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| Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Logo | |
|  | 2024–2025 Principal’s Manual for the MCAS-Alt |
|  |
| Fall 2024 |

**Purpose of This Manual**

The *Principal’s* *Manual for MCAS-Alt* is intended to support administrators and supervisors who oversee the MCAS Alternate Assessment (MCAS-Alt) administration in their school or educational program. The MCAS-Alt assesses the academic achievement of a small number of students with the *most significant cognitive disabilities* who are unable to take the standard MCAS tests, even with test accommodations, but are nevertheless required to participate in statewide assessments.

Students must participate in statewide 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 they will require an alternate assessment is made annually by the student’sIEP team, as appropriate, using the criteria provided on page 3 of this document.

Compiling the MCAS-Alt is an important opportunity for educators to identify educational goals for students based on alternate achievement standards and to share information about students’ progress in meeting those challenging goals. The MCAS-Alt is an ongoing assessment integrated into daily instruction, with data documented over time.

This manual highlights the critical deadlines, activities, and oversight procedures that must be followed each year, as well as the steps needed to ensure that complete and accurate alternate assessments are submitted each spring. It identifies areas in which resources and attention will be needed to support the instruction and assessment of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

The cooperation of administrators is essential in assisting DESE 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 the most significant disabilities.

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# Important Dates

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Before Submission* | Order MCAS-Alt submission materials | January 2–17, 2025 |
| Receive submission materials (binders, etc.) | week of February 24, 2025 |
| Order additional submission materials, as needed, at [www.mcasservicecenter.com](http://www.mcasservicecenter.com) | February 24–March 25, 2025 |
| *Submission* | Schedule UPS pick-up at  [www.mcasservicecenter.com](http://www.mcasservicecenter.com) | March 19 through  2:30 p.m. on March 27, 2025 |
| Deadline for UPS pickup | 5:00 p.m. on March 28, 2025 |
| *Results Reported* | Results posted electronically  in Dropbox Central | week of June 9, 2025 |
| *Score Appeals* | File an appeal if a scoring discrepancy is noted.  (Note: the school must have retained a photocopy of the assessment.) | 5:00 p.m. on June 20, 2025 |

# Contact Information

**MCAS Service Center**

**Hours: 8:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday–Friday**

**Phone: 800-737-5103**

**MCAS Service Center** [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@mass.gov](mailto:mcas@mass.gov)

**Web:** [www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/)

**Suggested Timeline for Principals**

**2024**

**September/October**

* Educators who are conducting the MCAS-Alt and administrators overseeing those educators should register for a [virtual fall training session](https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/resources.html).
* Encourage eligible educators to apply to be training specialists.
* Ensure that tea educators chers conduct the MCAS-Alt Skills Survey *before* identifying measurable outcomes for each strand of their students’ alternate assessment.

**November/December**

* Educators start inputting data from instructional activities.
* Administrators or designees monitor the progress of educators in compiling their students’ alternate assessments (see *Supporting Educators Who Conduct the MCAS-Alt* on page 6 of this manual).

**2025**

**January**

* Order MCAS-Alt submission materials between **January 2 and 17**. Memos containing passwords for 2025 will be posted by January 2, 2025, in DropBox Central in the Department’s [Security Portal](https://gateway.edu.state.ma.us/). School principals need a new password for ordering MCAS-Alt materials.
* Educators register for a state-sponsored [review session](https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/resources.html) (in-person or virtual).

**February**

* After receipt of materials, verify the school received the correct number of binders. (Keep the box.)
* **Complete Part 1** of the online [Principal's Certification of Proper Administration](http://www.mcasservicecenter.com/) (PCPA).
* Order additional MCAS-Alt submission materials through the MCAS Service Center, if needed.
* register for a [review session](https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/resources.html) (in-person or virtual).
* Continue to monitor educators’ progress in compiling their students’ alternate assessments.

**March**

* Verify that educators have completed their students’ MCAS-Alt assessments.
* Order additional submission materials, if needed, by March 25.
* **Schedule** your school or program’s UPS pickup through the MCAS Service Center from **Wednesday,** **March 19**, to **Thursday, March 27**, by **2:30 p.m.**
* Deadline for MCAS-Alt pick-up from schools: **5:00 p.m. on Friday, March 28.**

**June**

* **Retrieve preliminary results from the school’s DropBox in the** Department’s Security Portal (mid-June).
* **Download *MCAS-Alt Feedback Forms* (FFs)from your school’s** [DropBox](https://gateway.edu.state.ma.us/)**.**
* **Share FFs with educators who conducted the MCAS-Alt.**
* **Review the MCAS-Alt score appeals process (see page 10,** *MCAS-Alt Score Appeal****s*).**
* **If needed, submit score appeal(s) by 5:00 p.m. on Friday, June 20.**

# MCAS Participation Guidelines

All students who are educated with Massachusetts public funds, including students with disabilities, English learners, and English learners with disabilities, are required by state and federal laws to participate in statewide assessments. The question is not **whether** students with disabilities participate but **how** they will participate. A student participates in the alternate assessment in all grades and subjects for which the standard MCAS tests are required. The student’s grade is determined by information found in the Student Information Management System (SIMS) sent to DESE.

