



## Superintendent's Circular

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Version 01

### **PARTICIPATION GUIDELINES FOR TESTING ENGLISH LEARNERS ON STATEWIDE ASSESSMENTS**

*This circular will remain in effect unless rescinded or superseded  
by a subsequent versions.*

The purpose of this circular is to provide schools with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA DESE) guidelines for testing English Learner (EL)<sup>1</sup> students on statewide assessments.

#### **DEFINITION**

According to MA DESE, an EL student is a student whose native language is not English, and currently unable to perform ordinary classroom tasks in English. An EL student also scores less than proficient on an English language proficiency assessment. When a student has been identified as an EL according to MA DESE and U.S. Department of Justice requirements, a student retains this designation, regardless of their program setting until they meet

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<sup>1</sup> English Learner (EL) refers to a specific subset of Multilingual Learners (MLs) who are classified as English learners. This term is used in federal and state laws, regulations, and policies. For more information, see MA DESE's Guidance on English Learner Education Services and Programming, page 5, available at <https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/guidance/>.

state exit criteria<sup>2</sup>. Students who meet the exit criteria must be reclassified as Former English Learners (FELs).

## PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS FOR EL STUDENTS

Federal and state laws require that all EL students participate in statewide assessments. Massachusetts students will meet the requirements of these laws by participating in both the MCAS and ACCESS for ELLs tests.

### EL Participation Requirements in Statewide Assessments

	ACCESS Grades K2-12	MCAS		
		ELA	Math	Science and Tech/Eng
First-Year EL Students <sup>3</sup>	Required only for K2-12 grade students entering	<i>Optional</i> <sup>4</sup>	Required	Required

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<sup>2</sup> Students must score 4.2+ overall and 3.9+ in literacy on ACCESS for ELLs to be reclassified as former English learners (FELs). MA DESE will release Alternate ACCESS exit criteria in fall 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Results for first year EL students are **not** included in MCAS school and district summary results or in state accountability reporting.

<sup>4</sup> Optional, provided that the student **has participated** in ACCESS for ELLs testing. This first year exemption shall be applied one time.

	before ACCESS for ELLs testing is completed			
All Other EL Students	Required	Required	Required	Required

## **ACCESS FOR ELLS AND ALTERNATE ACCESS FOR ELLS**

All EL students must be assessed annually to measure their English language proficiency and progress in learning English in the four domains of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Students in grades K2-12 who are identified as EL must participate in ACCESS for ELLs testing or the Alternate ACCESS for ELLs for their grade. This requirement applies regardless of the number of years a student has been enrolled in U.S. schools and whether their parent or guardian has an approved request to opt-out of ESL services. The following students must participate:

- students who were reported as EL in the October 2024 SIMS, and
- students who enroll in school after the October 2024 SIMS submission and prior to February 7, 2025 who will be reported as EL in the March 2025 SIMS.

Foreign exchange students who are coded as #11 under DOE013 “Reason for Enrollment” in [SIMS](#) must participate in an ACCESS for ELLs test, if they are reported as English learners. They are also required to participate in the MCAS tests specified for the grade in which they are reported.

## **ALTERNATE ACCESS FOR ELLS**

This is the state’s alternate English language proficiency assessment for EL students in grades K2-12. This assessment is designed specifically for those EL students with the most

significant cognitive disabilities<sup>5</sup> who are unable to meaningfully participate in ACCESS for ELLs, as indicated in the student's IEP. This paper-based assessment is uniquely designed to monitor students' progress in acquiring academic English.

## MCAS

EL students must participate in all MCAS tests scheduled for their grades, regardless of the language program and services they are receiving or the amount of time they have been in the United States. The one exception applies to first-year EL students who enrolled in U.S. schools after March 1, 2025 and who were not reported in the March 2024 SIMS report, for whom only MCAS ELA testing in Spring 2025 is optional.

*Note: EL students in high schools need to pass MCAS tests as a state requirement for graduation. There are opportunities for retesting if students do not pass MCAS the first time.*

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<sup>5</sup> For more information, see <https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/access/participation-guidelines.html>.

