

**Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE)
Assessment and Accountability in the Fifty States: 1999-2000**

MASSACHUSETTS

*This profile was verified by the Massachusetts Department of Education in August 2000.
All information was current as of that date.*

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State Assessment System (1999-2000 school year)

1. *Provide a brief overview and history of the assessment system as the context.*

The **Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)**, first administered in 1998, was implemented in response to the Education Reform Law of 1993, which required that MCAS be designed to:

- test students educated with public funds across the Commonwealth, including students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency
- be administered annually in at least grades 4, 8, and 10
- measure performance based on the Massachusetts *Curriculum Framework* learning standards
- report performance of individual students, schools, and districts
- serve as one basis of accountability for students, schools, and districts (for example, beginning in 2001, grade 10 students must pass the grade 10 tests as one condition of eligibility for a high school diploma)

2. *What are the characteristics of the state assessment system, including:*

- *Name of Assessment Instrument(s) or Program(s)*

The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)

- *Grade Levels and Subjects Tested*

Grades 4, 8, and 10 are tested in the following subjects:

1. English Language Arts
2. Mathematics
3. Science/Technology
4. History/Social Studies (Grades 8 and 10)
(Only Test Item Analysis Results generated from these administrations)

Field testing took place in the spring of 2000 in the following grades and subjects:

- Grade 3: Reading
- Grade 5: History/Social Studies and Science/Technology
- Grade 6: Math
- Grade 7: Reading

Only item statistics were generated from these field tests. See *future changes in assessment (question 8)* for further details on state plans for assessment.

- *Norm or Criterion Referenced: Criterion*

- *Matrix or Census Testing:*

MCAS test questions were based on common and matrix-sampled items. Common test items are those that are identical in all twelve forms of the test administered at each grade level. Approximately 80% of all questions on any given test form were common questions. All individual school and district results (performance levels and scaled scores) are based exclusively on common items; thus, the performance of every student at the tested grades is based on identical questions.

The remaining twenty percent of the MCAS test questions on each test form were matrix-sampled items, which differed across the twelve test forms at each grade level tested. Matrix-sampled items serve three primary purposes. First, they serve as the basis for equating tests from year to year. This allows for comparisons of performance at the school and district levels over time. Second, matrix-sampled items combined with common items allow reporting in greater depth and detail for a broader range of the curriculum than is possible with common items only. Results from the matrix-sampled items and common items are aggregated at the school, and district levels to produce subject area subscores (e.g., for Mathematics, the subscores are Number Sense, Patterns and Relations, Geometry and Measurement, and Statistics, and Probability). Matrix items are also used for embedded field-testing. Only non-embedded field test items are used to generate subject area subscores.

- *Item Types (including proportions if available via Internet or interview) such as: traditional or enhanced multiple choice, performance tasks, open-ended questions, portfolios, essays, etc.*

Multiple-choice questions

- used in all content area tests
- students select an answer from four options

Short-answer questions

- used in Mathematics tests only
- students generate a brief response, for example, a short statement or computation leading to a numeric solution

Open-response questions

- used in all content area tests
- students create a brief response in writing or in the form of a narrative or a chart, table, diagram, illustration, or graph, as appropriate

Writing Prompts

- used in English Language Arts tests only
 - students write a composition based on the writing prompt, which may relate to a reading passage
- *Time of Testing (specific month(s) or testing window):* April (Composition and Grade 3 Reading Only) and May
 - *High School Exit Exam (date of implementation and/or phase-in timeline)*
MCAS at the grade 10 level provides this function. Beginning with the Class of 2003, students will be required to pass the MCAS grade 10 tests as one requirement for a high school diploma. Students will be given multiple opportunities, if necessary, to pass the tests. Students must also meet local graduation requirements for high school graduation, for example, completion of required coursework and attendance requirement.
 - *Other (State-Mandated) Assessments:* NAEP and TIMSS.
 - *Transitional or Final Assessment System:* Final, despite changes listed below

3. *Who designed and produced the assessment(s) used by the state? If a commercial test was used by the state, were modifications or additions made to the assessment to address state requirements or standards? If so, what did they include?*

In the summer of 1994, an RFR was issued to create the assessment system and the first five-year contract was awarded to **Advanced Systems**. Test development began in January of 1996. Massachusetts's teachers have also been involved in the brainstorming and development of the assessment, the creation of items and the editing of questions in a committee structure. These committees of educators also help the state ensure that items are linked to specific standards and that all items are developmentally appropriate. However, as time has progressed, the state has determined that the time and talents of these teacher committees would be better used in brainstorming about content and standards alignment rather than item editing. The state has also selected Harcourt-Brace as the new state assessment contractor.

4. *What are the state requirements for local assessment, including the types of assessments*

and their use in areas such as reporting and accountability, as well as Title I adequate yearly progress? What grade levels and subjects are tested?

The state has no such requirements.

5. *Is the state assessment system aligned with the state standards?*

Yes; MCAS is exclusively aligned with the state standards.

