K12 ACADEMICS — STATE EDUCATION SERIES



Massachusetts
Education Guide

A complete profile — schools, testing, graduation, accountability, school choice, teacher certification & financial aid, each in depth.

K12 ACADEMICS

Find Your Community

2026 EDITION

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Everything about school in Massachusetts.

This guide profiles **Massachusetts**'s education system in seven parts, each a two-page deep dive with the key facts, plain-English explanations, and a link to the full, regularly-updated guide online. From K12 Academics, the world's largest education resource, online since 2004.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Education Overview · State Testing · Graduation Requirements · Accountability & Report Cards · School Choice · Teacher Certification · Financial Aid

SEARCH 200+ DIRECTORIES

K-12 Schools · Colleges & Universities · Vendors · Summer Programs · International Programs · Performers

Education Overview

EDUCATION IN MASSACHUSETTS

Massachusetts educates roughly 910,000 public K–12 students across about 400 school districts (municipal, regional, charter, and vocational), overseen by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Board. Massachusetts consistently ranks at or near the top of national education rankings . Two recent...

WHO MUST ATTEND SCHOOL

- **Start age** — 6
- **End of compulsory age** — 16
- **Districts** — ~400 (municipal, regional, charter, vocational)
- **Satisfying it** — Public, approved private, or approved home education

PRE-K IN MASSACHUSETTS

Massachusetts does not yet have a statewide universal pre-K program, but it is expanding access through initiatives like the Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative (CPPI) and Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) operational grants that stabilize child-care programs. Some cities (such as Boston) offer universal pre-K locally....

AT A GLANCE

Compulsory	Ages 6–16
Districts	~400
Testing	MCAS
Diploma	District (post-Q2)
Choice	Inter-district

DISTRICTS & CHARTERS

Massachusetts's largest districts include Boston , Springfield , Worcester , Lynn , and Brockton . Massachusetts has a strong charter-school sector — Commonwealth charters (authorized by the state Board) and Horace Mann charters — with some Boston charters ranking among the highest-performing in the nation. Importantly, charter growth is...

PRIVATE & INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN MASSACHUSETTS

- **Independent boarding schools** — Nationally known schools such as Phillips Academy (Andover), Deerfield Academy, Groton School, Milton Academy, and Northfield Mount Hermon — plus The...
- **Independent day schools** — Schools such as Roxbury Latin, Belmont Hill, Buckingham Browne & Nichols, Winsor, and Noble and Greenough
- **Catholic & religious schools** — Archdiocese of Boston and diocesan schools (such as BC High and Catholic Memorial), plus Jewish and other faith-based schools
- **Specialty schools** — Montessori, Waldorf, and schools for specific learning needs

READ MASSACHUSETTS'S FULL EDUCATION OVERVIEW GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

State Testing

WHAT YOUR STATE TESTS

Massachusetts uses the MCAS (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System) in grades 3–8 and grade 10. The big news: in November 2024, voters passed Question 2 , which removed the requirement that students pass the MCAS to graduate — effective immediately for the class of 2025 . The MCAS is still given as an academic benchmark and for...

WHICH TESTS, WHICH GRADES

- **MCAS grades 3–8** — English language arts and mathematics each year; science at grades 5 and 8
- **MCAS grade 10** — ELA, Mathematics, and a high-school Science & Technology/Engineering test
- **MCAS-Alt** — Alternate assessment for eligible students; ACCESS for ELLs for multilingual learners

FORMAT & SUBJECTS

MCAS is computer-based (with paper for accommodations), combining multiple-choice, short-answer, and open-response items, including essays on ELA.

IS PASSING REQUIRED TO GRADUATE?

No longer required to pass. Since Question 2 passed, students do not need to achieve a passing MCAS score to graduate . They must still participate in the assessment and complete their district's course and credit requirements. State leaders have discussed strengthening course requirements (e.g., MassCore) in place of the test mandate...

AT A GLANCE

Test	**MCAS**
Grades	**3–8 and 10**
Subjects	**ELA, Math, Science**
Big change	**Grad requirement removed (2024)**
First affected	**Class of 2025**
Still given?	**Yes (accountability)**

HOW IT'S SCORED

MCAS reports performance levels — Not Meeting, Partially Meeting, Meeting, and Exceeding Expectations . With the graduation mandate removed, these levels are now used for school accountability and student feedback rather than gating a diploma.

TESTING WINDOWS

MCAS is given in a spring window (grade 10 has spring administrations with retest options historically). Exact dates are set by DESE and your district.

