

M-C-A-S

These letters stand for Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System.

This page offers tips for how parents can help prepare their children before MCAS testing and points to resources for more information.

Assessments, like the MCAS tests measure how well students have learned the standards. They give students an opportunity to demonstrate what they know.

The results of the assessments are then used to guide school improvement efforts and to identify student needs and schools that need assistance.

In other words, what students should know, what they are taught, and what they are tested on are all aligned, or linked. This approach to improving education is called “standards-based reform.”

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:

- 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
- 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.)

THE 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.
- 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 item.
- Encourage your child to check answers for accuracy if time permits.

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 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.

Sources

“Help Your Child Improve in Test-Taking,” U.S. Department of Education, available online at www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/TestTaking, provides research-based techniques developed through the Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

• Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks describe what students should know and be able to do in core academic subjects at each grade. The MCAS tests are designed to test how well students have mastered the information in these Frameworks. Online at www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html

• MCAS Overview: Frequently Asked Questions gives an overview of the entire MCAS test. Online at: www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/overview_faq.html

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.