6. *What is the state's approach for ensuring alignment and what evidence of that alignment is provided?*

In order to ensure the State test's alignment to the state's *Curriculum Framework* learning standards as well as to the MCAS performance standards, the Department of Education has adopted the following test development strategies/methods:

- opted to develop a customized test that exclusively measures student performance based on Massachusetts *Curriculum Framework* standards, rather than an off-the-shelf standardized test.
- developed test specifications, which guide the distribution of items by *Curriculum Framework* content strand and substrand.
- developed *Guides* to the MCAS in each content/grade level area to specifically identify the standards that will be measured and describe how these standards are to be manifested on MCAS tests (assessment expectations).
- use MCAS Performance Level definitions in test development to ensure that each content area/grade level test includes items across the performance continuum defined by the Performance Level definitions.
- oversee the work of its testing contractor to ensure that its developers develop items to address specific standards as prescribed by test specifications, and code items accordingly. Additionally, the testing contractor uses several quality control measures to verify that items have been correctly coded to standards.
- involve Massachusetts educators in all phases of the test development process; in addition to other important tasks, Committees are charged with reviewing items for accuracy of coding to standards, identifying gaps (standards not assessed by test item bank) and reviewing and critiquing the overall alignment of items to the *Curriculum Frameworks*, MCAS Performance Level definitions, and overall test specifications.
- oversee and internally repeats all of the above processes designed to ensure alignment.
- annually release 100% of test items used to determine student, school, and district scores so that educators and the members of the public can judge for themselves whether the items are aligned with the *Curriculum Frameworks*, and give feedback to the Department accordingly.

7. *How is the data included in the state assessment system used?*

Improvements in teaching and learning:

- Parents and students will use the results to monitor students' progress.

- Local educators will use results to help identify strengths and weaknesses in curriculum and instruction.

School and district accountability

- The School Performance Ratings Process will use MCAS data to determine school performance and improvement ratings.

Student accountability

- Beginning with the Class of 2003, students will be required to pass the MCAS grade 10 English Language Arts and Mathematics tests as one requirement for a high school diploma. Students will be given multiple opportunities, if necessary, to pass the tests. Students must also meet local graduation requirements for high school graduation, for example, completion of required coursework, attendance, etc.

8. *Are there changes planned for the state assessment system (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline? Are there implications for the state reporting or accountability systems (Title I or in general)?*

Key changes for the 2000 and 2001 years are summarized as follows:

- A new grade 6 math test will be administered (*field testing took place spring of 2000*).
- The English language arts test will be redesigned to include separate reading and writing tests.
 - Writing tests will be administered in grades 4, 8 and 10.
 - Reading tests will be given in grades 3, 4, 7, and 10 (*grade 3 and 7 field testing took place spring of 2000*).
- The science and technology and history and social science tests will be moved from grade 4 to grade 5 (*both grade 5 history and science field-testing took place spring of 2000*).
- The grade 3 reading test (ITBS) will be replaced by an MCAS reading test, which will be pilot tested in spring 2000 and implemented the following year. An early administration of some tests (grade 3 reading) will enable results to be returned before the end of the school year.

9. *What have been the major issues and challenges in the area of state assessment? Explain.*

More work is needed to improve the schools' and public's understanding of the goals of the testing and accountability programs, and to inform teachers, parents, and other interested citizens about what the state is doing to ensure that our tests are based on reasonable standards and are fair.

Inclusion Policies for Assessment

1. *What exclusions are made in the current state assessment for students with disabilities? LEP? Who makes the decision about exclusion of a particular child? Does the state collect data or in other ways monitor the number and types of students excluded? Does that vary by test?*

The Education Reform Law provides for no exemptions from taking the tests. This policy assures that all Massachusetts public school students are provided an opportunity to learn the materials covered by the Curriculum Framework learning standards. All public school students in the tested grades must participate in MCAS, including students

- in charter schools
- in institutional school programs
- in educational collaboratives
- receiving publicly funded special education in private schools
- with disabilities who either have an Instructional Education Program (IEP) or receive Section 504 instructional accommodations
- who are limited English proficient (unless they have been enrolled in United States schools for three or fewer years AND who are ineligible for the Spanish-language version of MCAS).

Home-schooled students are not enrolled in the public school system and are therefore not required or entitled by law to participate in MCAS. After MCAS has been fully implemented, the Department of Education plans to consider whether and under what circumstances it is feasible to permit privately educated students, including those being home-schooled, to participate in the MCAS testing program if they wish to do so.

2. *What accommodations and/or modifications are made on the current state assessment for students with disabilities? LEP?*

Students with disabilities who meet eligibility requirements will be allowed to use testing accommodations as necessary. The Department is currently piloting testing alternatives for students with disabilities who cannot be tested using accommodations, and considering options for students with limited English proficiency who have attended public schools in the United States for three or fewer years and who cannot be tested with the English or Spanish versions of the tests.

The student's **IEP or Section 504 Team** determines how the student will participate in MCAS. If the Team determines that it is appropriate and allowed within the guidelines, certain testing accommodations are permitted. If the Team determines that the student's disability prevents the student from taking the MCAS tests, even with accommodations, the Team must locally develop an alternative assessment for that student which is appropriate to the student's academic development. The Department is in the process of developing a system of alternative assessments for these students that will be available for future MCAS administrations.

LEP students are defined in the following ways:

- students who are enrolled in a Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) program or who receive English as a Second Language (ESL) support at school;
- students who were not born in the United States whose native language is a language other than English and who are currently not able to perform ordinary classroom work in English;

- students who were born in the United States to non-English-speaking parents and who are not currently able to perform ordinary classroom work in English.

LEP students who meet the following requirements are not required to participate in MCAS at this time:

- Spanish-speaking LEP students who have been enrolled for three or fewer years of school in the United States, and
- will not be recommended for regular education classes in the following school year, and
- who do not possess sufficient reading and writing skills in Spanish to permit their participation in the Spanish-language version of MCAS.

Additionally, the following LEP students are not required to participate in MCAS at this time: Non-Spanish-speaking LEP students who have been enrolled for three or fewer years of school in the United States AND who will not be recommended for regular education classes in the following school year.