HOW TO PREPARE

- **Released items & practice** — DESE publishes released MCAS questions and practice tests matching the real format
- **Course-aligned learning** — MCAS tests the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks
- **Note the change** — MCAS still matters for feedback and accountability even though it no longer gates graduation

READ MASSACHUSETTS'S FULL STATE TESTING GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

Graduation Requirements

AT A GLANCE

Massachusetts made a major change in 2024: voters repealed the requirement to pass the MCAS to graduate (starting with the class of 2025). Now, districts certify that students have met state standards through coursework. The MassCore program of study is the state's recommended course sequence.

CREDIT & COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Massachusetts sets local district credit requirements, and recommends the MassCore course of study: 4 English, 4 math, 3 lab science, 3 history/social science, 2 world language, 1 arts, and additional courses. Districts set the specific credits.

TESTING TO GRADUATE

No longer required to pass MCAS. Students still take the MCAS (required by state and federal law), but a passing score is no longer required to graduate . Instead, districts certify that students have met the state's academic standards through coursework.

DIPLOMA TYPES & HONORS

Massachusetts issues a standard diploma, with the John and Abigail Adams Scholarship (merit) and the Seal of Biliteracy available. Districts may add honors.

AT A GLANCE

Big change	**MCAS graduation test repealed (2...**
Now	**Districts certify competency**
Recommended	**MassCore course of study**
MCAS	**Still taken, not required to pas...**
Confirm with	**Your district**

OTHER REQUIREMENTS

With the MCAS gate removed, competency is certified by the district based on coursework aligned to state standards. Confirm how your district handles this.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **How many credits does Massachusetts require?** — The state sets a minimum, but your district may require more — confirm locally.
- **Does Massachusetts require a test to graduate?** — No longer — the MCAS graduation requirement was repealed in 2024; districts now certify competency.
- **Are there different diploma types?** — Yes — plus honors designations and seals; see the diplomas section.
- **What if my student is behind on credits?** — Talk to the counselor about credit recovery and alternative pathways.
- **Where do I confirm the exact requirements?** — Your school counselor, district, and the state department of education.

READ MASSACHUSETTS'S FULL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

Accountability & Report Cards

AT A GLANCE

Massachusetts rates schools with an accountability classification and an accountability percentile , published on the School and District Profiles — rather than a letter grade or star rating.

HOW THIS STATE RATES SCHOOLS

Massachusetts measures each school's progress toward improvement targets and assigns a classification — schools are either not requiring assistance or intervention (with sub-levels like "meeting targets") or requiring assistance or intervention . It also reports an accountability percentile (1–99) comparing similar schools. Read both...

WHAT GETS MEASURED

- **Academic achievement** — How students score on state tests (proficiency in reading/ELA and math)
- **Academic growth / progress** — How much students improve year to year — not just where they land
- **Graduation rate** — For high schools (the 4-year cohort rate)
- **English-learner progress** — How English learners are progressing toward proficiency
- **School quality / student success** — An extra indicator — often attendance/chronic absenteeism, college/career readiness, or similar

AT A GLANCE	
Format	**Classification + percentile**
Classes	**Requiring assistance/interventio...**
Also	**Accountability percentile (1–99)**
Tool	**MA School & District Profiles**
Look up at	**profiles.doe.mass.edu**

FINDING & READING THE REPORT CARD

Look up any school on the Massachusetts School and District Profiles (profiles.doe.mass.edu) . Review the classification, percentile, and target progress , and the trend.

HOW FAMILIES SHOULD USE RATINGS

- **Read it in context** — A school's score reflects its students' circumstances too, not only its quality
- **Look at growth, not just scores** — Growth shows how much a school moves students — often more telling than raw proficiency
- **Check the trend** — Is the school improving over time?
- **Look past the summary** — Dig into the underlying data (subgroups, attendance, readiness)
- **Then visit** — Data raises questions; a visit answers them (see our guide on evaluating a school)

READ MASSACHUSETTS'S FULL ACCOUNTABILITY & REPORT CARDS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

School Choice

AT A GLANCE

Massachusetts does not have a private-school-choice program. It offers strong public choice: a well-known charter sector and the Interdistrict School Choice program (attend a participating public school in another district, tuition-free).

THIS STATE'S CHOICE PROGRAMS

There is no ESA, voucher, or tax-credit scholarship for private school in Massachusetts. Families seeking a private school pay tuition (with financial aid often available).

PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE, TOO

- **Open enrollment / transfers** — Attend a public school outside your zone, where allowed (see our finding-your-school guide)
- **Charter schools** — Tuition-free public schools of choice (where available)
- **Magnet schools** — Tuition-free public schools with a specialized focus
- **Homeschooling** — Legal in all 50 states (rules vary)

LEGAL & LEGISLATIVE STATUS

Private-choice proposals have not been enacted in Massachusetts. Confirm the current status if you've heard of a new proposal.

