Purpose of This Manual

The *Principal’s Manual for MCAS-Alt* is intended to support administrators who oversee the MCAS Alternate Assessment (MCAS-Alt) process and the submission of student portfolios in their school or program. The MCAS-Alt is a component of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) that is intended to assess the academic achievement of a relatively small number of students with significant disabilities who are unable to take the standard MCAS tests, even with test accommodations, but who are nevertheless required by law to participate in statewide assessments. The process of compiling an MCAS-Alt portfolio is an important opportunity for educators to identify educational goals for students who have been designated by their IEP teams and in their 504 plans to participate in alternate assessments, and to share information about students’ progress in meeting those challenging goals.

This manual highlights the critical dates, activities, and oversight procedures that must be accomplished each year, and the steps needed to ensure that complete and accurate portfolios are submitted each spring. It identifies areas in which resources and attention will be needed to support the instruction and assessment of students with significant disabilities.

The cooperation of administrators will be essential in assisting the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to report effectively on the progress and performance of *all* students to parents, schools, and the public; and to assist schools in developing challenging programs of instruction for students with significant disabilities.

Thank you for participating in this vital component of the statewide assessment system.
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## Summary of Important Dates Regarding 2018 MCAS-Alt

(see **Timeline** on next page for details)

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<tr>
<th><strong>Before Submission</strong></th>
<th><strong>Order MCAS-Alt submission materials</strong></th>
<th><strong>January 8–19, 2018</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Receive submission materials (binders, etc.)</td>
<td><strong>Week of February 26</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Order additional submission materials, as needed</td>
<td><strong>March 5 through March 23</strong></td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Submission</strong></th>
<th><strong>Schedule UPS pickup at</strong> <a href="http://www.mcasservicecenter.com">www.mcasservicecenter.com</a></th>
<th><strong>March 15 through 3 p.m., March 28</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Deadline for UPS pickup</strong></td>
<td><strong>5:00 p.m., March 29</strong></td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Results Reported</strong></th>
<th><strong>Results posted electronically in Dropbox Central</strong></th>
<th><strong>Week of June 11</strong></th>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Score Appeals</strong></th>
<th><strong>File electronically, if a scoring discrepancy is noted (Note: school must have retained a photocopy of portfolio)</strong></th>
<th><strong>5:00 p.m., June 22</strong></th>
</tr>
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## Contact Information

**MCAS Service Center**

- **Hours:** 8:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday–Friday
- **Phone:** 800-737-5103
- **Email:** mcas@measuredprogress.org
- **Web:** [www.measuredprogress.org](http://www.measuredprogress.org) [www.mcasservicecenter.com](http://www.mcasservicecenter.com)

**Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**

- **Hours:** 8:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday–Friday
- **Phone:** 781-338-3625
- **Fax:** 781-338-3630
- **Email:** mcas@doe.mass.edu
- **Web:** [www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/)
MCAS-Alt Suggested Timeline for Principals

2017

September/October
- Send Parent/Guardian Reports to home of students.
- Store returned portfolios securely (see Storage and Destruction of Returned MCAS-Alt Portfolios).
- Encourage teachers compiling MCAS-Alt portfolios to attend an ESE-sponsored Educator Training session (flyers faxed to schools and posted to www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/resources.html).
- Register to attend an ESE-sponsored Administrator’s Overview of MCAS and MCAS-Alt for Students with Disabilities.

November/December
- Ensure that teachers have begun compiling student portfolios.

2018

January
- Order MCAS-Alt binders and submission materials.
- Encourage teachers to attend an ESE-sponsored portfolio review session.

February
- After receiving shipment of binders and submission materials, complete online Principal’s Certification of Proper MCAS-Alt Administration (PCPA)–Part 1.
- Encourage teachers to attend final ESE-sponsored portfolio review session (late February).
- Verify that teachers have made substantial progress on their students’ portfolios (see Supporting Teachers Who Conduct the MCAS-Alt).

March
- Verify that teachers are completing their students’ portfolios.
- Ensure that the school received a sufficient number of binders and submission materials, especially for newly enrolled students taking MCAS-Alt.
- Order additional submission materials, if needed, by March 6.
- Schedule UPS pickup through MCAS Service Center by 3:00 p.m., Wed., March 28.
- Deadline for portfolio shipment: 5:00 p.m., Thursday, March 29.