3. *Does the state provide assessments in languages other than English? If so, describe. In what grades and subjects?*

The Spanish-English language version of MCAS includes tests in: Mathematics, Science & Technology, and History & Social Science.

LEP students, including those in two-way bilingual programs, must take the English-language version of MCAS if they meet any of the following definitions:

- The student has been enrolled in school in the United States for more than three years; or
- The student is currently enrolled in a TBE program or receives ESL support and has been/will be recommended for regular education classes for the school year following MCAS testing; or
- The student is in a two-way bilingual program and has been in school in the United States for three or fewer years, but would likely be transitioned into regular education classes, were such a program offered at the student's school.

LEP students who are native-Spanish speakers must take the Spanish-language version of MCAS if they meet all of the following requirements:

- The student has completed three or fewer years of school in the United States; and
- The student is currently enrolled in a TBE program or receives ESL support and will not be recommended for regular education classes for the following school year; and
- The student does not have adequate English-language skills to participate in the English-language version of MCAS; and
- The student possesses reading and writing skills in Spanish.

4. *Does the state provide alternative assessments for students with disabilities? If so, describe. For which students and in which subjects and at what ages?*

The state was in the process of developing and piloting an alternative test this year (1999-2000) so that those with severe disabilities can be involved in the assessment in the future, but no such system exists at the point.

5. *Does the state have a goal for the inclusion of students with disabilities and/or LEP students on the statewide tests? Does the state use any strategies to encourage the inclusion of students with disabilities? LEP students?*

Yes, except only for the most severely disabled students who cannot be tested even with accommodations. These students will be assessed using alternate instruments. Spanish-English tests are allowed for eligible LEP students and bilingual dictionaries are allowed for any student classified as LEP.

6. *Are changes planned in the for the inclusion of SWD and LEP students in the state assessment system (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline? Are there implications for the state reporting or accountability systems (Title I or in general)?*

The Department plans to continue to develop efforts to develop a statewide system of alternate assessments for severely disabled students.

Performance Standards

1. *How many and what performance levels has the state established for its assessments?*

Results are reported for individual students, schools, and districts according to four performance levels across all subject areas as defined by the Board of Education:

- **Advanced:** Students at this level demonstrate a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of rigorous subject matter, and provide sophisticated solutions to complex problems (**scaled score:260-280**)
- **Proficient:** Students at this level demonstrate a solid understanding of challenging subject matter and solve a wide variety of problems (**scaled score:240-259**)
- **Needs Improvement:** Students at this level demonstrate a partial understanding of subject matter and solve some simple problems (**scaled score:220-239**)
- **Failing:** Students at this level demonstrate a minimal understanding of subject matter and do not solve even simple problems (**scaled score:200-219**)

2. *Has the state set acceptable levels or targets for schools, districts or the state on tests, drop-out rates or other measures (e.g. 70% of students in Maryland pass the MSPAP)?*

Using the **School Performance Rating Process**, the state will measure schools' performance and improvement on the MCAS test. At the end of each two-year cycle, a school will be assigned two ratings:

Overall Improvement rating

At the end of each cycle, this will be determined by comparing a school’s average improvement across all MCAS content areas to its overall improvement expectation. The school will receive one of the following ratings:

- Failed to Meet (fell more than 1 point below the target range)
- Approached (came within one point of the target range)
- Met (scored within the target range)
- Exceeded (improved beyond the target range)

Overall Performance rating

This will be calculated by averaging across the content areas the percentage of students scoring in the failing and the proficient or advanced levels on the MCAS tests administered during the two year cycle. From highest to lowest, the categories will be as follows:

- Very High
- High
- Moderate
- Low
- Very Low
- Critically Low

3. *How are these performance standards calculated? What data are included in the calculations, and at what proportions (e.g. assessment results 60%, dropout and attendance rates 40%). How are the calculations made? What is the final unit of analysis for reporting school and district achievement levels (e.g. performance index, grade, category)?*

Both of these rating will be based on the school’s performance during that cycle. A school’s baseline performance will determine the amount of improvement that the school is expected to make during the rating cycle. Six performance categories have been established to describe the percentages of the school’s students scoring at the proficient and advanced levels and in the failing levels. Improvement will be measured using the school’s average MCAS scaled score, for each content area and for the three content areas combined.

<u>Performance Category</u>	<u>% Proficient/Advanced</u>		<u>% Failing</u>	<u>Increase average</u>
1	80% or more	and	5% or less	1-3 points
2	60% or more	and	10% or less	1-3 points
3	40% or more	and	20% or less	2-4 points
4	20% or more	and	40% or less	3-5 points
5	Less than 20%	or	41% to 60%	4-6 points
6			> 60%	5-7 points

For the first rating cycle, the data from the 1998 MCAS test will be compared with the average of the 1999 and 2000 results. In subsequent cycles, the two-year average of a school’s performance in the prior cycle will serve as the baseline for the next cycle.

4. *Are all students, schools and districts included in these performance calculations? If not, who is excluded?*

The Education Reform Law provides for no exemptions from taking the tests, and all public school students in grades 4, 8, and 10 must participate in MCAS and are therefore included in the calculations.

5. *Are changes planned for the state performance standards (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline? Are there implications for the state reporting or accountability systems (Title I or in general)?*

The state's math and science curriculum frameworks have recently been revised and approved by the SBE, and will be reflected in future versions of the MCAS. The social studies curriculum framework is also currently being revisited.

