

5 Things to Know

About the MCAS High School Graduation Requirement

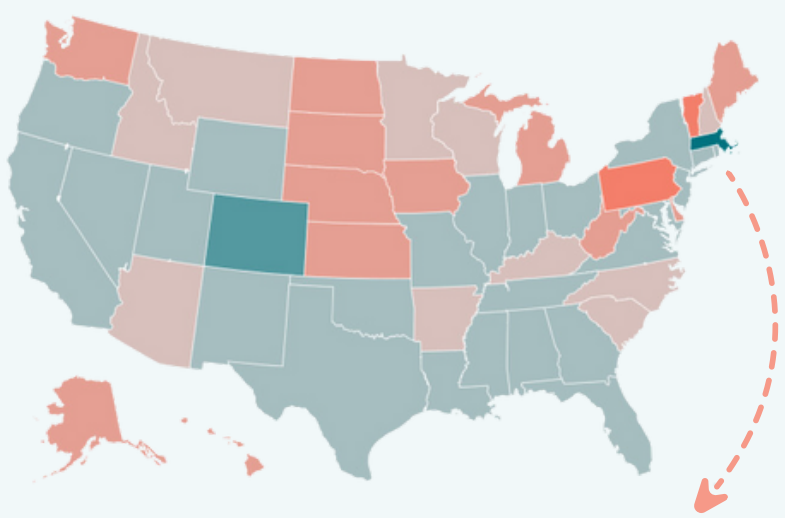
The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) is a set of statewide tests that measure student performance in English Language Arts (ELA), Science, and Mathematics. ELA and Math MCAS tests are given annually to students in grades 3-8 and 10, while the science tests are given in grades 5, 8, and 10. These results offer valuable insight into how well our education system is meeting the needs of various groups of students, including students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, multilingual learners, and students with disabilities. In addition, MCAS exams are a crucial part of the graduation requirements for high school students in Massachusetts. To obtain a high school diploma, students must fulfill local district requirements and achieve a passing score on the 10th grade ELA/Math/Science MCAS tests, also known as the **Competency determination (CD)**.

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46 out of 50 states and Washington D.C. have state-mandated graduation requirements and 44 of them have comprehensive statewide course requirements to earn a diploma. However, Massachusetts does not have comprehensive statewide course requirements. Instead, the state uses the MCAS competency determination as the only mechanism to objectively measure and ensure that students across the state are academically prepared for success after high school.

FIGURE 1: 50 STATE COMPARISON OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

- No Course Requirements
- Comprehensive Statewide Course Requirements
- Comprehensive Statewide Course Requirements & Limited Assessment
- Comprehensive Statewide Course Requirements & Comprehensive Assessment
- Limited Statewide Course Requirements & Local District Requirements
- Limited Statewide Course Requirements, Local District Requirements & Comprehensive Assessment