June
- Retrieve preliminary results from the school’s DropBox in the Department’s Security Portal.
- Download Portfolio Feedback Forms (PFFs) from your school’s DropBox.
- Share PFFs with teachers who created the portfolio(s).
- Review the MCAS-Alt score appeals process (see MCAS-Alt Score Appeals).
- If needed, submit score appeal(s) by 5:00 p.m., Friday, June 22.
MCAS Participation Guidelines

As you are aware, students must participate in grade-level assessments that correspond with the grade in which they are reported in the Department’s Student Information Management System (SIMS). The decision regarding how a student will participate in MCAS, and whether he or she will require an alternate assessment, is made annually in each subject scheduled for assessment by the student’s **IEP team**, or by the educators responsible for developing 504 plans, using the guidelines provided below.

The student’s IEP team or 504 plan coordinator should answer the following questions and consider the decision-making flowchart on the next page.

- Can the student demonstrate knowledge and skills on the computer- or paper-based MCAS test under routine conditions?
- Does the student require accommodations or accessibility features to demonstrate knowledge and skills on the test? If so, which ones are necessary?
- If no to both questions above, does the student need an alternate assessment? A student should be designated for the MCAS-Alt if he or she is
  - working on **learning standards** that have been **substantially modified** below grade-level expectations due to the severity of the disability; and
  - receiving **intensive, individualized instruction** in order to acquire, generalize, and demonstrate knowledge and skills; and
  - unable to demonstrate knowledge and skills on an on-demand computer- or paper-based test, even with accommodations and accessibility features.

A student may take the computer- or paper-based MCAS test in one subject and the MCAS-Alt in another. These assessment decisions should be reviewed, and may be revised, each time the team meets. The student’s IEP or 504 plan must include a separate determination in each subject scheduled for assessment.

Teams should **not** assume that a student requires an alternate assessment based solely on whether he or she:

- has not been provided instruction in the general curriculum;
- has a specific disability (e.g., all students with intellectual disabilities should not automatically be designated for the MCAS-Alt);
- is placed in a program or classroom where it is expected that all students will take the MCAS-Alt;
- has taken an alternate assessment previously (since this is an annual decision);
- has previously failed the MCAS test;
- is an English language learner;
- is from a low-income family or is a child in foster care;
- requires the use of assistive technology or an alternative augmentative communication system; or
• attends a school in which the IEP team may have been influenced to designate the student for an alternate assessment in order for the school to receive disproportionate credit toward the school’s accountability rating.

A student with a severe and complex disability who is working *at or close to grade level* may be designated either for the MCAS-Alt “grade-level” (grades 3–8) or “competency” (high school) portfolio, if they are unable to take the computer- or paper-based MCAS tests.

High school students submitting a “competency” portfolio may use this assessment to satisfy the Competency Determination (CD) requirement, if they can demonstrate in their portfolio a level of achievement comparable to that of a student who has met the CD requirements. This requirement is met by achieving a performance level of Needs Improvement or higher on the “competency” portfolio in that subject. See the 2018 Educator’s Manual for MCAS-Alt for more information.

### MCAS-Alt and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Beginning in the 2017–2018 school year, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) places a *statewide cap of 1 percent of students* who may take alternate assessments based on *alternate achievement standards*. This refers to the basic MCAS-Alt, but not to “grade-level” and “competency” portfolios. A [memo from the Commissioner](#) was posted to the Department’s web page last March to assist in understanding the new requirements, to provide resources for use by districts in meeting the new requirements, and to share data regarding the percentage of students in each district who took the MCAS-Alt in 2016.

The Commissioner requested that districts review this information, including guidance and criteria for IEP teams to determine which students should take an alternate assessment. Materials for annual training of IEP teams were made available, as well as a sample [parent notification letter](#), which ESSA now requires districts to send to parents and guardians of students taking the MCAS-Alt. Finally, districts were asked to provide written assurances to the Department that IEP teams would be trained annually, parents would be notified, and whether the district was likely to exceed one percent of eligible students taking the MCAS-Alt.