All students should be able to review MCAS practice tests before test administration to become familiar with how to access the computer-based tests.

## ****Decision-Making Guide for Participation in MCAS for Students with Disabilities****

Following federal regulations, “the identification of a student as having a particular disability as defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or as an English learner does **not** determine whether a student is a student with the *most* *significant* *cognitive* *disabilities*.” 34 C.F.R. § 200.6(d)(1)(i) (emphasis added).

The **U.S. Department of Education** also requires that each state define students having the most significant cognitive disabilities, and therefore which students are *eligible to participate* in the alternate assessments.DESEhas adopted the following definition/criteria to determine eligibility for participation in the alternate assessment:

**Students must meet *all* four of the following criteria to be eligible to participate in the MCAS-Alt:**

1. have cognitive disabilities evidenced by significant delays in attaining age-level academic achievement standards, even with systematic, extensive individually designed instruction, related services, and modifications; **and**
2. have cognitive disabilities that significantly impact their educational performance and ability to apply learning from one setting to another; **and**
3. require extensive, direct individualized instruction and substantial support to achieve measurable gains on the challenging state academic content standards for the grade in which the student is enrolled; **and**
4. perform significantly below average in general cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior. “Significantly below average” is defined as a student functioning two or more standard deviations below the mean on commonly accepted norm-referenced assessments in both cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior *(e.g., two or more adaptive skill areas such as daily living skills, communication, self-care, social skills, and academic skills).*

All four criteria must be met for a student to participate in the alternate assessment. Complete the one-page companion document [***Alternate Assessment Participation Tool***](https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/essa/) and upload it to the **MCAS-Alt File Exchange** found in the DropBox in the Security Portal.

Question 1: Does this student with disabilities meet the definition for "students with the most significant cognitive disabilities" as described above?
YES: The student is eligible for the MCAS-Alt. Note: Simply because the student is eligible does not warrant the Team to administer the MCAS-Alt. Students taking the MCAS-Alt likely will face challenges earning their high school diploma.
NO: Proceed to question 2.

Question 2: Does this student with disabilities require specific and allowable accommodations and accessibility features to demonstrate knowledge and skills on assessments?
YES: The student's IEP or 504 plan must include the specific allowable accommodations and accessibility features for MCAS testing, which should generally mirror accommodations the student receives during routine instruction.
NO: The student must participate in the standard MCAS testing using available accessibility features. Accommodations may be included int he student's IEP or 504 plan later if the student's needs change.

Teams should **not** base a decision to administer the MCAS-Alt solely on whether the student

* has not been provided instruction in the Curriculum Framework learning standards;
* is absent for an excessive number of days;
* has a specific disability (e.g., not all students with intellectual disabilities should 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 learner;
* is economically disadvantaged or is in foster care;
* requires the use of assistive technology or an alternative augmentative communication system.

## One Percent Statewide “Cap” on MCAS-Alt Participation

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) places a **statewide cap of 1 percent** of the total number of assessed studentswho may take alternate assessments based on *alternate achievement standards*. This cap applies *only* to the basic MCAS-Alt, not [grade-level and competency portfolios](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/cd-reqs/), which are discussed separately.

The [ESSA](https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/essa/) site provides districts with resources to assist them in meeting the ESSA requirements: an updated presentation intended for the annual training of IEP teams; a companion form for IEP teams to use to determine eligibility for the alternate assessment; and an updated sample parent notification letter (with translations), which districts must give or send to parents and guardians of students taking the MCAS-Alt.

DESE has requested that districts review this information, including the criteria for IEP teams to determine which students are eligible to participate in an alternate assessment. Districts will be asked to submit a justification if the number of students who will take the MCAS-Alt exceeds one percent of their assessed students. All other districts will be asked to complete a letter of assurance that all guidelines have been met.

