



FEDERATION FOR CHILDREN  
WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

# Family **FACTS** on Education

A publication of the Massachusetts Center for Family and Community Engagement

Volume 9

## Helping Your Child Prepare for MCAS



### What can I do to help my child with MCAS?

M-C-A-S. Four letters that can spell anxiety, both for parents and for students! They stand for Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System. This issue of Family FACTS explains how families can dispel the anxiety and help their children be ready to take these tests or any other state assessments both now and in the future.

### Tips to Help Your Child

Prepare for Tests Parents and families can do several things to create a positive test-taking experience and help students prepare for tests. Here are some ideas:

#### Throughout the Year

- Make sure your child gets enough sleep, eats properly, and gets to school on time. During test time, make this a special effort.
- Encourage your child to READ, READ, READ. No activity is linked to academic success as much as reading. Even the math portion of the MCAS uses word problems to test problem-solving ability.
- Write test dates on your home calendar. The MCAS test schedule is online at [www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/cal.html](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/cal.html).
- Talk with your child's teacher(s) often to see what you can do at home to support our child's work in school. Ask for regular progress reports.
- Review your child's previous year's MCAS report. See "After the Test" below.
- Encourage your child to participate in practice-test opportunities.

- If your child is having difficulty with a subject, call the school and ask if extra support in that subject is offered.
- Praise your children for working hard and for the things they do well.
- Set times each day for study and homework.
- Ask about homework every day, and check to see that it is completed.
- Give your child a quiet, well-lit, comfortable place to study.
- Help your child practice MCAS test questions. Review the test together so you will all get familiar with the expectations. (Previous years' MCAS tests are online at [www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/testitems.html](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/testitems.html).)
- If your child has a disability, meet with the Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Team to decide how your child will participate. A student with a disability is entitled to receive appropriate accommodations for test taking, similar to the ones they need everyday for learning. Some students are entitled to take the MCAS-Alt—an "alternate assessment"—in order to better demonstrate what they know. The Team's decisions are written in the student's IEP or 504 Plan, and are subject to parent approval. (Refer to the participation requirements manual to learn more about test accommodations and alternate assessments at [www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/participation/sped.pdf#search=%22MCAS%22](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/participation/sped.pdf#search=%22MCAS%22))

## Day of the Test

- Make sure that your child is well rested and eats breakfast.
- See that your child arrives at school on time and is relaxed.
- Comfort counts. Send a sweater if it's a cool day. Dress in layers for a warm day.
- Send along all the needed tools—sharpened pencils, pens, rulers, etc.
- Encourage your child to do the best work possible and to have a positive attitude.
- Encourage your child to listen/read carefully to all test-taking directions and to ask questions if any directions are unclear.
- Remind your child not to get stuck on any one test question. Move on to other questions and return to the difficult one later.
- Encourage your child to check answers for accuracy if time permits.

## After the Test

Early in the school year, families will receive a Parent/Guardian Report from the school which describes in detail how their student did on the previous spring's MCAS tests. Parents of students who participate in the MCAS Alternate Assessment (MCAS-Alt) receive two Parent/ Guardian Reports—one standard report, which indicates that the student took the alternate assessment, and one report that shows how the student performed on the alternate assessment. You can review the actual test items on the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's website at [www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/testitems.html](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/testitems.html). Local libraries often have printed copies of the test questions and answers as well.

- Review all parent reports you receive.
- Identify areas of strengths and weaknesses. For example, were scores higher in math or English? Were your child's math skills stronger in computation or in solving word problems? Your child's teacher can help you.
- Praise your child's testing strengths and make a plan to address identified weaknesses.
- If your child's test score is not consistent with his or her grades, contact your child's teacher or counselor.

Remember—you are very important to your child's success in school and in life. Your interest and support let your child know you believe in him or her and that you value education. We hope these suggestions help you help your child be successful in school and in life.

- A score of 220, or a performance level of Needs Improvement, is considered the minimum passing score. If your child has scored at the Warning/Failing level, ask if the school is offering him or her extra tutoring or support. Encourage your child to take part in the academic support programs your school or district offers. Also, ask whether the school is developing an Educational Proficiency Plan for your child.
- Students who score below 220 on the grade 10 tests will have more opportunities to take and pass these tests. "Retest" opportunities are provided each fall and spring for 11th and 12th graders who did not pass, and for out-of-school youth.
- See your child's teacher if you need additional help to understand how your child did on the test.
- The MCAS Performance Appeals process provides another way for students who have taken the test three times to show that they have the necessary knowledge and skills needed to meet grade 10 standards. For more on the appeals process, contact your high school principal or guidance office, visit the parents' page at [www.doe.mass.edu/mcasappeals](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcasappeals).

### To Reduce Test Anxiety

"Test anxiety" is worrying too much about doing well on a test. It can keep students from doing their best. Some ways to help them reduce anxiety are:

- Talk about the test in a positive way.
- Encourage best efforts, yet have realistic expectations.
- Encourage your child to focus on his or her strengths, such as a good memory or strong analytical skills.
- Assure your child that the test is only one measure of academic performance.
- Emphasize that test scores do not determine a person's worth.
- Find out whether or not your child's school offers test-taking practice.



FEDERATION FOR CHILDREN  
WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

The Schrafft Center  
529 Main Street, Suite 1M3 | Boston, MA 02129  
617-236-7210 | 1-800-331-0688  
[info@fcsn.org](mailto:info@fcsn.org) | [www.fcsn.org](http://www.fcsn.org)

*Informing, Educating, Empowering Families*

This article was originally written by Janet R. Vohs, Director of Publications and Curriculum, Mass PIRC, as a Parents' PLACE Bulletin. It was funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, Grant #U310A050001. The views and opinions herein do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education.

This article was updated by the Family and Community Engagement Team (FACET) at the Federation for Children with Special Needs, March, 2014. For more information about this article, please call the Federation at 1-800-331-0688. Permission is granted to copy or reprint this article in whole or in part. Please credit the Federation for Children with Special Needs. Readers are encouraged to contact their local school administration as part of any and all discussions regarding a child's education.