It is reasonable to assume that *some* students who were designated for the MCAS-Alt in the past may be more suited in 2017–2018 to take either new online or paper MCAS tests with accommodations; or submit a “grade-level” or “competency” portfolio instead. It is the Department's goal to provide as many students as possible with an opportunity to learn (and be assessed on) grade-level curriculum, and to ensure that students with disabilities in high school are not deprived of the opportunity to earn a diploma. However, the Department is not asking IEP teams to "get students off the alternate assessment" in order to meet the one percent statewide requirement. The Department has already submitted a waiver request to the U.S. Department of Education for relief from this provision. Nonetheless, the one percent ESSA cap is an opportunity to revisit decisions to assign students to the basic MCAS-Alt who may be able to access assessments based on grade-level achievement standards.
Decision-Making Tool for MCAS Participation by Students with Disabilities

The “decision tree” shown below may be used by IEP teams and 504 plan coordinators to make annual decisions regarding appropriate student participation in MCAS for each content area being assessed.

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1 An explanation and examples of “complex and significant disabilities” can be found on page 11 of the Educator’s Manual for MCAS-Alt.
2 See pages 41–61 in the Educator’s Manual for MCAS-Alt for details on the submission requirements of “grade-level” and “competency” portfolios.
Principals are responsible for the following activities:

- Ensuring that all students with disabilities participate in MCAS as prescribed by their IEP team, or as listed in their 504 plan;
- Monitoring the alternate assessment process to ensure that student work is neither duplicated, altered, nor fabricated in a way that provides information that is false or portrays the student’s performance inaccurately;
- Identifying qualified school personnel to administer the MCAS-Alt and ensure that all staff responsible for compiling and submitting receives training prior to each administration, regardless of past experience conducting similar assessments;
- Ensuring adequate school resources are allocated and staff coordinated, to guarantee appropriate participation in, and timely submission of, MCAS-Alt portfolios. Resources should include the allocation of sufficient time to compile evidence and enter data by the submission deadline;
- Ordering MCAS-Alt materials (in January), and reviewing the Materials Summary and the contents of shipments (in February), which include
  - three-ring binders (one for each student’s portfolio)
  - plastic envelopes (one for each portfolio)
  - one envelope addressed to the principal containing shipping labels, individual Student Information Booklets, Materials Summary form, and score appeal information;
- Scheduling a UPS pick-up through the MCAS Service Center by 3:00 p.m. on Wednesday, March 28, for pick-up no later than 5:00 p.m. on Thursday, March 29, 2018.
- Completing the online PCPA–Part 1 after reviewing the Materials Summary;
- Submitting MCAS-Alt portfolios, and completing Part 2 of the PCPA, which provides assurances that all information is accurate and complete for each student.
- Ensuring that each student’s MCAS-Alt forms are accurately completed, including the MCAS-Alt Student Identification Booklets.
- Reporting MCAS-Alt irregularities in cases where it is alleged that an MCAS-Alt administration was compromised by contacting the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education at 781-338-3625.
  - When this occurs, the Department will request a local fact-finding investigation into the alleged irregularity and a written report based on the results of the investigation within an established timeline.
Supporting Teachers Who Conduct the MCAS-Alt

Principals can support teachers who are conducting the MCAS-Alt by

- encouraging an early start to the portfolio process (i.e., identifying students taking the MCAS-Alt, setting up student folders, identifying instructional goals and activities);
- encouraging collaboration among general education, special education, and related services staff, including paraprofessionals, to collect data and evidence for the portfolios;
- encouraging teachers to attend a fall training session and winter portfolio review session(s) in January and February;
- providing flexible scheduling and planning time to work on portfolios;
- appointing an MCAS-Alt lead educator to find answers, give advice, and be available to assist as needed; and
- reviewing portfolios periodically.

