



Andrew J. Bott
Superintendent

The Public Schools of Brookline
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Dear Parents and Guardians,

Every year as the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests approach, superintendents across the Commonwealth, myself included, are asked privately and publicly whether or not schools devote instructional time to MCAS test preparation or to the review of specific MCAS focused lessons prior to these state assessments.

Both the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and Brookline's Essential Learning Expectations are robust frameworks utilized as a foundation for our curriculum. We do not direct teachers to spend time teaching test-taking strategies nor do we encourage them to engage in last minute review of material for MCAS. Our curriculum, taught with fidelity and equally to all students, far exceeds the rigor of the MCAS and is more than sufficient to ensure students are prepared for MCAS tests. At the same time, Brookline very much values teacher autonomy, so you may find that individual teachers choose, on their own, to help familiarize their students with the format of these assessments. We leave that decision up to individual teachers.

I am also asked about the value of MCAS. MCAS is not an end point or a goal. It is a snapshot in time that can show us where we need to look more closely in our schools. These assessments continue to point out the inequities in opportunity and outcomes in our schools between groups of students. When we see patterns in MCAS results, it is up to our teachers, principals, staff, and district leaders to explore more deeply and understand whether these results are supported by other evidence of student learning, and call for any changes in our practice. Where there are inequalities in opportunity and outcomes within our schools, we work to identify ways we can change our own practice to better support students.

Finally, I am also occasionally asked whether or not families can have their student opt out of taking the MCAS tests. In short, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's answer to this question is no. In a letter to superintendents last year, then Commissioner Mitchell Chester said, "Neither the Commonwealth nor Congress provides an opt-out provision." Further, as laid out in the state regulation, if participation rates fall below 90% for any group of students, Brookline can fall to a Level 3 designation which would bring greater state accountability and oversight of our district.

One of my many responsibilities as superintendent is to ensure that the Public Schools of Brookline operates in compliance with all state and federal laws and regulations. Whether it is special education laws, civil rights laws, or laws and regulations related to statewide assessments, I need to be sure that we abide by all of them.

I have attached some additional resources related to these issues. Below you will find links to Deputy Superintendent Dr. Nicole Gittens' presentation on our 2017 MCAS results, a letter from our prior Interim Superintendent Dr. Joseph Connelly about MCAS, and the most recent communication from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education about MCAS participation.

Sincerely,



Andrew J. Bott
Superintendent

[Deputy Superintendent Dr. Nicole Gittens' 2017 MCAS Results Presentation to the School Committee](#)

[2016 Letter to Families from Dr. Joseph Connelly, Interim Superintendent](#)

[Education Commissioner Mitchell Chester's Letter to Superintendents Regarding MCAS Non-Participation](#)