

MCAS Accommodations



All students in Massachusetts's public schools and approved private special education schools (used to be called Chapter 766) must participate in the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS).

As part of the IEP, the Team must determine how a child will participate in the MCAS system. The Team will first consider the standardized test on demand or with certain accommodations. If the child can take the test with accommodations, then the Team will identify the accommodations that will be used.

Generally, the accommodations are the same as the those the student with a disability might use during classroom instruction.

However these accommodations are limited. The Massachusetts Department of Education instructs Teams to select only those accommodations that are believed to be essential in providing the student access to MCAS tests. Test accommodations may only be identified by the IEP Team, rather than by any individual. The identified accommodations must be listed in the IEP and may be administered only after the parent signs it.

There are two categories of accommodations—standard and nonstandard.

Definition of Standard Accommodations

Standard accommodations are changes in the routine conditions under which students take MCAS tests, and involve changes in:

1. Timing or scheduling of the test; for example, administration of the test in short intervals or at a time of day that takes into account the student's medical needs
2. Test setting; for example, administration of the test individually or in a small group setting
3. Test presentation; for example, test questions presented in large-print, Braille or electronically using a program like Kurzweil.
4. How the student responds to test questions; for example, the student dictates his or her responses

Definition of Non-Standard Accommodations

Non-standard accommodations are modifications in the way the test is presented or in the way a student responds to test questions that may alter what the test measures. Teams should exercise caution in considering whether a student requires a non-standard accommodation in order to access the test. Reliance on test accommodations should never replace appropriate and rigorous instruction in the subject being tested. Non-standard accommodations may **not**:

1. simplify, paraphrase, explain, or eliminate any test item, prompt, or multiple-choice option
2. provide verbal or other clues or suggestions that hint at or give away the correct response to the student

Non-standard accommodations, such as reading aloud the English Language Arts and Literature tests to a student, may only be used only when absolutely necessary and only when a student already receives this accommodation during his or her instruction.

Limited Examples of Acceptable Standard Accommodations:

- **Frequent Breaks:** Test administered in short periods with frequent breaks
- **Time of Day:** Test administered at a time of day that takes into account the student's medical or learning needs
- **Small Group:** Test administered in a small group setting (i.e., 2-5 students)
- **Familiar Test Administrator:** Test administered by a test administrator familiar to the student
- **Magnification or Overlays:** Student uses magnifying equipment, enlargement devices, or colored visual overlays
- **Large Print:** Student uses large-print edition of the test
- **Braille:** Student uses Braille edition of the test
- **Track Test Items:** Test administrator assists the student in tracking and/or sequencing test items (e.g., moving from one test question to the next) or redirecting the student's attention to the test

- **Read Test Aloud or Signs Test (except ELA Language and Literature Test and Reading Test):** Test administrator reads the ELA Composition writing prompt, Mathematics, Science and Technology/Engineering, and/or History and Social Science passages and test items to the student
- **Electronic Text Reader (except ELA Language and Literature Test and Reading Test):** Student uses computer-based text reader software for the ELA Composition writing prompt, Mathematics, Science and Technology/Engineering, and/or History and Social Science Test(s). Note: Use of programs like Kurzweil 3000 must be requested by the principal in the school's MCAS Enrollment Survey.
- **Scribe Test (except ELA Composition):** Test administrator writes the responses to open-response test items as they are dictated or signed by the student
- **Organizer, Checklist, Reference Sheet, or Abacus:** Student uses a graphic organizer, checklist, individualized mathematics reference sheet, or abacus
- **Word Processor:** Student uses a word processor, typewriter, or similar device to type the ELA Composition and/or answers to open-response questions. For the ELA Composition, any spell or grammar checking device must be turned off and disabled.

Limited Examples of Acceptable Non-Standard Accommodations:

- **Read Aloud or Sign ELA Language and Literature Test or Reading Test:** Test administrator reads or signs the ELA Language and Literature Test or Reading Test to a student
- **Electronic Text Reader for the ELA Language and Literature Test and Reading Test:** Student uses computer-based text-reader software for the ELA Language and Literature Test or Reading Test. Note: Use of programs like Kurzweil 3000 must be requested by the principal in the school's MCAS Enrollment Survey.
- **Scribe ELA Composition:** The student dictates or signs the ELA Composition to a scribe; records or signs the ELA Composition on audiotape or video; or uses a "speech-to-text" conversion device to record the ELA Composition.
- **Calculation Devices:** Student uses a calculator, number chart, arithmetic table, or manipulatives on non-calculator sections of the Mathematics Test
- **Spell- or Grammar-Checking Device or Word Prediction Software for the ELA Composition:** The student uses a spell- or grammar-checking device for the ELA Composition; or uses word prediction software.

Please note that the above accommodations do have further rules and conditions. For more information, please see the resources below.

A small percentage of students may be unable to take the on-demand test due to the nature of their disability. These students will take the MCAS Alternate Assessment. The Alternate Assessment will test the same material as the on-demand MCAS but uses alternate methods of determining what the student has learned. Typically the Alternate Assessment will not depend on your child's ability to take paper/pencil tests but will seek to assess skills through other methods.

In the past, large-scale assessments were not always considered important for students with disabilities. It was assumed that special education evaluations provided enough information on how well students were doing in school. However, special education evaluations do not typically provide information on what students know and can do relative to local and state learning standards. The lack of information about the general performance of students with disabilities means that schools were not held accountable in the same way and may not use additional financial and instructional resources in an equitable fashion that includes the needs of students with disabilities—Our kids were left behind.

Resources:

For more information regarding *Requirements for the Participation of Students with Disabilities in MCAS* including accommodations go to:

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/spedreq.pdf>

