



TO: Superintendents, Charter School Leaders, Assistant Superintendents,
Collaborative Leaders, Leaders of Approved Special Education Schools

FROM: Russell D. Johnston, Acting Commissioner

DATE: November 6, 2024

RE: Update on Student Competency Determinations

In response to the [Secretary of the Commonwealth's reported results](#) of Massachusetts Ballot Question 2, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is providing a frequently asked questions (FAQ) document relating to competency determination awards to offer guidance to districts and families at this time.

Questions and Answers

When does the new law take effect?

According to guidance provided by the Secretary of the Commonwealth, the earliest the law would take effect is December 5, 2024:

<https://www.sec.state.ma.us/divisions/elections/download/getting-on-the-ballot/State-Ballot-Question-Petitions.pdf>.

Will the MCAS retests in English Language Arts and Mathematics scheduled for November 2024 go forward? Will students who achieve qualifying scores on those tests be eligible to earn the CD?

Yes. The administration of the MCAS retests in English Language Arts (November 6 and 7) and Mathematics (November 12 and 13) will go forward. Since these tests will be administered before the new law goes into effect (see question above), any student who earns a qualifying score on the retest will satisfy the CD requirements for that subject area. We recommend that Districts highly encourage all students eligible for retesting in the November administration to do so.

Do high school students still need to earn a Competency Determination (CD) in order to graduate?

Yes, high school students will still need to earn a CD in order to graduate. Since 2003, the CD has been based on achieving qualifying scores on relevant MCAS tests. When the new law takes effect, the CD will be based on “satisfactorily completing coursework that has been certified by the student’s district” as written in the ballot question. Guidance on certification will be forthcoming.

What is the impact of the new law on students who have previously earned a CD before the date that the new law goes into effect?

Students who have already achieved the qualifying MCAS scores in math, ELA and science by the effective date have earned their CD and are eligible to earn a high school diploma provided they meet their local graduation requirements.

What is the impact of the new law on students who have not earned a CD before the date that the new law goes into effect?

As of the date the new law takes effect, students who have not yet earned the CD would be eligible to do so through “satisfactorily completing coursework that has been certified by the student’s district.” Guidance on certification will be forthcoming.

Background Information

State law requires students to satisfy the requirements of the “competency determination” (CD) in order to graduate from high school. G.L. c. 69, s. 1D (i). Ballot Question 2 amends the competency determination requirements as shown below, where the text that is underlined is newly added and the text that has been struck through is removed.

The "competency determination" shall be based on the academic standards and curriculum frameworks for tenth graders in the areas of mathematics, science and technology, history and social science, foreign languages, and English, and shall represent a determination that a particular student has demonstrated mastery of a common core of skills, competencies and knowledge in these areas, ~~as measured by the assessment instruments described in section one I~~ by satisfactorily completing coursework that has been certified by the student’s district as showing mastery of the skills, competencies, and knowledge contained in the state academic standards and curriculum frameworks in the areas measured by the MCAS high school tests described in section one I administered in 2023, and in any additional areas determined by the board. Satisfaction of the requirements of the competency determination shall be a condition for high school graduation. If the particular student's assessment results for the tenth grade do not

demonstrate the required level of competency, the student shall have the right to participate in the assessment program the following year or years. Students who fail to satisfy the requirements of the competency determination may be eligible to receive an educational assistance plan designed within the confines of the foundation budget to impart the skills, competencies and knowledge required to attain the required level of mastery. The parent, guardian or person acting as parent of the student shall have the opportunity to review the remedial plan with the student's teachers. Nothing in this section shall be construed to provide a parent, guardian, person acting as a parent or student with an entitlement to contest the proposed plan or with a cause of action for educational malpractice if the student fails to obtain a competency determination.