6. *What proportion of schools and/or districts fail to meet acceptable levels on performance targets?*

Although the state has established the system described above as the performance ratings system, starting with 1998 data as the baseline, the state has yet to identify schools not meeting the criteria as the two-year cycle included data from 1999 and 2000; ratings will take place in the 2000-2001 school year.

Reporting Performance Data

The MCAS tests are designed to measure student performance against the learning standards described in the Curriculum Frameworks. Consistent with this purpose, results on the MCAS tests are reported in terms of performance levels that describe student performance in relation to the established state standards. There are four performance levels: Advanced, Proficient, Needs Improvement, and Failing. Students receive a separate performance level classification (based on total scaled score) in each content area. School and district level results are reported as the number and percentage of students attaining each performance level at each grade level and subject area tested.

In addition to performance levels, MCAS results are reported as scaled scores. Scaled scores in each content area range from 200 to 280. The major purpose of including scaled scores in MCAS reports is to enhance the level of feedback provided to students, parents, and teachers. Each of the four performance levels encompasses a range of student performance. A student whose test performance is just above Failing and a student whose level of performance is slightly below Proficient are both classified as Needs Improvement. Scaled score results are more precise since they pinpoint a student's performance (score) on the continuum of scores within performance levels.

1. *Describe the characteristics of the state performance data reporting system (by whom, what data, who is the audience) for each of the following levels:*

- *Student reports*

For each content area tested, parents/guardians receive a *Student Report for Parents/Guardians* showing their child's performance on the MCAS with the following data:

- Student's performance level classification
- General and content-specific performance level definitions
- Student's scaled score and probable range of scores
- School, district, and state average score.

- *School and District reports*

School and District Profiles make important information about the Commonwealth's public schools available to all interested citizens. The array of information presented in the Profiles provides one snapshot of the educational picture in communities across the state. This information can be used in conjunction with firsthand observations and discussions by parents, educators, policy-makers, and any other interested parties to inform decision-making and ultimately improve the education of all Massachusetts students. The following is an explanation of information presented in the Profiles. All data are submitted by schools and districts to the Department of Education. Data that are collected at the district level only are not included in the School Profiles, and are indicated below with an asterisk. Profiles include the following:

1. **Grades/Schools***: indicates the number and grade range of schools in the district

2. **Programs***:

- **Inter-district Choice**: indicates whether students from other districts may enroll in the district through the state school choice program, which is voluntary and on a space-available basis.
- **Intra-district Choice**: indicates whether the district has a school choice program within the school district for students who live in the district.
- **Early Childhood Education**: indicates whether the district provides no-cost early childhood (preschool) education to three and/or four year-old children.
- **Kindergarten Starting Age**: indicates the age as of a particular date at which children are eligible to begin kindergarten.
- **Vocational Education**: indicates whether the district operates a Chapter 74 approved vocational education program.
- **Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE)**: indicates whether the district operates a TBE program. Under Massachusetts law, a district must provide a TBE program in a particular language if there are 20 or more limited English proficient students in that particular language group enrolled in the district. Limited English proficient students are students whose first language is not English and who cannot perform ordinary classwork in English.
- **METCO**: indicates whether the district participates in the state METCO program, which promotes voluntary desegregation by enrolling minority students from Boston and Springfield in suburban schools.

3. **Member(s) of Regional District(s)***: for local school districts, indicates the name(s) of any academic and/or vocational regional district(s) of which the local school district is a member. For regional school districts, indicates the names of member local school districts. A regional school district provides educational services to more than one town.

4. **Technology:** indicates the number of students for every one computer and the percent of classrooms with Internet access.
5. **Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)**
6. **Iowa Grade 3 Reading Test:** indicates the percent of third-graders at each performance level on the reading comprehension section of the test, from spring 1999. Results are not included for schools or districts for which fewer than six students participated.
7. **SAT:** indicates the average scores on the math and verbal sections of the SAT I, administered by the College Board, and the % of students taking the test, for the classes of 1995 & 1999.
8. **Advanced Placement:** indicates the number of exams taken, the number and percent of exams that scored 3 or higher (possible score range is from 1 to 5), and the number and percentage of students in the class of 1997 who participated.
9. **Enrollment by Grade:** indicates the enrollment for grades kindergarten through 12 for the 1994-95 and 1998-99 school years.
10. **Race/Ethnicity:** indicates the percent of enrollment by race/ethnicity for the 1998-99 school year. The reporting categories are those used by the U.S. Bureau of the Census.
11. **Selected Populations:** indicates the percent of enrollment represented by students in special education programs*, students who are limited English proficient, and students eligible to receive free or reduced price lunch*.
12. **Children Attending Public Schools*:** indicates the percent of school-age children in a city or town attending public schools.
13. **Staff (FTE)*:** indicates the number of students per teacher for the 1998-99 school year.
14. **Per Pupil Expenditures*:** are calculated by dividing a district's operating costs by its average pupil membership.
15. **Teacher Salary*:** indicates the minimum and maximum teacher salaries available.
16. **Foundation Budget Spending Comparison*:** The education reform act established a foundation budget for each school district. This budget represents the minimum level of spending needed to provide an adequate education for the district's students.
17. **Annual Dropout Rate:** indicates the percentage of students in grades 9-12 who dropped out of school between July 1, 1997, and June 30, 1998, and who did not return to school by October 1, 1998. The rate for 1994-95 is also provided. Dropouts are defined as students who leave school prior to graduation for reasons other than transfer to another school.
18. **Attendance Rate:** indicates the average percentage of enrolled students present in school for the 1997-98 school year.
19. **Student Exclusions:** indicates the number of student exclusions that occurred during the 1997-98 school year.
20. **Plans of High School Graduates:** indicates the post-graduate intentions of students.