The one-percent requirement represents an important opportunity for districts and IEP teams to revisit decisions to make the least dangerous assumption when designating students for the MCAS-Alt. It is reasonable to assume that at least some students who have been designated for the MCAS-Alt in the past may be better suited to take either computer- or paper-based MCAS tests with accommodations, especially since students who take the MCAS-Alt in high school are not eligible to meet the state’s requirements to earn a diploma. 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.

Last year, the Department was granted a waiver of this provision by the U.S. Department of Education with the understanding that it would continue to train districts on these requirements and make efforts to reduce the number of students taking the MCAS-Alt in the future. The Department intends to apply for an extension of this waiver for the 2024–2025 school year if needed.

# Principal’s Responsibilities for the MCAS-Alt

Principals are responsible for conducting the following activities:

* ensuring that all students with disabilities participate in MCAS as listed in their IEP
* following the criteria outlined in the definition of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities and recording and uploading results to the state
* identifying qualified school personnel to administer the MCAS-Alt and ensuring that all staff responsible for compiling and submitting the assessment receive training before each administration
* ensuring that all administrators overseeing educators who compile alternate assessments have attended or viewed a state-sponsored training in the fall
* monitoring the alternate assessment process and attesting that student work is not duplicated, altered, or fabricated in a way that provides false information or portrays the student’s performance inaccurately
* ensuring that adequate school resources are allocated to guarantee appropriate participation in and timely submission of MCAS-Alt portfolios

## Supporting Educators Who Conduct the MCAS-Alt

Principals should support educators who conduct the MCAS-Alt by doing the following:

* + encouraging an early start to the process (i.e., identifying students taking the MCAS-Alt, setting up student folders, completing the Skills Survey, identifying instructional goals and integrating assessment activities that align with curriculum)
  + encouraging collaboration among general education, special education, and related services staff, including paraprofessionals, to collect data and academic evidence for each student’s assessment
  + providing opportunities for educators to attend DESE-sponsored, fall, virtual training, **and** in-person winter review sessions, including classroom coverage and flexible scheduling to allow them to attend
  + providing time weekly or bi-weekly to input data
  + appointing an MCAS-Alt lead educator to be available to assist colleagues as needed
    - reviewing progress periodically to ensure that assessments are on schedule to be completed

Principals should be aware that educators compiling the MCAS-Alt are responsible for the following:

* collecting data over a minimum of **8 different dates** (as early as July if the educators have ESY)
* embedding the challenging instructional goals into daily instruction based on the results of the MCAS-Alt Skills Survey
* calculating the percentages of accuracy and independence for each student on each activity and recording this information using the Online Forms and Graphs program
* collecting student work or creating a teacher-documented work sample that reflects each instructional goal
* repeating these steps for each “strand” required for the content area being assessed in that grade
* completing all required forms

Schools must submit an assessment for allstudents. There is no provision for parents to opt out of MCAS or MCAS-Alt. Participation in statewide assessments is required of *all* students enrolled in public schools in the relevant grade levels. The state assessments provide important feedback to families, educators, administrators, and state policymakers as to where schools are succeeding and where schools and districts need to enhance their efforts.

## MCAS-Alt Ordering Process

* [Order MCAS-Alt materials](http://www.mcasservicecenter.com) between January 2 and 17, according to the number of students in each grade who will participate in the alternate assessment.
* Material will be shipped the week after February vacation. Be sure to **open the box** and review the Materials Summary (below).
* The shipment will include the following MCAS-Alt materials:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***Item*** | ***Quantity Provided*** |
| Materials Summary | 1 per school (this list) |
| Three-ring binder | 1 per student for whom MCAS-Alt materials were ordered |
| Student Identification Booklet (SIB) | 1 per student for whom MCAS-Alt materials were ordered |
| SIB Instruction Sheet | 1 per school |
| Labeled MCAS-Alt envelope | 1 per student for whom MCAS-Alt materials were ordered; the information on the label must be completed before submitting the binder |
| UPS Shipping Instructions and pre-printed UPS Shipping Label(s) | 1 label per 10 binders |
| Pre-printed Student ID Label (may not have one for each student) | 1 per student in grades 4–8 who participated in MCAS-Alt in your school the previous year (bubble-in student names without labels) |
| MCAS-Alt Score Appeal FAQ | 1 per school |

### Completing the Materials Summary

* Upon receipt of your shipment, principals or their designee should immediately inventory the materials and complete the Materials Summary to indicate the quantity of materials received. If there are discrepancies between the totals listed on the Materials Summary and the count from the inventory of materials, the discrepancies must be reported to the MCAS Service Center within two business days of receipt of the order.

