**DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS WITH LOW MCAS PARTICIPATION: RESOURCES AND GUIDANCE**

This resource and guidance document is for districts and/or schools designated as “Requiring Assistance or Intervention” due to low participation in the spring 2024 MCAS and ACCESS assessments for:

* the district overall;
* the school overall and/or;
* one or more student groups in one or more subjects.

The Department has a firm commitment to providing a high-quality education that meets state standards for all students, including those who have been historically marginalized due to disability, English language proficiency, race, and poverty. MCAS testing provides a critical set of common data from districts and schools across the Commonwealth that helps us assess how we are doing as a state in meeting that commitment to students.

The Department requires that districts and schools identified for low participation take steps to assess the root causes that contributed to the designation and implement necessary changes during this academic year. Attached are resources and guidance developed to support districts and schools with low participation in statewide assessments as they evaluate potential root causes and develop strategies to address them. The resources:

* describe some of the most common reasons districts and schools are identified for low participation;
* offer strategies for addressing them;
* include links to reference materials and resources that you may find useful; and
* provide contact information for DESE offices that can answer questions and provide clarifications that may be helpful.

We thank you for your effort to take concerted steps toward ensuring educational equity for all students in the Commonwealth.

**GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR ALL LOW PARTICIPATION DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS**

Make certain all staff (e.g., district and school administrators, testing coordinators, EL program coordinators and teachers, special education supervisors and teachers, and data managers) are familiar with [state regulations and requirements](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/participation.html) for participation in statewide testing by *all* students in Grades 3-8 and 10, including English learners and students with disabilities (including students with significant cognitive disabilities).

# Low Participation of Students with Disabilities

**Common Scenario: The school or district does not assess one or more students with disabilities.**

**Remedy:** Each student's IEP or 504 plan must document how, not whether, a student will participate in MCAS in the coming year.

## Resources/guidance and steps districts and schools can take:

DESE offers an array of useful publications and resources developed to provide districts and schools with guidance and support on:

* *Making decisions about how students with disabilities will be tested.* DESE’s annual publication, the [**Principal's Manual for MCAS-Alt**](https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/pam.docx)includes specific participation guidelines (beginning with a decision-making tool for MCAS Participation by Students with Disabilities for IEP Teams to use in making decisions about how students with disabilities will be tested.
* *Providing appropriate accommodations for students.* DESE’s [MCAS Accessibility and](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/accessibility/) [Accommodations](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/accessibility/) webpage offers a wide array of resources and policy guidelines for students with disabilities who will participate in the routine MCAS tests with accommodations. The site includes access to approved graphic organizers and supplemental reference sheets, assistive technology guidelines, and guidelines for the participation of students diagnosed with concussions.
* *MCAS Alternate Assessment (MCAS-Alt) Guidance.* This [webpage](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/default.html) provides resources that include an [overview](https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/default.html) and [frequently asked questions](https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/faq.html) about the MCAS-Alt, [resources and training](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/resources.html) materials, [sample portfolio strands,](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/samples.html) and information on [scoring and reporting MCAS-Alt results.](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/results.html)

# Low Participation of English Learners

**Common scenario: EL students are not tested in both MCAS ELA and ACCESS for ELLs tests.**

## Remedy: EL students must complete all four domains of the ACCESS test (i.e. listening, reading, speaking, and writing) and the ELA MCAS test to be counted as a participant in a district and/or school’s statistics, with the exception of first-year ELs who are not required to participate in the ELA MCAS test.

## Resources/guidance and steps districts and schools can take:

* Review the MCAS participation requirements and accommodations information for EL students in the [Principals Administration Manual**,**](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/testadmin/manual/PAM.pdf) p. 125–129.
* Review the [ACCESS for ELLs](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/access/) [web page](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/access/) (Accessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners), and especially the EL Assessment Updates.
* If an EL student has a disability that requires an accommodation or would preclude them from taking one or more subdomains of the ACCESS test, please review the [Principal's Pre-Administration Manual for ACCESS for ELLs: Tasks to be Completed in 2023-2024](https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/access/ppam.docx) (p.5). Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities may be eligible to take the [WIDA Alternate ACCESS.](https://wida.wisc.edu/assess/alt-access) Please see [Participation Guidelines for WIDA Alternate ACCESS 2023-2024](https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/access/participation-guidelines.html) for information on which students may be eligible for the WIDA Alternate ACCESS or email access@mass.gov to determine the appropriate course of action for a particular student.

**Common scenario: A student exits EL status at the beginning of the school year, but the district’s October SIMS submission does not reflect the programmatic change.** DESE uses student data submitted by districts to calculate student participation in testing. As a result, students who are reported as ELs in SIMS who participate in ELA MCAS but do not participate in ACCESS will be identified as non-participants in the required statewide assessments.

## Resources/guidance and steps districts and schools can take:

In this case, the school should *not* administer the ACCESS test to the student but should correct the SIMS data reported to DESE in a subsequent submission. In addition, the student should be removed from test registration in WIDA AMS, and if necessary, reported during the ACCESS discrepancy reporting window in the early summer. If the former EL student remains flagged for non-participation, the district should report it to DESE during the MCAS discrepancy reporting window in August.

# Low Participation of Students in Alternate Settings

**Common scenario: A district assumes that it is not responsible for testing students who are temporarily receiving educational services in an out-of-district placement or alternate setting during the MCAS testing window.**

**Remedy:** Districts are expected to provide an alternative plan to test those students, either in the temporary setting or if that is not possible, in an alternate test setting. This may apply to:

* Students who have been expelled but receive educational services from the district;
* Students enrolled in institutional settings that receive educational services from the district;
* Students enrolled in private schools that receive special education that is publicly funded *(includes approved and unapproved private special education schools within and outside Massachusetts)*;
* Students in custody of either the Department of Children and Families (DCF) or the Department of Youth Services (DYS);
* Students served under a home or hospital program of instruction due to an illness, injury, or temporary disability;
* Students currently in a temporary evaluative placement outside the district.

## Resources/guidance and steps districts and schools can take:

* Make arrangements with the student’s current educational setting to ensure that the student has an opportunity to participate in the assessment with a test administrator and materials provided by the student’s home district.

# For Further Information and Assistance

Office of Student Assessment: mcas@doe.mass.edu

Office of Language Acquisition: el@doe.mass.edu

Office of District and School Accountability: Elementarysecondaryed.act@mass.gov

Office of Special Education Planning and Policy: specialeducation@doe.mass.edu

Statewide System of Support:

* Associate Commissioner: Charmie Curry charmie.r.curry@mass.gov
* Coastal Region: Sheryl Rabbit sheryl.rabbitt@mass.gov
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Office of Effective Partnerships and Impact

* Senior Director: Rebecca Shor Rebecca.Shor@mass.gov