AT A GLANCE	
Private choice?	No statewide program
Public choice	Charters + Interdistrict School...
Charters	A well-known public charter sect...
Homeschool	Legal (approved by district)
Confirm with	Your district

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **Does Massachusetts have a private-school-choice program?** — No — Massachusetts has no private program, but offers charters and Interdistrict School Choice.
- **What's the difference between an ESA and a voucher?** — A voucher pays a private school directly; an ESA is a flexible parent-managed account for many approved expenses.
- **What is a tax-credit scholarship?** — Donors get a tax credit for giving to organizations that fund private-school scholarships.
- **Is there public school choice too?** — Yes — open enrollment, charters, and magnets (plus homeschooling).
- **Where do I confirm the details?** — On the official state program site (see below).

READ MASSACHUSETTS'S FULL SCHOOL CHOICE GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

Teacher Certification

HOW LICENSURE WORKS HERE

Massachusetts licenses teachers through the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) . You complete an approved program, pass the required MTEL exams, and earn an Initial License , later a Professional License .

WHICH TESTS THIS STATE USES

- **Communication & Literacy Skills** — Reading and writing — required of essentially all candidates
- **MTEL subject test(s)** — Content test(s) for your license field (elementary candidates take the Foundations of Reading and General Curriculum tests)
- **Note** — Requirements vary by field — confirm your specific tests

WHAT YOU NEED TO GET LICENSED

- **A bachelor's degree** — From an accredited college or university
- **A state-approved teacher-preparation program** — Completed at a college or through an approved alternative route
- **Student teaching / clinical practice** — Supervised classroom experience
- **Pass the required exams** — See the exams section above
- **A background check** — Fingerprint-based criminal background check
- **Apply to the state** — Submit your application and documents to the licensing agency

AT A GLANCE

Agency	**Massachusetts DESE**
Communication/literacy	**MTEL Communication & Literacy Sk...**
Subject	**MTEL subject test(s)**
License	**Initial — then Professional**

OTHER PATHS INTO TEACHING

Most states offer alternative routes for career-changers and those with a degree in another field. In Massachusetts, these typically let you start teaching while completing licensure requirements — through district or university alternative-certification programs, residencies, or emergency/provisional permits. Requirements (and the...

RECIPROCITY & OUT-OF-STATE LICENSES

- **Interstate agreements** — Most states participate in the NASDTEC Interstate Agreement, which eases (but doesn't guarantee) recognition of an out-of-state license
- **You may still owe exams** — States often require you to meet their own testing (or coursework) requirements, sometimes within a grace period
- **Check both states** — Confirm the specific steps with Massachusettss agency and your current state

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Financial Aid

THE STATE AID PICTURE

Massachusetts administers state aid through the Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA) at the Department of Higher Education, and has recently made community college tuition-free for residents. Undocumented students can apply via the Massachusetts Application for State Financial Aid (MASFA) .

NEED-BASED STATE GRANTS

- **MASSGrant & MASSGrant Plus** — Need-based grants for Massachusetts residents — MASSGrant Plus expands aid to cover more of tuition, fees, and (for the highest-need students) books.
- **Cash Grant** — Additional need-based aid at public colleges.

MERIT & LOTTERY SCHOLARSHIPS

- **John and Abigail Adams Scholarship** — A merit tuition waiver at Massachusetts public colleges for high-scoring students on the MCAS.

PROMISE & FREE-COLLEGE PROGRAMS

MassEducate makes community college tuition- and fee-free for eligible Massachusetts residents, and MassReconnect offers free community college to residents 25 and older without a degree.

COLLEGE SAVINGS (529 PLAN)

Massachusetts' U.Fund College Investing Plan (through MEFA) is the state's 529 plan (with a state tax deduction).

AT A GLANCE

Need-based	**MASSGrant & MASSGrant Plus**
Merit	**John & Abigail Adams Scholarship**
Free community college	**MassEducate & MassReconnect**
529 plan	**U.Fund**
Agency	**MA OSFA**
Apply by	**FAFSA or MASFA**

APPLYING & THE STATE AGENCY

- **File the FAFSA early** — It's the trigger for state grants and many scholarships
- **Register with OSFA** — Create the state agency's student account to track and claim awards
- **Confirm your details** — Verify residency, GPA, and enrollment as required
- **Meet any extra requirements** — Some programs need a separate form, GPA, or service commitment
- **Reapply every year** — State aid is awarded annually

DEADLINES & TIMING

State deadlines are typically much earlier than the federal FAFSA deadline , and some aid is first-come, first-served until funds run out. File the FAFSA as soon as it opens (in the fall) and confirm the state's specific priority date.

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