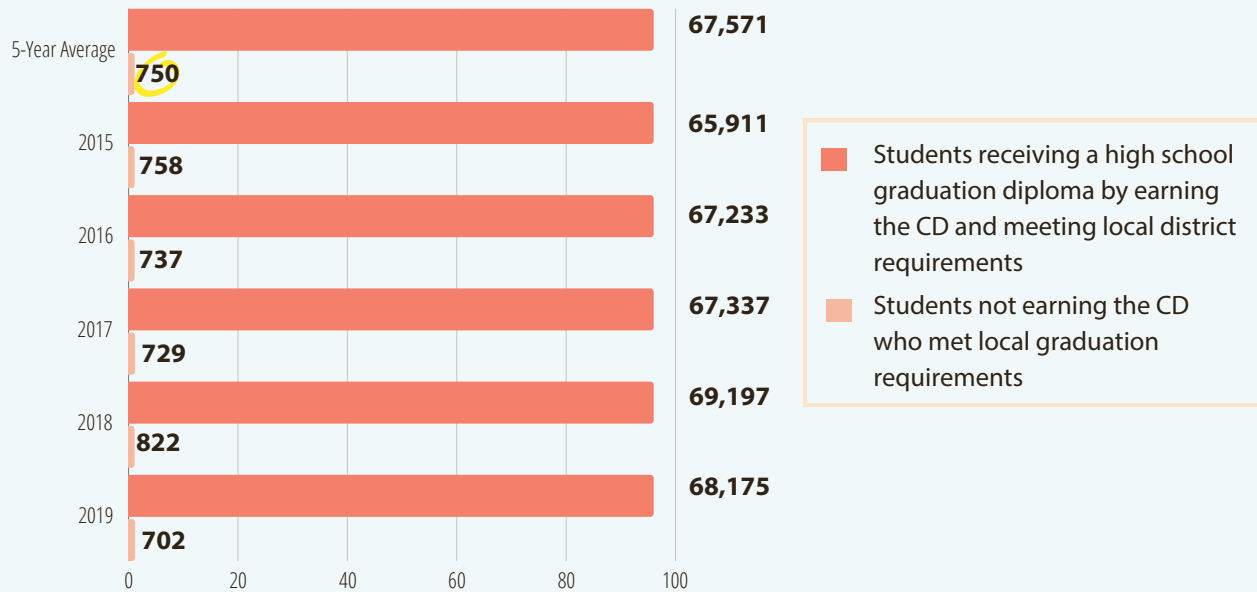
Massachusetts is 1 of 4 states without comprehensive statewide course requirements.

Data retrieved from Education Commission of the States : <https://edonomicslab.org/2023/10/24/the-fiscal-cliff-exploring-the-impacts-on-equity/>

2

In Massachusetts, **only about 1%, or 700 students, are denied a high school diploma solely because they did not pass** the 10th grade MCAS and earn the CD. Instead, these students receive Certificates of Attainment, indicating that they have only fulfilled local graduation requirements.

FIGURE 2: STUDENT OUTCOMES ON THE CD, 2015-19



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Students have several chances until the end of 12th grade to achieve a passing score on the 10th grade MCAS and obtain the CD. For **those who do not meet the standard passing requirement, there are multiple ways to get a CD.**

FIGURE 3: PATHWAYS TO EARNING A COMPETENCY DETERMINATION (CD)

Students can earn the CD by passing the 10th grade MCAS tests on their first attempt.

If students do not pass on their first attempt, they have five opportunities to pass the MCAS tests before the end of their senior year. Most students who fail their first test take it again and eventually pass.

To earn the CD, students can participate in an Educational Proficiency Plan (EPP), which assesses their academic performance and identifies areas for improvement. In the 2019 graduating class, 20% of students who earned the CD did so after successfully completing an EPP.

Students can also request that their school file an appeal on their behalf, allowing them to earn the CD by demonstrating that they have met certain learning standards through coursework or other means.

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In Massachusetts, **approximately 96%, or 67,500 students, pass the MCAS and earn the CD** by their senior year on an annual basis. The majority of students who do not earn the competency determination are multilingual learners (many of whom are newcomers) or students with disabilities.

FIGURE 4: CD ATTAINMENT RATES FOR STUDENT GROUPS (2015-19 AVERAGE)

Student Group	% Earning the CD
Black	92.4%
Latino	91.1%
Asian	97.8%
White	97.5%
Multilingual Learners	78.0%
Students with Disabilities	82.2%
Students from Low-Income Backgrounds	90.8%

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Nearly half of the school districts had **very few or no students who failed to graduate due to the MCAS**. In 2019, 48.3% of districts had no seniors who did not graduate because of MCAS performance, and an additional 21% of districts had only one student in that category. Out of the 702 students who completed their local requirements but failed to earn the CD, 59% were concentrated in 15 districts.

FIGURE 5: DISTRICTS WITH THE HIGHEST CONCENTRATION OF STUDENTS WHO DO NOT EARN A DIPLOMA BECAUSE OF MCAS PERFORMANCE