### Completing Part 1 of the Principal’s Certification of Proper Administration (PCPA)

* Principals complete Part 1 of the PCPA online and certify that the quantity of materials received is accurate. Check with educators to see if any additional materials are needed due to late enrollments.

### Ordering Additional Materials (if necessary)

* Locate the MP Ship Code on the Materials Summary and go to [www.mcasservicecenter.com](http://www.mcasservicecenter.com). Click on “MCAS Alternate Assessment,” then click on “Additional Materials” and place your order. The deadline to order additional materials is **Tuesday, March 25, 2025**.

## Shipping MCAS-Alt Materials

Principals should follow the steps below to prepare and send their shipments:

1. **Prepare the three-ring binders.**

Place all required forms and evidence for each student’s MCAS-Alt in a single three-ring binder. Label all audio/visual and other unattached materials with the student’s name and SASID. Check SASID number with SIMS data to ensure data is reported to the correct school. Insert the completed *2025 MCAS-Alt Cover Sheet* in the front of each binder.

1. **Complete one MCAS-Alt Student Identification Booklet (SIB) for each student with a pencil** (see sample in Appendix A). Do **NOT** share the SIB with another school or district; it is coded to return assessments from a particular school.

The SIB will be used to document a student’s participation in the MCAS-Alt. Submit **one SIB for each student who participates in the MCAS-Alt.** Do not submit a standard MCAS answer booklet for a student participating in the MCAS-Alt. If there is no label, fill in the bubbles in the SIB.

a. For each student scheduled to participate in the MCAS-Alt, complete page 1 with the student’s name or label, if provided, and page 2 with the teacher’s name.

b. Insert each completed SIB in the **front inside cover flap** of thestudent’s three-ring binder.

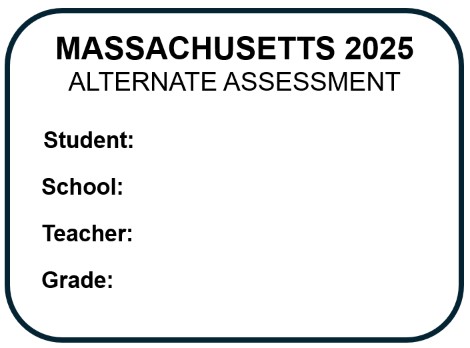
c. Use the student’s label if it has the correct information; if the label is incorrect or if no labels were given, fill in the bubbles with the relevant information.

1. **Complete the Materials Summary.**

Complete the Material Summary according to the directions. Make a copy of the completed form for your records.

1. **Pack materials for return.**

Put each student’s binder in the large plastic bag (provided). **DO NOT SEAL** the large plastic envelope. Label *each* large plastic envelope in designated areas. Return unused binders and SIBs.



(Further instructions on how to pack unused material are available with shipment.)

1. **Schedule your school’s pick-up of MCAS-Alt materials.**

Schedule a UPS pick-up of material through the MCAS service center **no later than 2:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 27.** UPS must pick up all MCAS-Alt materials **no later than 5:00 p.m. on Friday, March 28.** You are encouraged to schedule a UPS pick-up any time after March 19.

1. **Retain copies of documents** (i.e., packing slips, material summary, the printout of PCPA, UPS tracking numbers, and confirmations).
2. **Complete Part 2 of the PCPA.** Doing so provides assurances that all information is accurate, authentic, and complete for each student.

Remember to report MCAS-Alt irregularities by contacting the Department at 781-338-3625 or by email at [mcas@mass.gov](mailto:mcas@mass.gov). The Department may 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.

# Scoring the MCAS-Alt

After the MCAS-Alt is submitted each spring, it is reviewed and scored at a scoring center sponsored by the Department and by its test contractor. The Department’s [*Guidelines for Scoring the MCAS-Alt*](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/scoreguide.docx) provide detailed information on the scoring processused to review and rate each student’s assessment. Scoring occurs each April and early May under the Department’s direct supervision, using trained and qualified scorers. Scorers are monitored continually for their accuracy and consistency.

## ****Instructions for Viewing and Downloading MCAS-Alt Preliminary Results****

**To view the MCAS-Alt Feedback Forms (FFs) in mid-June from the previous spring, principals should:**

* **log in to the** Department’s [Security Portal](https://gateway.edu.state.ma.us/)
* **click on Application List**
* **choose DropBox Central**
* **click on MCAS 2025 Data**
* **choose schoolname (cannot be in the district view)**
* **find *MCASalt\_FeedbackForms2025***
* **click on *MCASalt\_FeedbackForms2025* and download the PDFs to distribute to educators for review**

**For assistance logging in, see your district or organization** [Directory Administrator](http://www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/data/diradmin/list.aspx)**.**

## MCAS-Alt Score Appeals

Once preliminary results are reported on the Department’s Security Portal in mid-June, a principal or their designee may submit a score appeal if there is evidence that an assessment was scored incorrectly, and a copy of the evidence was kept at school for review.

