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

Orientation for District IEP Teams and Other Interested Staff

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**Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): The “One Percent” Rule**

- “The total number of students assessed in a subject using an alternate assessment aligned with *alternate academic achievement standards*...may not exceed 1% of the total number of students in the state who are assessed in that subject.”
  - **Districts** may exceed 1%, if justification is provided.
  - **States** may not exceed 1%, but may request a one-year waiver, if 95% of students were assessed.

**ESSA Also Requires Parental Notification of Participation in an Alternate Assessment**

Parents must be clearly informed as part of the IEP process, that:

- their child’s academic achievement will be measured based on “alternate achievement standards;” and
- participation in an alternate assessment may eventually delay or otherwise affect completing the requirements for a diploma.

(See Sample *Parent Notification Letter – Attachment 4*)
Goals and Outcomes of the Alternate Assessment

- To include difficult-to-assess students in assessment and accountability (it’s the law).
- To ensure that standards-based skills and content are taught at levels that are meaningful and challenging.
- To determine which knowledge and skills students have learned.
- To provide information to schools and parents on the achievement of students with significant disabilities (i.e., what they can do).

Who Should Take MCAS-Alt?

A student with a disability who is....
- Working on learning standards that have been substantially modified due to the severity of the disability, and is
- Receiving intensive, individualized instruction in order to acquire, generalize, and demonstrate knowledge and skills, and is
- Unable to demonstrate knowledge and skills on a standardized, on-demand paper or online test, even with accommodations,

. . . should take the MCAS-Alt in that subject.
(Teams decide annually in each content area)

A student should not take the MCAS-Alt based solely on...

- a particular disability or placement
- previous low achievement on MCAS or classwork
- lack of standards-based instruction
- participation in MCAS-Alt the previous year (since this is an annual decision)
- ELL status
- low income or child in foster care
- Administrator decision for accountability purposes

Other assessment options for students with significant disabilities

A student with a significant disability should be considered for a grade-level or competency portfolio, if he/she:
- performs classroom work at or near grade-level;
- cannot demonstrate knowledge and skills on the MCAS test in that grade and subject, even with accommodations; and
- is attempting to earn a score that is comparable to a student who takes and passes the MCAS test.
**Decision-Making Tool to guide IEP teams in determining the appropriate assessment option**

**Next Steps for IEP Teams**

- Team members review guidelines, criteria, and decision-making tool in Commissioner’s memo.  
  - Review the IEPs of students currently taking the MCAS-Alt during annual IEP meetings.  
  - Determine if students meet the criteria for MCAS-Alt.  
- If administering MCAS-Alt, provide parents with a notification letter.

**Next Steps for Districts**

- Review your district’s rate of MCAS-Alt participation.  
  - See attachment to Commissioner’s memo at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/essa.  
- District provides written justification if likely to exceed one percent in 2017–2018.  
- Retrain teams annually on criteria to be used (and not used) in selecting students for MCAS-Alt.  
- Increase awareness of other assessment options:  
  - next-generation computer-based MCAS tests (with new accessibility features), and  
  - “grade-level” and “competency” portfolios

**In Conclusion...**

- This is not intended to “get students off the MCAS-Alt” or encourage large-scale migration away from the alternate assessment.  
- Instead, ESSA gives us an opportunity to refine and clarify the criteria used for team decision-making.  
- Ensure that students who take the MCAS-Alt really need this assessment format.
ESE Contact Information

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Thank You!