*** District level data only.**

2. *How are the data distributed? When during the year (month or time period after assessment)? To whom (students, teachers, parents, the media, the community)?*

Results of the MCAS are reported in November following the previous school year's administration. The following documents generated by the Department of Education report MCAS results:

Report:	Distributed:
<i>Student Reports for Parents/Guardians</i>	Schools
<i>Test Item Analysis Reports</i>	Schools
<i>School Reports</i>	Schools and districts
<i>District Reports</i>	Districts
<i>Report of State Results</i>	Public
<i>Summary of District Performance</i>	Public

3. *At what level(s) are data disaggregated (state, district and school levels)? For what groups are disaggregated data reported (see Internet sites for state, district and school level report cards)?*

School reports disaggregated results by student status (i.e., students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency). Schools are provided with electronic database files, from which they can disaggregate their results by race/ethnicity, gender, migrant status, and free/reduced lunch status. Statewide results disaggregated by limited English proficiency and student disability status are available in electronic database files for download from the Department of Education’s website. Statewide results disaggregated by race/ethnicity, limited English proficiency status, and student disability status are reported by the state. Database files are available for internal analysis disaggregating statewide results by race/ethnicity, gender, migrant status, and free/reduced lunch status.

5. *Does trend data exist from the state assessments (example: Texas State Assessment data is available from “1996-97 on”)?*

Trend data goes back to 1998 from the MCAS.

6. *How are the results of students with disabilities and limited English proficiency reported? Are they included in the aggregate scores reported to the public, or disaggregated by group?*

Results for students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency are disaggregated and included in totals.

7. *What are the state’s requirements for the use of data in school and district improvement planning?*

Schools that are referred for review will be required to submit a report to the review panel that will include additional student performance data, **including results disaggregated by subgroups**, and other standardized assessment data.

8. *Are changes planned for performance reporting (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include?*

Results are expected to be reported earlier in the fall than in the previous MCAS administrations.

9. *What have been the major issues and challenges in the area of performance standards and reporting? Explain.*

The misinterpretation of the assessment results by the media has been an ongoing issue in the area of reporting.

State Accountability System (1999-2000 school year)

1. *Provide a brief overview and history of the accountability system as the context.*

In September 1999, the Massachusetts Board of Education adopted a comprehensive **School and District Accountability System**. This system will be used to assess the effectiveness and monitor the improvement of all public schools and districts, and to hold school and district leaders accountable for that performance and improvement. The system will assist districts in identifying student learning needs, setting goals for improvement in student performance, and devising specific strategies to help their students reach State standards. Targeted assistance in the form of guidance and resources will be provided where necessary to assist schools and districts in delivering the programs and services needed to help students to meet those goals.

In addition, Accountability and Targeted Assistance programs provide improvement planning and support, including the Academic Support Services Program Grants, School and Community Partnerships, School-Linked Services and After School Program Grants.

2. *What are the characteristics of the state accountability system? Organize the response into the following subsections:*

- *Student Accountability/Rewards and Sanctions*

Beginning with the Class of 2003, students will be required to pass the MCAS grade 10 tests as one requirement for a high school diploma. Students will be given multiple opportunities, if necessary, to pass the tests. Students must also meet local graduation requirements for high school graduation, for example, completion of required coursework.

- *School Accountability*

Using the **School Performance Rating Process**, the state will measure schools' performance and improvement on the MCAS test. At the end of each two-year cycle, a school will be assigned two ratings:

Overall Improvement rating

At the end of each cycle, this will be determined by comparing a school's average improvement across all MCAS content areas to its overall improvement expectation. The school will receive one of the following ratings:

- Failed to Meet (fell more than 1 point below the target range)
- Approached (came within one point of the target range)
- Met (scored within the target range)

- Exceeded (improved beyond the target range)

Overall Performance rating

This will be calculated by averaging across the content areas the percentage of students scoring in the failing and the proficient or advanced levels on the MCAS tests administered during the two year cycle. From highest to lowest, the categories will be as follows:

- Very High
- High
- Moderate
- Low
- Very Low
- Critically Low.

Both of these rating will be based on the school’s performance during that cycle. Consequences will be based on this rating. A school’s baseline performance will determine the amount of improvement that the school is expected to make during the rating cycle. Six performance categories have been established to describe the percentages of the school’s students scoring at the proficient and advanced levels and in the failing levels. Improvement will be measured using the school’s average MCAS scaled score, for each content area and for the three content areas combined.

Performance Category	% Proficient/Advanced		% Failing	Increase average
1	80% or more	and	5% or less	1-3 points
2	60% or more	and	10% or less	1-3 points
3	40% or more	and	20% or less	2-4 points
4	20% or more	and	40% or less	3-5 points
5	Less than 20%	or	41% to 60%	4-6 points
6			> 60%	5-7 points

From the first rating cycle, the data from the 1998 MCAS test will be compared with the average of the 1999 and 2000 results. In subsequent cycles, the two-year average of a school’s performance in the prior cycle will serve as the baseline for the next cycle. State actions will include recognition, warnings, and the identification of schools whose low performance and failure to meet expectations warrant further review. Schools can potentially be listed as **under-performing** based on this review.

