MCAS-Alt and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)
TOPICS Addressed in this Training Session

• ESSA requirements and alternate assessments
  o Review Commissioner’s memo and updated attachments.
• Which students should take the MCAS-Alt?
  o Clarify the criteria for participation.
  o Become aware of other available assessment options.
• Next steps for Districts and IEP teams.
Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): The “One Percent” Rule for Statewide Alternate Assessment

• “The total number of students assessed in a subject using an alternate assessment aligned with alternate academic achievement standards...may not exceed 1 percent of the total number of students in the state who are assessed in that subject.”
  
  o Defines “1%” based on total number of students assessed in a subject.
  
  o **Districts** may exceed 1% of all assessed students if justification is provided.
    
    ▪ Districts must address any disproportional representation of students from all subgroups taking the MCAS-Alt.
  
  o **States** may exceed 1%, if a one-year waiver was granted based on assessing 95% of students and other factors.
Parent Notification of Participation in an Alternate Assessment

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

• their child’s academic achievement will be measured based on “alternate achievement standards” that reflect lower expectations than for other students; and

• participation in an alternate assessment may eventually delay or otherwise affect completion of the requirements for a diploma.

(A Sample Parent Notification Letter, translated in five languages, may be copied onto school/district stationery and must either be sent or provided at the IEP meeting.)
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 being taught at levels that are meaningful and challenging.
- To determine the 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 the MCAS-Alt?

Only a student with a significant cognitive 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 determine annually for each content area.**
A student should **not** take the MCAS-Alt based solely on...

- previous low achievement on MCAS
- a particular disability or placement
- lack of standards-based instruction
- participation in MCAS-Alt the previous year (since this is an annual decision)
- English learner (EL) status
- low income, child in foster care, or interrupted formal education
- potential impact on a school’s accountability rating
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:
  o performs classroom work at or near grade-level;
  o cannot demonstrate knowledge and skills on the MCAS test in that grade and subject, even with accommodations;

  and

  o 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

- Does the student have an IEP or 504 plan?
  - Yes
    - Can the student fully or partially demonstrate knowledge and skills on a standardized computer- or paper-based test, either with or without accommodations?
      - Yes
        - Does the student have a significant cognitive disability? AND
          - Is working on academic standards that have been modified substantially below grade-level expectations, AND
          - Is receiving intensive, individualized instruction to acquire and demonstrate knowledge and skills; AND
          - Is unable to fully or partially demonstrate knowledge and skills on a standardized test, even with the use of accommodations?
            - No
              - The student is working at or near grade-level expectations.
            - Yes
              - The student should take either the computer- or paper-based MCAS test in the content area, with appropriate accessibility features and accommodations.
        - No
          - The student should take either the computer- or paper-based MCAS test, with or without accommodations; or may be considered for the “grade-level” or “competency” portfolio.²
  - No
    - Student is ineligible to receive test accommodations or take the MCAS-Alt. Student must take the standard MCAS test using universal accessibility features, as needed.

- Does the student have a complex and significant disability¹ that would prevent him or her from fully or partially demonstrating knowledge and skills on the MCAS test, even with the use of accommodations? (for example, a significant emotional, behavioral, health-related, neurological, motor, or communication disability)
  - No
  - Yes
    - If all criteria above are met, the student should be considered for the MCAS-Alt in the content area.³
Next Steps for Districts

Districts should:

• **Review data** on rate of MCAS-Alt participation.
  - Provide assurances that, if *disproportionality* is found for students taking MCAS-Alt in any subgroup, steps will be taken to address it.
  - District data is available [here](#) and in [School and District Profiles](#).

• **Provide written justification**, if likely to exceed one percent in the current school year.

• **Retrain teams annually** on criteria to be used (and not used) for selecting students for MCAS-Alt.
  - Training presentation (PowerPoint) available [here](#).
Next Steps for IEP Teams

• Team Chairperson and team members must:
  o Be familiar with guidelines, criteria, and decision-making tool in Commissioner’s memo.
  o Review the IEPs of students currently taking the MCAS-Alt during annual IEP meetings.
  o Review assessment options and determine if student meets criteria for MCAS-Alt in each subject scheduled for assessment.
In Conclusion...

• These requirements are not intended to “take students off the MCAS-Alt” or encourage large-scale migration away from the alternate assessment.

• Instead, ESSA provides an opportunity to refine and clarify our understanding of the criteria to be used for team decision-making.

• The provision is intended to ensure that the MCAS-Alt is the “right” assessment for a student, and that it does not unintentionally lower expectations.

• Requirements are also intended to make IEP teams aware of all available assessment options.
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