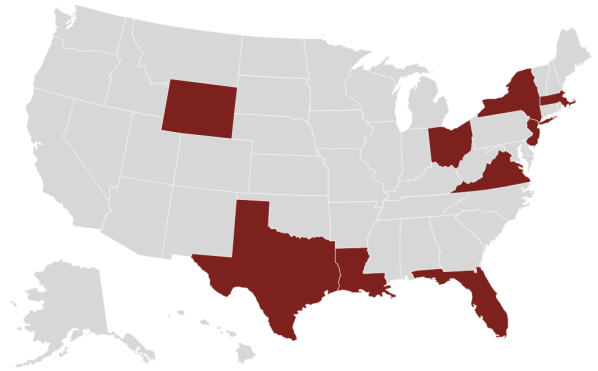


What is the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)?

Developed after the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993, the MCAS is series of assessments (i.e. tests) that measure student learning and growth towards the MA Curriculum Frameworks. It is given to MA public school students in grades 3 - 8 and in high school. It is the only consistent assessment that all MA public school students take.

What could voters be deciding?

Voters could decide if Massachusetts should eliminate the requirement that students pass the high school ELA, Math, and Science MCAS exams in order to earn a high school diploma.



Nine U.S. states currently require students to pass comprehensive standardized tests to earn a high school diploma.

What are some key facts about MCAS?

- Massachusetts students have a single pathway to a high school diploma. They must demonstrate competency by achieving a minimum score on their high school MCAS exams in ELA, Math, and Science *and* meet local requirements.
- The class of 2003 was the first graduating class for whom earning a passing score on MCAS was required for graduation.
- Between 97% and 99% of Massachusetts public school students participate in MCAS.
- Students can retake MCAS exams up to five times, and an appeal process is available for those not earning a passing score.
- In 2023 82% of students met the graduation testing requirement by the end of 10th grade.
- 96% of students meet the state's Competency Determination (e.g. achieving a minimum MCAS score) to earn a diploma.
- Each year about 700 students, approximately 1% of the graduating class, do not earn a high school diploma because they have not passed the state's Competency Determination.
- One-third of students who drop out of high school have not passed the MCAS exams required for graduation.

What do supporters and opponents say?

Supporters of the ballot question say...

- The high stakes of MCAS results in narrowing of the curriculum and more focus on teaching the content or types of questions on the exam.
- The MCAS graduation requirement is harmful to students with disabilities and multilingual learners.
- Students of color and low-income students are disproportionately denied diplomas.
- There should be more options for students to demonstrate proficiency, including performance assessments and capstone projects.
- A single data point or test should not be the sole determinant in something so important to a student's academic or work future.

Opponents of the ballot question say...

- The MCAS requirement is currently the only consistent graduation requirement across all districts.
- The graduation requirement ensures that no student is socially promoted.
- The graduation requirement communicates to employers that students possess basic academic skills and competencies.
- The graduation requirement advances the aim of equity because it demands a basic level of academic achievement.
- There is no empirical evidence that the graduation requirement has led to a decline in graduation rates or an increase in dropout rates.

Research and Data Findings

- The most dramatic increase in 10th grade MCAS Math scores occurred only when the graduation requirement was enacted (Sireci and Sireci, 2007).
- Low-income urban students are just as likely to retake the test as equally skilled suburban students, but they have less success on the retest (Papay, Murnane, and Willett, 2010).
- Exit tests have produced few of the expected benefits and have been associated with costs for the most disadvantaged students (Holme, Richards, Jimerson, Cohen, 2010).
- When California implemented a graduation testing requirement, there was little to no effect on the graduation rates of white students. It had a large negative effect on Black, Hispanic, and Asian students (Reardon, 2010).
- Many English language learners struggle with the language demands and drop out as a result (Blaise, 2018).
- There is strong evidence that the MCAS test itself predicts longer-term outcomes, including earnings, above and beyond typical markers of student advantage (Papay, Mantil, Murnane, Donohue, McDonough, 2020).
- The 4-year graduation rate in Massachusetts has gone from 79.9% in 2006 to 90.1% in 2022. The dropout rate has also decreased from 4.6% in 1994 to 2.1% in 2022 (Curtin, 2023).
- The pattern of increased graduation rates when the testing requirement was paused due to the pandemic showed historically underserved groups (e.g. students of color and low-income students) graduating at higher rates. The MCAS graduation requirement appears to be a barrier that is holding students back (Kruger, 2024).

Ballot Question Summary

Under this proposed law, to satisfy the competency requirement for high school graduation, students would either be required to achieve a minimum score on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) (or other statewide or district-wide assessments) or be required to satisfy school or district requirements for class credits, grades and attendance.

This proposed law would still require students to take the MCAS in the tenth grade, and those students who do not achieve a minimum score would be required to take the test a second time (in either the eleventh or twelfth grades). Students who enter Massachusetts schools in the eleventh or twelfth grades would only be required to take the MCAS one time.

This proposed law would allow former students who were denied their high school diplomas solely due to poor MCAS performance to request and receive their high school diplomas if they previously satisfied school or district requirements for class credits, grades and attendance.

This proposed law would prohibit any information about a student's MCAS performance from being included on the student's official high school transcript without the student's written permission.

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