Rewards and Sanctions

The chart below outlines more generally the rewards and sanctions for *schools and districts* associated with Overall Performance and Improvement targets:

OVERALL PERFORMANCE	OVERALL IMPROVEMENT			
	<u>Failed to Meet</u>	<u>Approached</u>	<u>Met</u>	<u>Exceeded</u>
Very High	Not Applicable	Recognition for very high performance	Recognition for very high performance and meeting improvement expectations Candidate for Exemplary Schools Program	Recognition for very high performance and meeting improvement expectations Candidate for Exemplary Schools Program
High	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Recognition for high performance and meeting improvement expectations	Recognition for high performance and meeting improvement expectations Candidate for Exemplary Schools Program

OVERALL PERFORMANCE	OVERALL IMPROVEMENT			
	<u>Failed to Meet</u>	<u>Approached</u>	<u>Met</u>	<u>Exceeded</u>
Moderate	Warning that school/district must strengthen improvement efforts	Not Applicable	Recognition for meeting improvement expectations	Recognition for exceeding improvement expectations Candidate for Exemplary Schools Program
Low	Warning that school/district must strengthen improvement efforts	Warning that school/district must strengthen improvement efforts	Recognition for meeting improvement expectations	Recognition for exceeding improvement expectations Candidate for Exemplary Schools Program

Very Low	Referred for review to determine whether school should be declared under-performing. High priority for district support and targeted state assistance	Referred for review to determine whether school should be declared under-performing. High priority for district support and targeted state assistance	Recognition for meeting improvement expectations. High priority for district support and targeted state assistance	Recognition for exceeding improvement expectations. High priority for district support and targeted state assistance Candidate for Exemplary Schools Program
Critically Low	Referred for review to determine whether school should be declared under-performing. Top priority for district support and targeted state assistance	Referred for review to determine whether school should be declared under-performing. Top priority for district support and targeted state assistance	Recognition for meeting improvement expectations. High priority for district support and targeted state assistance	Recognition for exceeding improvement expectations. High priority for district support and targeted state assistance Candidate for Exemplary Schools Program

The Exemplary Schools Program will provide the opportunity for successful schools to share their knowledge with other schools in the state. At the end of each ratings cycle, all schools that received an *overall improvement rating as having exceeded expectations*, and any school that received an *overall improvement rating as having met expectations and that significantly outperformed demographically similar schools in the state in absolute performance* will be eligible to apply for the program. A panel will review the applications and based on the panel’s recommendations, the Commissioner will select schools to serve as exemplars.

- *District Accountability*

The District Performance Evaluation Process will consist of comprehensive on-site evaluations every five years, with mid-cycle reviews between. Central to the process is the expectation that every district develop and implement long-term and annual self-evaluation and district improvement planning processes led by the district school committee and superintendent. The SDE will provide assistance and training in this process as needed. Districts cited for serious or widespread deficiencies that fail to submit an acceptable plan remedy these shortcomings in the time specified may be declared **under-performing**.

An evaluation protocol and performance rating rubric will be developed to ensure consistency in the application of district performance evaluation criteria. District

performance will be assessed and rated based on performance standards and evaluation criteria to be approved by the Commissioner and SBE. The SDE will submit an annual report to the SBE on the results of the mid-cycle and five-year evaluations. The SBE will use this information to identify districts that are **chronically under-performing**.

3. *What methods of measuring progress are used in the state accountability system?*

Absolute targets and relative growth expectations have been established in overall school performance and improvement ratings system.

4. *Are all students included in calculating the measures of progress? If not, who is excluded (probe on inclusion of SWD and LEP students)?*

The Education Reform Law provides for no exemptions from taking the tests, and all public school students in grades 4, 8, and 10 must participate in MCAS and are therefore included in the calculations.

5. *How do the general state accountability system and the system of accountability for Title I schools compare? Are they the same, or different? How?*

The state accountability system is the same system used for Title I accountability.

6. *Are subgroup performance results used as an indicator in the calculation of state accountability measures? If so, how? To identify schools or districts in need of improvement? For recognition and rewards?*

Schools that are referred for review (*see Identifying and Assisting Low Performing Schools and Districts section below*) will be required to submit a report to the review panel that will include additional student performance data, **including results disaggregated by subgroups**, and other standardized assessment data. Subgroup performance will also be used in identifying exemplary schools.

7. *Are charter and/or non-public schools included in the accountability system? If so, how?*

Charter schools are included in the state accountability system but non-public schools are not included.

8. *Are changes planned for the state accountability system (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline?*

The changes planned for the assessments (additional grades and content areas) will most likely affect the accountability system in 2001 (*see changes in Assessment Section*).

9. *What have been the major issues and challenges in the area of accountability? Explain.*

No specific issues were addressed.

Identifying and Assisting Low Performing Schools and Districts

1. *How are schools and districts identified as low performing? Using what criteria? Do the identification processes and/or criteria differ for Title I and non-Title I schools?*

Schools with low MCAS performance that do not meet improvement expectations may be referred to a Review Panel for more extensive evaluation. School's attendance and dropout rates and improvement trends may be considered in determining which schools may be referred for review. Schools that are referred for review will be required to submit a report to the review panel that will include:

- Additional student performance data, including results disaggregated by subgroups, and other standardized assessment data
- An analysis of the factors that might have had an impact on the school's failure to make progress
- Evidence of the school improvement initiatives enacted in the past 24 months and improvement plans for the coming year.

The panel will also meet with representatives from the school and district and work through questions and answers. The review panel will then provide a report to the Commissioner with a summary of their findings.

The Commissioner can then either:

- Determine that the school is likely to meet the improvement expectations, but put the school on **academic warning**
- Declare the school to be **under-performing**, and appoint an independent fact-finding team to assess the reasons for the under-performance and prospects for improvement. The fact-finding team will conduct a comprehensive on-site inspection of the school and report their findings to the Commissioner and to the district office.