**ASSESSMENT TESTING WINDOWS**

The testing windows for administering the SY2024-2025 annual assessments in Boston Public Schools are listed below:

<b>SY 2024-25 Dates</b>	<b>State Assessment</b>
Nov. 6- 7	November 2024 MCAS HS ELA Retests
Nov. 12-13	November 2024 MCAS HS Mathematics Retests
Jan. 6- Feb. 14	2025 ACCESS for ELLs
Feb. 4- 5	February 2025 MCAS HS Biology and Introductory Physics Tests
Mar. 6 & 7	March 2025 MCAS HS ELA Retests
Mar. 11- 12	March 2025 MCAS HS Mathematics Retests
Mar. 24 Apr. 18	Spring 2025 MCAS Grades 3-8 ELA Test
Mar. 25-26	Spring 2025 MCAS Grade 10 ELA Test
Mar. 28	2025 MCAS Alternate Assessment (MCAS-Alt) Submission Deadline
Apr. 28-May 23	Spring 2025 MCAS Grades 3-8 Mathematics & Grades 5&8 STE Tests
Apr. 28- June 6	Spring 2025 MCAS Grade 8 Civics Test
May 20 21	Spring 2025 MCAS Grade 10 Mathematics Test
June 4-5	Spring 2025 MCAS High School STE Tests

*Note: dates are based on the State Initial Release of the 2024–25 MCAS and ACCESS for ELLs Testing Schedule, as of 5/15/2024. These dates are not considered final until confirmed by DESE.*

## GUIDELINES FOR ASSESSING EL STUDENTS IN THEIR FIRST 12 MONTHS OF ENROLLMENT IN U.S. SCHOOLS

For recently arrived ELs who have been enrolled in a U.S. school for the first time **after March 1, 2024**, and who were not reported in the March 2024 SIMS report, the following apply:

1. The participation in ACCESS for ELLs or Alternate ACCESS for ELLs testing **is required**, provided that the student enrolls in school **before February 7, 2025**.
2. The participation in Spring 2025 MCAS ELA assessment<sup>6</sup> *is not required but is recommended* for student diagnostic purposes only. Testing in MCAS ELA is strongly encouraged to be considered an opportunity for students in high school grades to earn a passing score for graduation requirements.
3. For students expected to participate in statewide assessments, non-participation in ACCESS and MCAS testing negatively impacts the school and district accountability.

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<sup>6</sup> ELA testing is also optional for EL students from Puerto Rico who are in their first year of enrollment in a Massachusetts school.

## SCHOOL AND DISTRICT REPORTING FOR EL STUDENTS

Reporting Measure	First Year ELs (1st year in any U.S. school)		All Other ELs (Regardless of number of years enrolled in BPS)
	Students Reported in the district's October 2024 SIMS or enrolled before February 7, 2025	Students Enrolled after February 7, 2025	
Assessment Participation Rate for MCAS ELA is based on ACCESS	<p>Students are expected to take the ACCESS test to be counted in the school MCAS participation rate for ELA. <i>Regardless</i>, student's participation in the MCAS <b>ELA</b> test is <b>optional</b>.</p> <p>If a student does not participate in ACCESS testing, the student counts as 'non-participant' for MCAS in the</p>	<p>Students <b>count</b> as participants regardless of participation in MCAS ELA testing. ACCESS is not required if a student enrolled at the end of the testing window.</p>	<p>Students are expected to take the ACCESS test to be counted in the school MCAS participation rate for ELA. Otherwise, the student counts <b>against</b> the school MCAS participation rate for ELA.</p> <p>MCAS ELA testing is <b>not optional</b>.</p>



Reporting Measure	First Year ELs (1st year in any U.S. school)		All Other ELs (Regardless of number of years enrolled in BPS)
	Students Reported in the district's October 2024 SIMS or enrolled before February 7, 2025	Students Enrolled after February 7, 2025	
	school's MCAS ELA participation rate.		
Accountability Determinations	Students' MCAS results <sup>7</sup> <b>are not</b> included in the accountability calculations. For first year ELs who participate in ELA testing, results will be provided at the school level and will be used for Competency Determination purposes for high school students.		Students' MCAS results <b>are</b> included in the accountability calculations.

