

*Jeffrey C. Riley, the Massachusetts Commissioner of Education, has proposed several changes to the MCAS this year, in light of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Here are the changes and what they mean for Massachusetts students and educators.*

- In a January 5 memo, Commissioner Riley said he will recommend to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education that this year's seniors be allowed to earn their high school diplomas by passing their required courses and not have to pass the MCAS.
- He said, "The [Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)] will significantly reduce testing time for students in grades 3-8 through a session sampling approach, in which each student will take only a portion of each MCAS assessment in each subject."
- The Commissioner will *not* "recommend to the Board any new underperforming or chronically underperforming districts or schools in the upcoming school year." Those are labels the state assigns based on MCAS scores. They lead to drastic disruptions that usually include firing the principal and most of the staff. The "chronically underperforming" label leads to state takeovers.
- "Schools may offer the biology MCAS to first-time 9th graders in June, instead of or in addition to offering it in February."
- Riley said that students in grade 10 will still need to take and pass the English and Mathematics tests in order to attain a high school diploma. As has been customary in the past, retests will be available for 11th grade students this year and in subsequent years for students who fail the high school MCAS tests.

***Here is CPS's analysis of the changes.***

- Although Riley maintains that MCAS testing this year is essential to diagnosing students' progress during the pandemic, *this is highly dubious*.
  - First, each student in grades 3 through 8 will be taking only *a portion* of the test in each subject. Therefore, the results for any one child will *not* be comparable to their previous scores or the scores of other children.
  - Second, for an academic test to be valid, a student must have had a reasonable opportunity to learn the material on the test. Given the school closures during the pandemic and the inadequacy and inconsistencies of hybrid learning, and disparate access to Internet and computers at home, not all students will have had a reasonable opportunity to learn the content on the tests.
- Although DESE says there is no “opt-out provision” for the MCAS, that is misleading. State law says DESE must *give* tests to all students. However, state law does not say every student in grade 3 to 8 must take those tests and it does not provide for any penalties to students in grades 3 through 8 who refuse, or their parents. (See Citizens for Public Schools' new COVID version of the fact sheet on opting out of MCAS, posted on our website.)

At this point in time, CPS does not know if students will have the option to take the MCAS at home.

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