019		7282	158	7440	2.1%	7315	162	7477	2.2%

2018

Admin Year	District	ELA Standard MCAS	ELA MCAS-Alt	ELA Total	ELA pct MCAS-Alt	Math Standard MCAS	Math MCAS-Alt	Math Total	Math pct MCAS-Alt
2018		7029	149	7178	2.1%	7013	149	7162	2.1%

2017

Admin Year	District	ELA Standard MCAS	ELA MCAS-Alt	ELA Total	ELA pct MCAS-Alt	Math Standard MCAS	Math MCAS-Alt	Math Total	Math pct MCAS-Alt
2017		6848	197	7045	2.8%	6857	195	7052	2.8%

2019 MCAS-Alt Participants in Your District by Nature of Disability and Level of Need (HANDOUT)

District	Nature of Disability	# MCAS Test District	# MCAS Alt District	% Alt District	% Alt State	Level of Need			
						1	2	3	4
(7,440 students assessed in 2019)	Intellectual	51	82	61.7	48.7			12	70
	Sensory/Hard of Hearing or Deaf	10	●	23.1	10.5				●
	Communication	113	●	0.9	1.6			●	
	Sensory/Vision Impairment or Blind	●	●	16.7	5.9				1
	Emotional	149	●	1.3	1.0				●
	Physical	●	●	16.7	7.2				●
	Health	207							
	Specific Learning Disabilities	668	●	0.3	0.3			●	●
	Sensory/Deafblind								
	Multiple Disabilities		2		41.7				●
	Autism	86	46	34.8	26.8			●	43
	Neurological	27	13	32.5	8.0				13
	Developmental Delay	21	5	19.2	4.8				●
	ALL disabilities	1342	158	10.5	6.9			17	141
	Total				2.1%	1.4%	● (State=.5%)	● (State=.5%)	11% (State=12%)

Student Assessment – Contact Information

MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education – Student Assessment (781-338-3625)

- Dan Wiener, Administrator of Inclusive Assessment – dwiener@doe.mass.edu
- Debra Hand, MCAS-Alt Coordinator – dhand@doe.mass.edu
- Robert Pelychaty, Accommodations and MCAS Appeals Coordinator – rpelychaty@doe.mass.edu
- General Inquiries – mcas@doe.mass.edu

Questions?

Thank you!