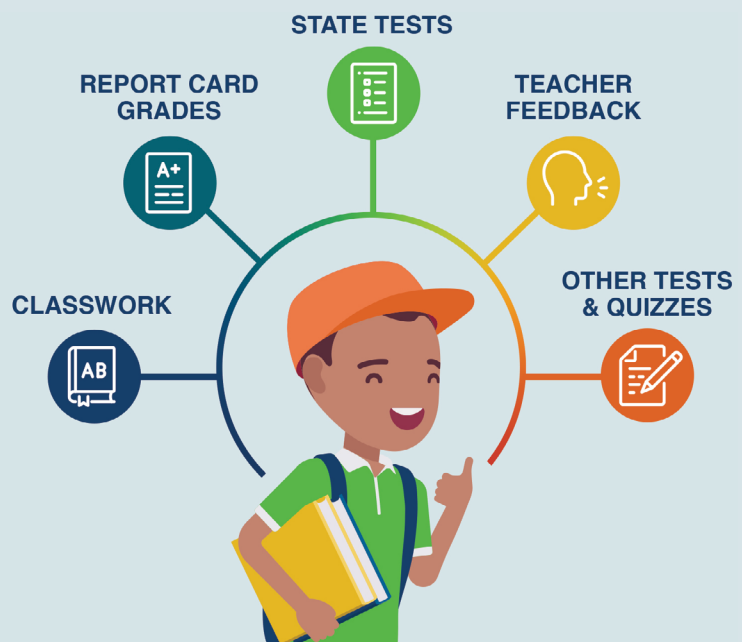




## A FAMILY GUIDE TO ANNUAL STATE TESTS IN MASSACHUSETTS: One of Many Measures of Student Learning

There are many ways to measure academic performance, and annual state tests are only one of them. These tests are not meant to tell the whole story. They are meant to be combined with other measures, including teacher feedback, classwork and projects, and report card grades. Together, these measures can give families a more complete picture of a student's performance so they can better support learning at home and advocate for their child.



### State Assessments 101

The Every Student Succeeds Act, or ESSA, requires students to take state tests in reading and math every year in third through eighth grade and once in high school. In Massachusetts, students in third through eighth grade take the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) in English language arts and math. Students in fifth and eighth grade also take MCAS in science/technology/engineering (STE). High school students take MCAS in English language arts, math and STE (biology, chemistry, physics or technology/engineering) in 10th grade.

To earn a diploma, students must earn passing scores on the MCAS in English language arts, math and STE. Students who do not pass any test in 10th grade can retake it in 11th and 12th grade. Students who have difficulty passing MCAS can submit a “competency portfolio” which includes artifacts of their work to demonstrate they have mastered the subject.

## A Focus on Grade Level Skills

Unlike other tests, MCAS is focused on grade level material and is aligned to the state standards (Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks). The test questions match what students do and learn in the classroom every day throughout the year, which are the grade-level skills that are most important for students to learn in order to move on to more challenging content.

The MCAS tests are taken online. They include a variety of different types of questions, including traditional multiple choice, short-answer and questions that require students to write well developed essays.

### Grade 6: Math

A dairy farmer delivered milk over two days.

- On Monday, he used 5 gallons of fuel to drive 40 miles.
- On Tuesday, he drove 120 miles at an average rate of 10 miles per gallon of fuel.

Determine the miles traveled per gallon of fuel on Monday and the number of gallons of fuel used on Tuesday.

Drag and drop a number into each box to correctly complete the sentence.

0.1   0.125   5   8   10   12   40   120

The dairy farmer drove at an average rate of  miles per gallon of fuel on Monday, and used a total of  gallons of fuel on Tuesday.

### Grade 3: ELA

For this question, you will write a story based on the passage. Write your story in the space provided in your Practice Test Answer Document. Your writing should:

- Use characters, settings, events, and other details from the passage.
- Use correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

**Based on the passage, write a story that tells what will most likely happen next to the pink bunny slipper and the leather glove that were dropped into the basket. Use what you know about the characters, settings, and events from the passage to write your story.**



## Useful Information for All

### **FAMILIES:** Understanding Grade Level Performance

The MCAS report gives families information on how well their child performed on different sets of skills in each subject. Families can use this information to identify where their child is doing well and where they may need support or practice. This helps families better support learning at home. It can also help them start meaningful conversations with teachers, set goals for each student's areas of improvement and identify resources and strategies that can be used at home and in school to help students make progress.

#### **Questions to Ask the Teacher about Your Child's MCAS Report:**

- What does this mean about my child's learning?
- Is my child on grade level?
- Where does my child need more support or improvement?
- What short-term learning goals should my child meet to show progress?
- How can I support learning at home?



### **TEACHERS:** Informing Instruction

Students take different types of tests throughout the school year. Some districts give benchmark or diagnostic tests, such as MAP Growth or i-Ready. These are taken several times a year and measure mastery of important concepts and skills in reading and math. Students take a test at the beginning of the year to identify their “starting point” and again throughout the year to measure their progress. Benchmark tests help teachers identify and address learning gaps early on so students can stay on track to meet grade level expectations. While MCAS is only given near the end of the school year, it is one way of showing how much progress students have made from the beginning of the year and how well they have met grade level expectations.

Teachers use MCAS results to inform and improve their instruction. They can also use the results to look for trends in their students' learning to see what skills or concepts students learned and what content they struggled with. This helps teachers identify what they taught effectively and where they need to improve or change their instructional strategies.

### **SCHOOL & DISTRICT LEADERS:** Informing Decisions

MCAS results are critical for school and district leaders to make informed decisions about schools and students. School and district level MCAS scores show leaders how students across a school or district are performing and indicate if a certain group of students or schools need more support. This allows them to target additional support or resources to help those schools improve. District leaders can also use MCAS scores to understand what strategies and changes are working.



### **STATE LEADERS:** Helping Schools Improve

State leaders use MCAS results to identify schools and districts that need more support and resources. They identify the schools with the lowest performance in the state, as well as schools with certain groups of students that performed much lower on the test than the rest of the students in that school. These schools receive additional funding and resources from the state to support students and teachers. For example, schools may hire more teachers or tutors or they may purchase additional instructional materials and programs, depending on the needs of their students.

#### **Where Can I Go for More Information?**

- For more information, visit [DoE.Mass.edu/MCAS/Parents/default.html](https://doe.mass.edu/MCAS/Parents/default.html)
- For sample score reports, visit [DoE.Mass.edu/MCAS/Parents/pgreport/](https://doe.mass.edu/MCAS/Parents/pgreport/)
- To see a practice test, visit [MCAS.Pearsonsupport.com/Student/](https://mcas.pearsonsupport.com/Student/)
- For ideas on how to support your child's learning at home, visit [PTA.org/FamilyGuides](https://pta.org/FamilyGuides)
- For more information about the Massachusetts PTA visit [MassachusettsPTA.org/New\\_site/](https://MassachusettsPTA.org/New_site/)