The deadline for submission of score appeals is **5:00 p.m. on Friday, June 20, 2025**.

The following materials must be reviewed by the principal, director, or superintendent when submitting a score appeal:

* the *MCAS-Alt Feedback Form* (FF) from the scored assessment, [available](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/results.html) in schools’ DropBox the week of **June 9, 2025**
* the photocopy of the evidence, kept by the school, to support a claim that the score on the FF does not reflect an accurate score based on the scoring rubric

Please consult the [frequently asked questions](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/scoreappeal-faq.html) about MCAS-Alt score appeals.

Results of MCAS-Alt score appeals will be mailed to schools by the end of July. Final results are posted in mid-September and reflect changes based on discrepancies reported to the Department and the findings of MCAS-Alt score appeals. Scored student binders are returned to schools in September and must be stored securely. (See *Storage and Destruction* on page 14.)

# Reporting Results of the MCAS-Alt

## Achievement Levels

For each student who takes the MCAS-Alt, one of the following achievement levels will be reported in each content area:

**Grades 3 through High School (Alternate Achievement Standards for MCAS-Alt)**

* ***Incomplete***—**Insufficient evidence and information** was included to allow an achievement level to be determined in the content area.
* ***Awareness***—Students demonstrate **very little understanding** of standards and core knowledge topics contained in the Massachusetts curriculum framework for the content area. Students require extensive prompting and assistance, and their performance is mostly inaccurate.
* ***Emerging***—Students demonstrate a **simple understanding that is below grade-level expectations** of a limited number of standards and core knowledge topics contained in the Massachusettscurriculum framework for the content area.Students require frequent prompting and assistance, and their performance is limited and inconsistent.
* ***Progressing***—Students demonstrate a **partial understanding that is below grade-level expectations** of selected standards and core knowledge topics contained in the Massachusettscurriculum framework for the content area.Students are steadily learning new knowledge, skills, and concepts. Students require minimal prompting and assistance, and their performance is basically accurate.

**Grades 3–10 (Grade-Level Achievement Standards for MCAS):**

* ***Partially Meeting Expectations***—Students performing at this level on this test partially meet grade-level expectations for knowledge, skills, and understanding. These students may need coordinated assistance and/or additional instruction to succeed at the next grade level.
* ***Meeting Expectations***—Students performing at this level on this test meet grade-level expectations for knowledge, skills, and understanding, and are academically prepared to succeed at the next grade level.
* ***Exceeding Expectations***—Students performing at this level on this test exceed grade-level expectations for knowledge, skills, and understanding, and are academically well-prepared to succeed at the next grade level.

## School and District Results

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-districtplacements, such as educational collaboratives or approved and unapproved private special education schools.

To meet federal requirements for reporting, both aggregated and disaggregated results of statewide assessments must be reported for students taking the MCAS and MCAS-Alt. The results of MCAS-Alt are included in school, district, and statewide reports of MCAS results as achievement levels only.

The alternate achievement levels of *Incomplete, Awareness, Emerging*, and *Progressing* will be included in the lowestachievement level for school and district reporting.

**Parent/Guardian Reports**

In early fall, districts receive shipments of MCAS-Alt Parent/Guardian Reports, which provide a detailed description of a child’s score in each area of the MCAS-Alt scoring rubric and an overall achievement level in each subject.

Districts are responsible for sending a parent/guardian report to the home of each student who took the MCAS-Alt. If the student is also reported as an English learner, a copy in the student’s home language must also be sent. The shipment of MCAS-Alt Parent/Guardian Reports will include print copies of the translations of the report shell in the state’s most frequently spoken languages. The translated report shells are also available [online](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/results.html).