Following the fact-finding process, the school must submit a *revised* **school improvement plan** to the SBE for its approval. If the school fails to demonstrate significant improvement as dictated by its plan within 2 years after approval of the plan, the school may be declared **chronically under-performing**.

Immediately after being declared as "chronically under-performing" the principal must be removed and the superintendent will designate a new one. (A principal who is removed can be returned to the school the following year only if the Board finds that he/she did not play a significant role in the school's under performance.) The new principal has extraordinary powers including the authority to dismiss teachers and other school staff without adhering to established administrative procedures and collective bargaining agreements. However, teachers with professional teacher status (those who have served for three consecutive years

in a district) must be given written notice of the termination decision five days in advance and have appeal rights including arbitration.

In addition, the Commissioner may make additional funds available to increase the salaries of the principal and teachers. The amount of the salary increases is tied to the percentage of low-income students in the school -- 1 percent for every 10 percent of the student body that is low-income. Further, if the school does not receive funding from the district at least equal to the average per pupil funding for students of the same classification and grade level in the district, the district must increase funding to the school to bring it at least up to this average. Also, the Board of Education may take other actions reasonably calculated to increase the number of students at the school who satisfy the student performance standards.

Under-Performing District Identification: Every district must develop and implement an annual self-evaluation and district improvement planning process with school staff and community leaders. This process must result, at least once every five years, in a long range plan to improvement educational programs and facilities. Annually, the district must also develop and implement a written plan stating specific goals for school improvement and actions to be taken. A district plan to support the improvement of any school within the district that has been declared as under-performing and each school within the district that failed to meet its improvement expectations during the previous rating cycle must be included in the district's annual improvement plan.

The SDE will evaluate all districts on a regularly scheduled basis and an on-site evaluation at least once every five years, assessing the level of academic proficiency, trends in drop-out and attendance rates, quality of instruction, facilitates, etc. The SDE will create a five-year performance report for the district and make it available to the public and the SBE.

The Commissioner will advise the SBE of any case in which a District Performance Evaluation uncovered serious or widespread deficiencies in the quality of the education provided. A determination by the SBE, on recommendation of the Commissioner, of one or more serious or widespread deficiencies in the district will constitute evidence of **under-performance by the district** and trigger the appointment of an independent fact-finding team, similar to that used with schools that are under-performing. Officials of the school district and the responsible municipality(s) will be provided with copies of the fact-finding teams recommendations and conclusions, and copies will be made available to the public.

If the report provided by the fact-finding team uncovers a situation in which the SBE determines that "inadequate or unsound educational or fiscal practices by a school district are negatively affecting the academic performance of students" the SBE may declare the district as **chronically under-performing**, and a receiver will be designated for the district. The receiver will assume the responsibilities generally provided to the superintendent and report and take direction from the Commissioner.

2. *Does the district or the state decide whether a school is low performing? If the district is involved in the process, how much discretion do they have?*

The state is responsible for the process described above. The review panel will then provide a report to the Commissioner with a summary of their findings, and the Commissioner will then determine what actions are necessary.

3. *What types of assistance are provided to these schools and districts by the state?*

Schools and districts identified as low performing receive preferential funding priority for a variety of state and federal grants. These include, among others: Title I school support team grants, Title I schools improvement grants, reading excellence grants, CSRD grants, Massachusetts early literacy grants, and essential skills grants. A number of these programs include year-long participation in networking meetings.

In addition to the grants described above, the state has an Academic Support Services Program to provide funds to develop or enhance academic support services for students scoring in levels I or II on the MCAS or who have been identified as failing or needing improvement based on standardized assessment measures at any grade level. This program was funded at \$20 million in FY 1999 and has been increased to \$40 million for FY 2000. At present, participation in these grant programs is voluntary. Participation will be required of districts and schools that fail to meet improvement expectations under the School and District Accountability System.

In addition to grant programs, the SDE sponsored a number of professional development opportunities targeted to low performing schools and districts, including conferences on early literacy, schoolwide planning and improving student achievement. In collaboration with the Northeast Comprehensive Assistance Center, a number of teams from low performing schools participate in a schoolwide congress where they receive ongoing schoolwide reform planning, related professional development and monthly coaching.

The Department of Education Targeted Assistance Program is under development to provide assistance in the form of guidance and resources, where necessary, to assist schools and districts in delivering the programs and services needed to help students to meet state goals. This program will provide on-site consultation and support to district administrators in

- Strategic planning
- Use of data to inform decision making
- Performance assessment
- Comprehensive school reform strategies
- Effective practices.

4. *Who provides the state assistance?*

See previous question for description of multiple service providers.

5. *Does support to Title I and all low performing schools and districts differ? Is support generally provided for all schools and districts, or are services specifically designed to help those that are low performing?*

Although all low performing schools and districts receive preferential treatment for grants, some federally funded grants are specially targeted at Title I schools; these include: Reading Excellence; Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program; Title I School Support Team Grants; and Title I School Improvement Grants. The assistance provided to low-performing schools that are not Title I is still being developed by the Accountability and Targeted Assistance Unit.

6. *Has the state established a set of criteria and/or a process for getting schools and districts out of low performing status? If so, what do they include?*

Such schools and districts have not yet been identified by the state.

7. *Once a school or district is identified as low performing, what types of plans must it prepare? Who are they submitted to once completed? How do they differ from other planning documents?*

When the SDE determines that inadequacies in the district's performance in one or more areas are not being effectively addressed, the district will have the opportunity to prepare a plan, submitted for Board approval, to remedy the shortcomings. The Department will provide technical assistance as needed in preparation of that plan.