Principals should be aware that teachers compiling MCAS-Alt portfolios are responsible for

- collecting authentic and accurate student information and work samples
- identifying challenging instructional goals, then documenting the outcomes of activities related to each goal;
- collecting evidence in the form of work samples for the portfolio that reflect each instructional goal;
- calculating the percentages of accuracy and independence for each activity and recording this information on a data chart provided in their Online Forms and Graphs program and in the Educator’s Manual for MCAS-Alt;
- repeating these steps for each “portfolio strand” required in the content area being assessed; and
- completing all required forms, including the Portfolio Cover Sheet, Strand Cover Sheets, Student Identification Booklet, Parent Verification Form, student introduction, consent form to photograph the student, work sample description forms, and data charts.
Scoring MCAS-Alt Portfolios

After portfolios are submitted to the Department each spring, they are reviewed and scored at a scoring center sponsored by the Department and its test contractor. The Department’s publication, *2017 Guidelines for Scoring MCAS-Alt Portfolios*, provides detailed information on the scoring process used by scorers to review and rate each student’s portfolio. Scoring occurs each April and early May under the Department’s direct supervision, using hired and trained scorers from Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Scorers are monitored continually for their accuracy and consistency.

Instructions for Viewing and Downloading MCAS-Alt Preliminary Results

In order to view the MCAS-Alt Portfolio Feedback Forms (PFFs) once they are available, principals must log in to the Department’s Security Portal and click on Application List, then choose DropBox Central, and look under the school name. For assistance logging in, see your district or organization Directory Administrator.

Final results are usually posted in mid-September and reflect changes made as a result of discrepancies reported to the Department and MCAS-Alt score appeals (see section above on score appeals). Student portfolios are returned to schools in October and must be stored securely.

Note: Students in grade 9 who submitted an MCAS-Alt portfolio in Science and Technology/Engineering, and who did not achieve a score of at least Needs Improvement, will be reported as “Previously Failed” on their PFF in grade 10.

MCAS-Alt Score Appeals

Once preliminary results are reported electronically in mid-June, a teacher or principal may submit an MCAS-Alt score appeal if there is evidence that a portfolio was scored incorrectly. The deadline for score appeals submission is 5:00 p.m. on Friday, June 22, 2018. Score appeals cannot be accepted after this date.

The following materials must be reviewed by the school before submitting a score appeal:

- the Portfolio Feedback Form (PFF) from the scored portfolio (available in schools’ DropBoxes the week of June 11, 2018);
- the photocopy of the portfolio kept at the school to demonstrate that the score on the PFF does not represent the portfolio accurately;
- the MCAS-Alt score appeal application (available in mid-June); and
- frequently-asked-questions about MCAS-Alt score appeals.

Reporting MCAS-Alt Results

Scaled (i.e., numerical) scores are not assigned to MCAS-Alt results. Instead, alternate assessment results are reported as achievement levels only:

- For grades 3–8: Exceeding Expectations, Meeting Expectations, Partially Meeting Expectations, Not Meeting Expectations, Progressing, Emerging, Awareness, or
Incomplete. (A score of Incomplete means there was insufficient information to provide a score in that subject.)

- For high school: Advanced, Proficient, Needs Improvement, Progressing, Emerging, Awareness, or Incomplete. (A score of “Incomplete” means that there was insufficient information to provide a score in that subject.)

**Parent/Guardian Reports**

In October 2017, districts will receive MCAS-Alt Parent/Guardian Reports. These reports will provide a detailed description of a child’s score in each area of the scoring rubric and an overall achievement level in each subject of the alternate assessment.

The district must send a parent/guardian report to the student’s home. If the student is also reported as an English language learner (ELL), a copy of the parent/guardian report in the student’s home language must be sent to the home of the student. Print copies of translations of the report “shell” in the ten most prevalent languages are provided in the shipment of MCAS-Alt Parent/Guardian Reports. Translated reports “shells” are also available online.

**School and District Results**

Preliminary school and district performance-level results and Portfolio Feedback Forms are posted to DropBox Central in the Department’s Security Portal in mid-June. Official results are posted in fall and reflect the changes made as a result of discrepancies reported to the Department, as well as the results of MCAS-Alt score appeals. Students’ portfolios are returned to schools in mid-September.

District level results include achievement-level results for students attending each school in a district, as well as for those students who reside in the district and attend publicly funded out-of-district placements, such as educational collaboratives or approved and unapproved private special education schools.