## School and District Accountability

MCAS-Alt results are included in school and district accountability, together with the results of students who took standard MCAS tests (excluding the 2019­–2020 school year, for which no assessments were administered and no results were reported). Details on the state’s accountability system are [available](http://www.doe.mass.edu/accountability/). Accountability determinations for schools that administer MCAS tests in grades 3–8 and 10 will be based on a combination of indicators, including the following:

* **average scaled MCAS scores** in ELA, mathematics, and science and technology/ engineering (this replaces Composite Performance Index points used previously)
* **average student growth percentile** (SGP) in ELA and mathematics
* progress toward attaining **English language proficiency** for students reported as English learners
* percentage of **chronically absent** students

Table 1 shows the score scale for MCAS tests. MCAS-Alt achievement levels in each subject are also assigned an average scaled score, as are grade-level and competency portfolios, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 1**

**MCAS Tests**

**Scaled Score Ranges**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Standard MCAS**  **Achievement level** | **Scaled Scores** |
| Not Meeting Expectations (NM) | 440–469 |
| Partially Meeting Expectations (PM) | 470–499 |
| Meeting  Expectations (M) | 500–529 |
| Exceeding Expectations (E) | 530–560 |

**Table 2**

**MCAS Scaled Score Equivalents for MCAS-Alt**

ELA and mathematics (grades 3–10) and STE (grades 5 and 8 only)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **MCAS-Alt Achievement Level,**  **based on alternate achievement standards** | **Assigned MCAS Scaled Score Equivalent** |
| Incomplete (INP) | 455 |
| Awareness (AWR) | 470 |
| Emerging (EMG) | 485 |
| Progressing (PRG) | 500 |

### Storage and Destruction of Returned MCAS-Alt Binders

In September of each year, the Department returns scored MCAS-Alt assessment binders to schools.

Once returned, an MCAS-Alt assessment 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](http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr23.html?section=06), a temporary record contains everything not in the transcript that is “clearly of importance to the educational process.”

Principals or their designees are required to periodically review temporary student records and may destroy portions that are “misleading, dated, or irrelevant.” **Before destroying these records, schools must give parents and eligible students written notice of the intent to destroy records, and of the parent’s 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).

The Department recommends that schools retain scored MCAS-Alt assessments as follows:

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

Despite these recommendations, there are circumstances in which it may be prudent to retain MCAS-Alt assessments longer than the above recommended periods. Schools and districts should treat the destruction of MCAS-Alt assessments for specific students on a case-by-case basis. However, in all cases, records must be destroyed or given to the parent within the seven years described above.

**Please Note:**

Districts are reminded that they must furnish a copy of the content in the student’s MCAS-Alt binder to the eligible student or parent upon request, per (603 CMR 23.07(2)). Additionally, when a student transfers from one Massachusetts district to another, the Department recommends that the previous district send the student’s current and/or most recent MCAS-Alt to the new district.

# Frequently Asked Questions

**Q. If a student who is designated for the MCAS-Alt moves into my school late in the school year, what should we do?**

1. If a student moves in from another Massachusetts district and is scheduled to take the MCAS-Alt, the receiving school is responsible for completing and submitting the assessment to the best of their ability. The Department encourages the receiving school to contact the sending school and arrange for the student’s assessment-in-progress to be sent to the receiving school. Data inputted by sending school, may be transferred to the receiving school.

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

1. **Is there a date beyond which a transfer student would be exempt from participating in the MCAS-Alt?**
2. No, there is no cut-off date beyond which a student is exempt from the assessment, unless the student moves in after the submission deadline of March 29, 2025.
3. **How does a transfer student’s score affect my school’s results?**

A. The transfer student will be counted either as a participant or non-participant in the new school, depending on whether their MCAS-Alt is submitted. The achievement level results will be reported to the new school, but if the student has not attended the school for an entire academic year, the student’s results are included for accountability only at the district level.

1. **How should the school report a medically absent student?**
2. If a student will not participate in the assessment for a medical reason, the school should check the “Not Tested Status” box on the Student Identification Booklet. Documentation must be kept at the school for students who did not participate for medical reasons. An absent student will be reported as a non-participant in the assessment.
3. **Must the district provide a copy of the completed assessment to the parent, if requested?**
4. Parents are required to be invited to view their child’s MCAS-Alt before it is submitted each year and to sign a Verification Form. A copy of the contents of their child’s binder must be furnished by the district to the parent/guardian if requested.
5. **May a parent prohibit their child’s school from submitting the MCAS-Alt for a student who has been designated by their IEP team to take the MCAS-Alt?**
6. Schools are expected to submit an MCAS-Alt for eachstudent designated for an alternate assessment in their last approved IEP. Parents may not restrict their child’s ability to participate in the MCAS-Alt, nor may parents restrict the school from submitting the student’s alternate assessment.

**Common Questions for Schools Implementing the Definition of “Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disability”**

1. **Question: Will students be able to take the MCAS-Alt in some areas and the standard MCAS in other areas?**

**Answer:** No. Students who meet the definition of the most significant cognitive disabilities only meet those criteria if they present with global delays. Students with near-grade level skills must participate in the standard MCAS tests with accommodation.