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<sup>7</sup> First-year EL students *must* participate in MCAS Mathematics and Science and Technology/Engineering tests, although results will be reported for diagnostic purposes only and students' results will not be included in school and district summary results or in state accountability reporting.

## **PROVIDING APPROPRIATE TESTING ACCOMMODATIONS TO ELS**

Testing accommodations involve changes to testing procedures, testing materials, or the testing situation to allow students meaningfully participate in an assessment. However, testing accommodations must not alter the test construct or the test content being measured.

Testing accommodations for ELs are designed to address their unique linguistic needs during the normal process of English language acquisition. When appropriately assigned, testing accommodations offer ELs the opportunity to demonstrate knowledge in a subject, regardless of their English language proficiency level. This provides schools and divisions with an accurate picture of an EL's content area achievement.

EL students may be eligible for testing accommodations on MCAS assessments. Certain testing accommodations may be more appropriate for ELs at a particular language proficiency and for certain MCAS assessments. Decisions about accommodations for EL students should be made by the Language Acquisition team of educators familiar with the student. These decisions should be documented as described in the MA DESE MCAS Accessibility and Accommodations Manual.

The following accommodations are available to ELs, with or without disabilities, on MCAS tests:

Accommodation	Applicability
Paper-based edition (EL1)	May be administered to a first year EL student with a low level of English proficiency or an EL student who has little or no familiarity with technology (student does not use a computer routinely).
Authorized Bilingual Word-to-Word Dictionary and Glossary (if available) (EL2) <sup>8</sup>	<u>List of authorized English/Native Language dictionaries</u> (also available to Former ELs). Bilingual dictionary use for MCAS tests is strictly limited to those that provide word-to-word translations. Dictionaries that include definitions, synonyms, antonyms, phrases, and other information are prohibited. Electronic dictionaries are not allowed.
Text-to-speech (TTS) (EL3.1)	Next-generation computer-based Mathematics, grades 5 and 8 Science and Technology/ Engineering (STE) and/or high school Biology or Introductory Physics tests
Human read-aloud (EL3.2)	Next-generation computer-based or paper-based Mathematics and/or Science and Technology/

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<sup>8</sup> The use of DESE approved word-to-word bilingual dictionaries is strongly encouraged if students have demonstrated usage with need in accessing the native language definition. Some students with limited academic proficiency in their native language may find the dictionary usage a deterrent or a barrier to access the definition and translation. School teams are advised to use professional judgment in assessing the need based on the individual learner.

Accommodation	Applicability
	Engineering tests or legacy Mathematics or ELA <i>Composition</i> retests
Scribe (including human scribe or speech-to-text) (EL4.1, EL4.2)	Mathematics and/or STE tests or legacy ELA <i>Reading Comprehension</i> retest
English/Spanish test version for Math/Biology/Physics only (EL7)	Intended only for a Spanish-speaking EL student who has been in the U.S. for less than 3-years; Available in computer- and paper-based formats.

The student should be introduced to an accessibility feature or accommodation as early as possible in the school year, prior to the assessment. Accessibility features and accommodations are intended to remove barriers and allow EL students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills more effectively and *should never be provided* for the first time on a statewide assessment.

Please consider the following resources available:

- [MA DESE MCAS and ACCESS Participation Requirements](#)
- [MA DESE Authorized Bilingual Word-to-Word Dictionaries and Glossaries for Use by ELs and FELs on MCAS](#)
- [MA DESE MCAS Accessibility and Accommodations Site](#)

## IDENTIFYING FIRST YEAR EL STUDENTS

A list of the identified first year ELs, students who have been in the U.S. for less than 12 months and are actively enrolled in your school, can be retrieved through SIS ([ASPEN](#)). On the 'Student' tab in the field set menu, filter for "*First Year in U.S. Schools LEP Student.*" A report will be generated based on the school enrollment up to the date of retrieval.

In January 2025, the Office of Data and Accountability will flag these students in the SR/PNP file uploaded on the Spring 2025 testing platform. Schools may later export this file to identify the First Year EL students. New first year EL students enrolled after January 2025 will not be coded in the file, but schools can identify them in ASPEN.

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