



## What is the General Curriculum?

Historically, children with special needs only had limited if any access to the general curriculum. Thus, these individuals were not able to progress to their potential.

**Participation in the General Curriculum:** The federal law IDEA states that students with disabilities should work on learning the same curriculum that their non-disabled peers are learning. **This means the IEP does NOT design a curriculum, rather, the IEP designs the services that the student needs to enable them to make progress in the general curriculum, and to help them to reach their potential.** To enable students with disabilities to access the information in the general curriculum, Teams may find it necessary to identify accommodations, modifications or services to meet specific learning needs.

In Massachusetts the general curriculum is based on learning standards known as Curriculum Frameworks. Curriculum Frameworks define specific student learning expectations at each grade level. The general curriculum content areas now include frameworks in Preschool, Mathematics, English Language Arts, Science and Technology, History & Social Science, Health, Arts, and World Languages. Parents should become familiar with these frameworks and the types of learning expectations that Massachusetts requires of its students in these content areas.

In order to be informed members of the IEP Team, parents must become familiar with their school district's curriculum for students who are the same age and grade level as their child. Parents must also know how their child's disability affects their participation in that curriculum. Additionally, the school district must ensure that a person on the Team is available who understands the general curriculum and can be helpful in discussing how the student could participate in it.

**No Child Left Behind (NCLB):** On January 8, 2002, President Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act, a new education law. No Child Left Behind, or NCLB, concentrates on four main areas: accountability, flexibility, scientifically-based research, and options for parents.

- **Accountability** means that schools and districts will be held accountable for how well they serve their students.
- **Flexibility** means that NCLB wants to offer states, school districts, and schools more flexibility in how they use federal funds.
- NCLB also wants to offer states flexibility in regards to the teaching strategies they use. In exchange, it requires that each state develop a plan such that by the end of the 2005-2006 school year, all teachers are "highly qualified."
- Regarding **scientifically-based research**, NCLB plans to target federal funds on programs it believes have been proven successful through scientific research.
- Finally, NCLB offers a set of **opportunities and rights for parents**. Every school receiving Title I money must have a parent involvement policy and a school-parent compact. Under NCLB, certain low-performing Title I schools must offer students and their parents school choice or supplemental educational services. All schools and districts must give parents "report cards" on the school's and district's performance. Information on the report cards should include whether or not your child is eligible for school choice

and supplemental services, as well as information on the professional qualifications of the school's teachers.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requires that students must be tested for academic progress at least once during each of 3 grade spans: 3-5, 6-9 and 10-12. Starting with the 2005-2006 school year, NCLB requires that students be tested once a year between grades 3 and 8. NCLB also requires that the test used must align with the general curriculum framework standards. The test that Massachusetts has chosen to fulfill this mandate is called The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS).

MCAS tests knowledge defined in the curriculum frameworks—students show what they know and what they can do. In order to be held accountable for the knowledge tested on the MCAS, every child must have had the chance to learn the same information—This is called access to the general curriculum.

MCAS provides accountability on the individual, school, district and even state level. You can look at your child's school report card to get information on its dropout rate, its teachers, its MCAS scores, and whether or not the school made adequate yearly progress (AYP). MCAS results help generate the information included on these report cards. (MCAS tests Math, Eng. Lang. Arts, Science & Technology as well as History & Social Sciences. However, only Math and English Language Arts scores are currently used as graduation requirements. Starting with the 2007-08 school year, NCLB requires that students be tested on science as well as math and reading.)

Resources:

Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks cost \$6.00 per subject and can also be downloaded from the MA Dept. of Ed. Website at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html>. They should also be available as reference materials at your child's school.

**For more information on Access to the General Curriculum please contact the Parent Training and Information (PTI) project at the Federation for Children with Special Needs. They will help you register for an Access workshop.**

**For more information on NCLB and options for families attending schools that do not make adequate yearly progress please contact Parents' PLACE at the Federation. Or go to:**

- [www.NoChildLeftBehind.gov](http://www.NoChildLeftBehind.gov)
- [www.nifl.gov](http://www.nifl.gov)
- [www.baeo.org](http://www.baeo.org)
- [www.edreform.com](http://www.edreform.com)





## **Access to the General Curriculum Defined**

Goal: Improved academic competence for students with disabilities.

1. According to the state and local frame works, students with disabilities are taught the same curriculum as the general population of the school. There is one core curriculum for all students.
2. All classes are open to every student including shop and home economics.
3. Special educators specially design instruction to meet the needs of students with disabilities by accommodating special needs and modifying content, teaching methods, and assignment requirements. Regular and special educators as well as school staff then apply the accommodations and modifications to the curriculum and life of the school.
4. Students with disabilities are fully integrated into all facets of school life. All services and activities are open to everyone including guidance programs and post-secondary planning, after school activities/sports, dances, student government and clubs.
5. Access to the general curriculum does NOT include different instructional content or separate after school activities.

The IEP is a tool to help the student with disabilities access, participate in and make progress in the general curriculum and life of the school.

