



MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

From: Russell D. Johnston, Acting Commissioner

Date: February 19, 2025

Subject: Competency Determination: Proposed Amendments to Regulations on MCAS and Competency Determination, 603 CMR 30.00 (Addressing Changes in Statute)

At the meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) this month, I will present proposed amendments to 603 CMR 30.00, the regulations relating to the standard for the competency determination, for a vote to solicit public comment. With the Board's approval, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department/DESE) will invite public comment on the proposed regulations and then present the comments and any recommended revisions to the Board for final action in May 2025.

Since this fall, the Board has discussed the matter of the competency determination and the new statutory requirements at four meetings, including the special meeting on February 10, 2025 that was devoted to this topic. The proposed amendments to the regulations are informed by the Board's discussions and are designed to focus on student learning and promote academic equity for all students. Key provisions in the proposed amendments include the following:

1. Align the regulations to the new statutory language.

Under the current regulations, a student earns the competency determination by achieving a qualifying score on MCAS assessments. In the amended regulations, these obsolete provisions are deleted.

2. Define terms to provide clarity.

The new law introduces terms such as “showing mastery” and “satisfactorily completing coursework.” The amended regulations define these terms and others for clarity and consistency.

3. Specify minimum requirements to earn the competency determination.

The amended regulations incorporate the requirement in the new law that students show mastery of a common core of skills, competencies and knowledge in certain areas **and** also satisfactorily complete coursework in certain areas. Additionally, the amended regulations specify how students meet the requirement to satisfactorily complete coursework, as follows:

For English language arts, the student must: (i) satisfactorily complete coursework in the equivalent of two years of high school English language arts courses.

For mathematics, the student must: (i) satisfactorily complete coursework in Algebra I and Geometry courses; or (ii) satisfactorily complete coursework in Integrated Math I and Integrated Math II courses.

For science, the student must: (i) satisfactorily complete coursework in one year of Biology; or (ii) satisfactorily complete coursework in one year of Physics; or (iii) satisfactorily complete coursework in one year of Chemistry; or (iv) satisfactorily complete coursework in one year of a Technology or Engineering course.

4. Add “an additional area determined by the Board”

The new law authorizes the Board to add areas to the competency determination, including history/social science and world languages. The amended regulations add United States history to the areas included in the competency determination, beginning with the graduating class of 2027.

5. Offer options to address students’ needs

Some students who enroll in high school may not have a traditional transcript of their prior courses and grades. For example, some students may have been previously homeschooled or may have arrived from another state or country. The amended regulations provide that in these limited circumstances, where a district¹ is unable to document a student’s prior coursework, the student may

¹ The amended regulations define the term “district” broadly to include “any other public school established by statute or charter, acting through its governing board or director.”

earn the competency determination by attaining a qualifying score of at least “Meeting Expectations” or “Exceeding Expectations” achievement levels on the relevant high school MCAS assessment. The student may also earn the competency determination by meeting the standard for a substituted equivalent that the district certifies satisfies the same academic standards. The amended regulations also include a provision that allows the Commissioner to waive a provision of the regulations for good cause, upon a written request from a district.

6. Provide oversight

The amended regulations specify that districts must adopt a competency determination policy, which must be approved by the district’s governing body. Additionally, districts must post the policies on their websites and submit the policies, as well as their local graduation requirements, to the Department. Districts are required to certify to the Department that they have complied with these provisions. The amended regulations also specify that the Department will audit the quality of districts’ competency determination policies.

Rob Curtin, Chief Officer for Data, Assessment, and Accountability, will join us for the discussion at the Board meeting on February 25, 2025.

A redlined version of the regulations is attached, along with a motion to solicit public comment on the proposed amendments.

Enclosures:

603 CMR 30.00 Strikethrough version of regulations showing proposed amendments
Motion: 603 CMR 30.00