DESE: Update on Student Competency Determinations
Re: Summary of Memo from Acting Commissioner of DESE, Russel D. Johnston on 11/6/24 and updated 12/11/24.
Sally-Ann L. Stukuls, Director of Curriculum and Grants, Grades 6-12
For School Committee Meeting: January 14, 2025

Following the vote to remove the passing of the MCAS in grade 10 as a graduation requirement, DESE has issued the following information about student competency determinations.

Students in the class of 2025 who have previously earned Competency Determinations (CD) through regular or retest administration of the10th Grade MCAS test (including the November 2024 retest), or through a DESE appeal process, have earned their CD and are not impacted by the change in statute. For any students beginning the 2024-2025 school year without a CD, they had the opportunity to earn it through the November 2024 retest or an appeal but not once the new law takes effect (in December)(update on 12/11/24). Students will still be required to earn a CD to graduate but it will now be based on "satisfactorily completing coursework that has been certified by the student's district" as written in the ballot question. More guidance will be forthcoming from DESE. To obtain current CD status of students, data is available in Edwin Analytics under a report entitled "PE618 Student CS Roster".

For students who have not yet earned a CD, including those on an Educational Proficiency Plan (EPP), a CD can no longer be obtained from passing the MCAS. As outline in the new law, a student who has not yet earned a CD must demonstrate "Mastery of a common core of skills, competencies, and knowledge 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 administered in 2023. Districts are still allowed to determine local graduation requirements. Districts may still use MCAS scores as part of their local graduation requirement if they wish but are not required to do so by the state.

The requirements for districts in developing a process to determine if a student has met the new standard to earn a CD as of 12/11/24 is:

DESE recommends all districts serving high school students should develop a process that is:

- Aligned to the new language of the stature in a way that allows districts to demonstrate students have met the new requirements.
- Approved by the governing board of the district (e.g. school committee, board of trustees etc.).
- Shared with all students, families/guardians, and strict stakeholders.
- Publicly available in multiple languages.

New language of the law gives districts the responsibility of certifying coursework “satisfactorily completed “ by the student. Districts should certify that students have satisfactorily completed coursework aligned with the state academic standards and curriculum frameworks in English Language Arts, Mathematics, and at least one science discipline. (Biology, Introductory Physics, Chemistry, or Technology/Engineering).

Individuals who have not earned a CD must be afforded a process for earning the CD and DESE can no longer offer that opportunity through MCAS assessment once the law takes effect. Districts must allow former students who satisfactorily completed the relevant coursework to earn the CD.

Participation in MCAS testing is still required by federal and state law and the ballot question did not change this requirement. DESE’s accountability system will still continue to use assessment participation rates and resulting achievement and growth in its annual determinations made through the district and school accountability system.

The new law has not changed any requirements around providing FAPE to students with disabilities. Consistent with federal law, a district must provide a “free and appropriate public education” (FAPE) to a student with disabilities and must also determine that the student has met state and local graduation requirements, prior to graduating that student. A DESE advisory on this topic exists.

DESE will offer all scheduled retest opportunities for high school students in the 2024-25 school year. No student will be required to take a retest in the spring of 2025, but they will have the opportunity to do so. DESE will evaluate the frequency of retest opportunities in the future school years.

The Stanley Z. Koplik Certificate of Mastery Awards, John and Abigail Adams Scholarship program, and the State Seal of Biliteracy program will not be changed because of the new law. These programs will continue to utilize scores from MCAS assessments as qualifications for the award programs. While the new law changed the requirements for earning a CD, it did not change the requirements for any of these programs.

<u>Background Information from DESE:</u>
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 highlighted in green is newly added and the text that has been highlighted in red 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.

Resources:

https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/graduation.html