1. **Question: What if my student is an English Language Learner?**

**Answer:** If the student is an English learner and meets the definition of a student with the most significant cognitive disabilities, they may be eligible for participation in the Alternate ACCESS for ELLs. See [Participation Guidelines: Which Students Should Take the Alternate ACCESS for ELLs?](https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/participation.html) for further guidance.

1. **Question:** **Is the definition of Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities a new disability category?**

**Answer:** No. Every Student Succeeds Act, the Federal Law, requires that only students with the most significant cognitive disabilities be designated as eligible by IEP Teams for Alternate Assessments based on Alternate Academic Achievement Standards (AA-AAAS). The Department developed the students with the most significant cognitive disabilities definition to meet federal regulations.

1. **Question:** **This definition requires that students should be performing at least 2 standard deviations below the mean in cognitive, academic, and adaptive behavior domains to meet some of the eligibility criteria for an MCAS-Alt. Do I need to reevaluate students now to gather this information for students with the MCAS-Alt listed on their IEPs currently?**

**Answer:** No. Teams do not need to conduct a full reevaluation, but they should attempt to obtain evaluation information, if missing, on the required domains of cognitive, academic, and adaptative behavior.

1. **Question: What happens if an IEP Team determines that a student with a disability is no longer eligible for the MCAS-Alt because the student does not meet the definition of a Student with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities?**

**Answer:** The IEP Team must propose a standard MCAS participation with or without accommodations.

1. **Question:** **Does the “stay put” provision apply to MCAS participation?**

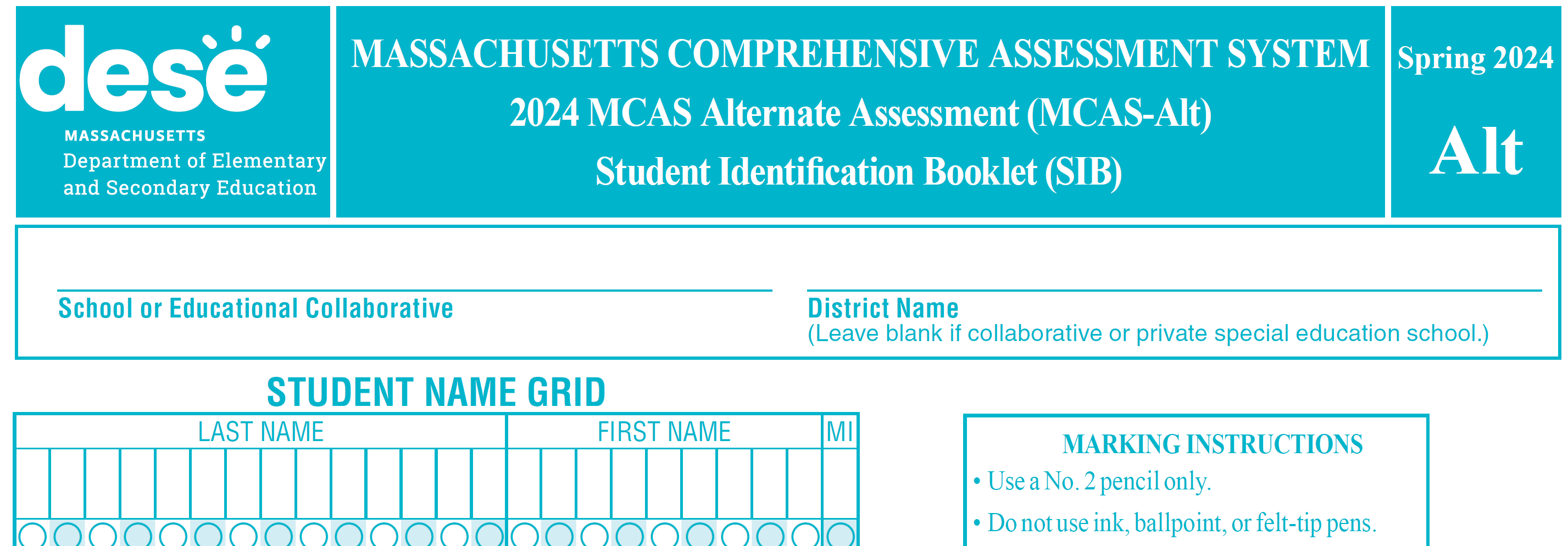
**Answer:** Yes, IEP Teams should seek to resolve differences when an IEP is rejected in part or in full.