Districts cited for serious or widespread deficiencies that fail to submit an acceptable plan in the time specified by the Commissioner may be declared under-performing. Pursuant to statute and state board regulation, schools that have consistently failed to improve the academic performance of their students are deemed to be "under-performing." Immediately following this determination, the Commissioner appoints an independent fact-finding team to assess the reasons for the under-performance and the prospects for improvement. The team reports its findings to the Commissioner and the district in which the school is located within 90 days. Within six months after the determination that a school is under-performing, the district in which the school is located is required to present a plan to the State Board of Education that sets forth specific goals for improvement, the means for attaining these goals, and a timetable, not to exceed two years, to complete the implementation of the plan. The district is required to implement this plan with any changes directed by the Board. During this period, the Commissioner provides technical assistance to the school for the improvement of its educational program.

8. *Are changes planned for the state system of identifying and assisting low performing schools or districts (proposed or enacted and to be implemented)? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline?*

The systems and processes described above are still in the process of being fully implemented for the 2000-2001 school year.

Title I and Adequate Yearly Progress

1. *What criteria are included in the definition of adequate yearly progress for schools and districts under Title I?*

Results from the MCAS in math and English/language arts have been used to determine whether or not a school has made adequate yearly progress. Although schools have also been able to use ITBS data in cases where MCAS data was not available, the 1998-99 school year was the last time the ITBS was administered as a third grade reading test. This data was, however, available in the state's 1999-2000 determination of which schools were in need of improvement. The state piloted a new MCAS third grade reading test in the spring of 2000 (*see assessment section – changes*).

2. *What are the definitions of adequate yearly progress for Title I schools and Districts? Are these transitional or final definitions? If transitional, when will the final definitions be in place and what criteria and processes will they include?*

The definition that the state has been using is transitional and will be replaced with the system newly adopted by the state (*see changes below and previous accountability section*). This new system of six performance categories including overall improvement and performance ratings has become the focus for Title I in the state. Under the old system, the state has essentially identified schools in need of improvement, and had not developed an established definition for adequate yearly progress beyond the identification process for schools in need of improvement (*see question #4 below*).

3. *What is the process for identifying those schools and districts that are not making adequate yearly progress under Title I? Does the district or the state make this determination for schools? If the districts plays a role, does the state provide guidance on local criteria?*
The state determined what schools were in need of improvement. Districts have been identified through their association with schools in their district. A total of 423 Title I schools out of 916 were identified as in need of improvement and 243 districts in the state have Title I schools. Of these, 101 districts have schools identified as in need of improvement.
4. *What are the criteria and processes for identifying schools and districts in need of improvement under Title I? What plans must be prepared? How can a school or district get out of Program Improvement? Does the district or the state make this determination for schools?*

The following criteria have been used to identify schools in need of improvement:

For schools with MCAS data:

- Any school that had more than 60% of its students scoring in the failing category on the MCAS math **or** English/language arts (each subject considered separately), and/or

- Any school that had less than 20% of its students scoring in either the proficient or advanced categories on both the MCAS math **and** English/language arts has been identified as in need of improvement under Title I.

For schools without MCAS data that used ITBS data, any school with less than 20% scoring at or above the 75th percentile in reading comprehension on the ITBS grade 3 reading test has been identified as in need of improvement.

5. *What types of assistance are provided to those in need of improvement under Title I?*

Title I schoolwide programs and schools in need of improvement receive Title I funded mini-grants to form school support teams to assist in needs assessment, school improvement planning, and program implementation. In addition, there are three grant programs intended to improve student performance on the statewide assessments, based on the curriculum frameworks. Schools collaborate across districts to plan and jointly conduct professional development activities focused on school improvement. Further, the practices of exemplary Title I school districts are disseminated to districts and schools in need of improvement.

6. *Who provides the assistance?*

These activities are funded with state Title I program improvement funds and the State Essential Skills Program.

7. *Have waivers played a role in this process?*

No, waivers were not identified as having played a role in the process.

8. *Are there future plans for the state system for schools or districts receiving Title I funding (proposed or enacted and to be implemented) or for the definition of adequate yearly progress? If so, what do these plans include? Why are these changes being made and what is the timeline?*

The transitional system to identify schools in need of improvement is expected to remain in effect until the 2000-2001 school year, when the first improvement rating cycle is completed. Under the School and District Accountability System adopted by the Board of Education in September, 1999, a School Performance Rating Process will measure both performance and improvement on MCAS tests to determine AYP.

At the end of each two-year cycle, a school will be assigned an overall performance rating and an overall improvement rating based on the average of the school's results in the two years of that cycle. Consequences for schools will be based on both ratings. A school's baseline performance determines the amount of improvement the school is expected make during the subsequent rating cycle. The school's 1998 MCAS results constitute the baseline for the first rating cycle (ending in 2000).

Six performance categories (*see section on Performance Standards*) have been established to describe the percentages of a school's students scoring in the Proficient and Advanced and in the Failing MCAS performance levels. The improvement expected for each school is based on its performance category. Improvement will be measured using the school's average MCAS scaled score, for each content area and for the three content areas combined.

9. *Is there alignment between Title I and non-Title I systems for adequate yearly progress?*

The two systems will be aligned as of the 2000-2001 school year once the new accountability system has been fully implemented.

10. *What have been the major issues and challenges in the area of Title I? Explain.*

The state is in the process of shifting to a new accountability system and this transition has been the central issue for both Title I and non-Title I accountability officials in Massachusetts.

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