To meet federal requirements for reporting disaggregated and aggregated results of statewide assessments for all students, the results of MCAS-Alt are included in school, district, and statewide reports of MCAS results as achievement levels only. The achievement levels of Incomplete, Awareness, Emerging, and Progressing will be included in the lowest achievement level for the purpose of school and district reporting.

**School and District Accountability**

The state’s accountability system is currently under development, in accordance with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). MCAS-Alt participation and results will be included in the new system, together with the results of students taking the MCAS tests, but details have not yet been finalized.
Storage and Destruction of Returned MCAS-Alt Portfolios

In September of each year, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) returns scored MCAS-Alt portfolios to the school that submitted them in the spring.

Once returned, an MCAS-Alt portfolio becomes part of a student’s temporary record, and must be kept by the school in a secure location. Under the Massachusetts Student Records Regulations, a temporary record contains everything that is not in the transcript and that is “clearly of importance to the educational process.”

Principals or their designees are required to periodically review temporary student records, and to destroy portions that are “misleading, dated, or irrelevant.” Prior to destroying these records, schools must give parents and eligible students written notice of the intent to destroy records, and of the parents’ right to receive copies of these records before they are destroyed (603 CMR 23.06(2)).

Regardless of the obligation to review and periodically purge temporary records of “misleading, dated, or irrelevant” documents, schools must destroy students’ temporary records no later than seven years after the student transfers, graduates, or withdraws from public school (i.e., a student’s temporary records must be destroyed within seven years after the student exits). However, schools may destroy “misleading, dated, or irrelevant” documents prior to this time by providing written notice to the student and his/her parent of the approximate date of destruction of the record and of their right to receive these materials in whole or in part prior to their destruction.

The Department recommends the following time periods for schools to retain MCAS-Alt portfolios after the Department has returned them to the schools, based on the general view that, over time, the importance of the portfolios to the educational process diminishes and ultimately they become dated and irrelevant:

- grades 3–8 ELA and Mathematics portfolios: retain two years after return of portfolios to school
- grades 5 and 8 Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) portfolios:
  - retain three years after grade 5 STE portfolios are returned to school
  - retain two years after grade 8 STE portfolios are returned to school
- high school ELA, Mathematics, and STE portfolios: retain two years after the student exits public education

Despite these recommendations, schools and districts should be aware of circumstances in which it may be prudent to retain MCAS-Alt portfolios longer than the above recommended time periods and treat the destruction of MCAS-Alt portfolios for specific students on a case-by-case basis. However, in all cases, records must be destroyed within the seven-year period described above.
Frequently Asked Questions

1. What if a student moves into my school late in the school year?
   A. If a student has moved from another Massachusetts district and will take the MCAS-Alt, the Department encourages you to contact the sending school and arrange for the student’s portfolio to be sent to the receiving school. The receiving school must complete and submit the portfolio.

   If the student has moved to a Massachusetts school from another state, the teacher should attempt to collect evidence in the remaining time before the deadline and submit what has been collected.

2. Is there a date after which a transfer student would be exempt from participating in the MCAS-Alt?
   A. No, there is no cut-off date beyond which a student is exempt from the assessment, unless it is past the date of portfolio submission (March 29, 2018).

3. How does a transfer student’s score affect my school’s accountability?
   A. The transfer student will be counted either as a participant or non-participant in the new school; if the student has not attended the school for the entire academic year, the student’s score is only included at the district level.

4. How should school report medically-excused absences?
   A. The Student Identification Booklet includes a box entitled “Not Tested Status” that must be completed if a student will not participate in the assessment for a medical reason. Documentation must be kept at the school for students who will not participate for medical reasons. The absent student will be reported as a non-participant in the assessment.

5. Must the district provide a copy of the portfolio to the parent, if requested?
   A. Yes, a copy of the MCAS-Alt portfolio must be furnished by the district to the parent/guardian, if requested.

6. May a parent forbid their child’s school from submitting an MCAS-Alt portfolio for the student?
   A. It is the Department’s expectation that schools will submit an MCAS-Alt portfolio for each student designated for an alternate assessment in the IEP. Parents may not impose a restriction on their child’s participation in the MCAS-Alt, nor restrict the school from submitting the student’s portfolio.