1. **Question:** **What if my student is eligible to take the MCAS-Alt, based on the criteria, but the team would like them to participate in the standard MCAS with accommodations?**

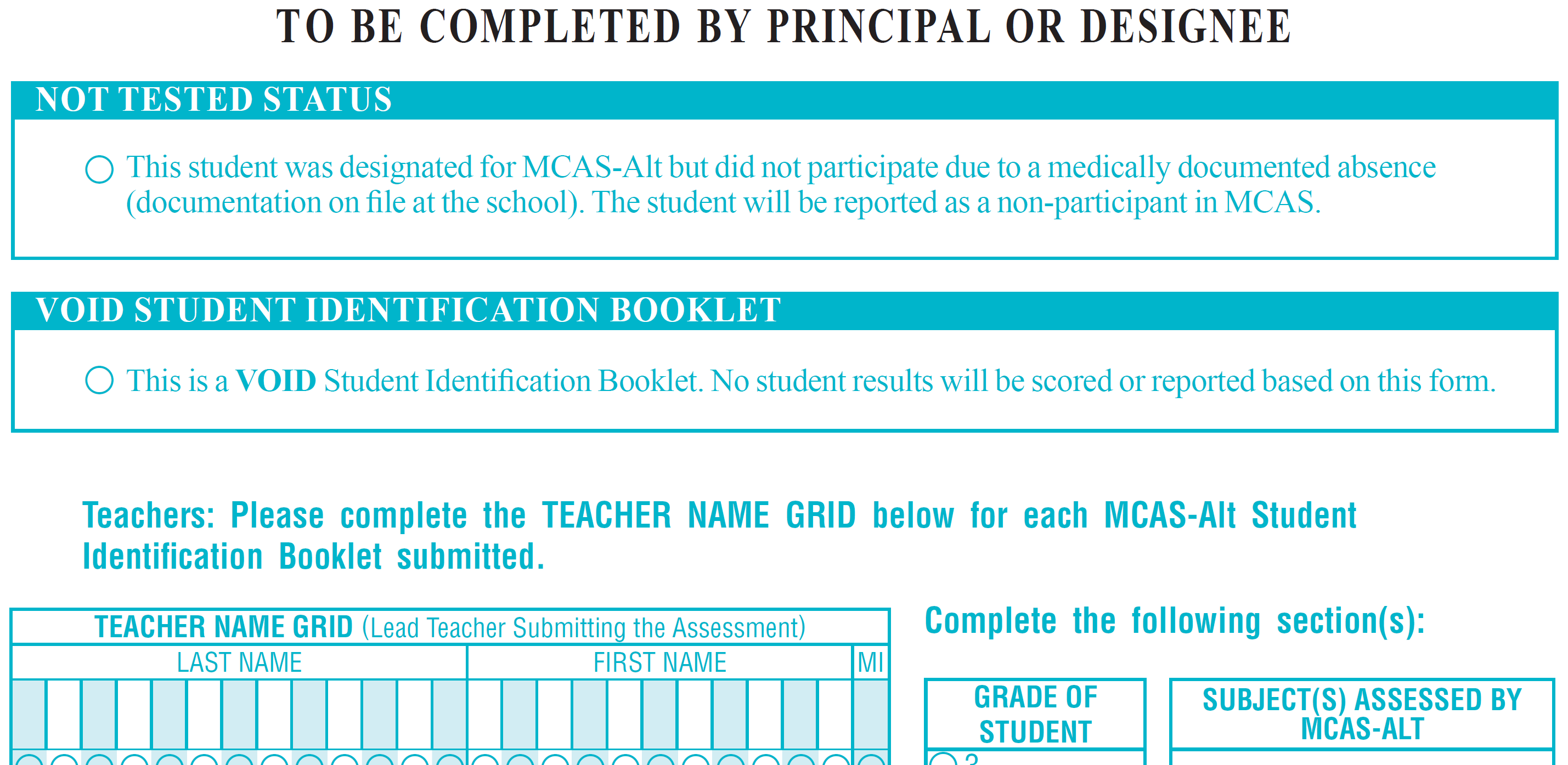
**Answer:** The IEP team should then assign the standard MCAS test with or without accommodations.

# Appendix A: Completing the Student Information Booklet (SIB)

**Page 1**



**Student’s Name**



**Page 2**

**Teacher’s Name**

# Alternate Assessment Participation Tool: The PCPA form will attest to the validity of student eligibility based on the criteria Companion tool for alternate assessment participation to be completed by the IEP team.