

Board of Education talks MCAS replacement January 28, 2025

By Maya Mitchell
Boston University Statehouse Program

The chair of the board of the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education acknowledged Tuesday that they faced a “mess” in creating a new statewide high school graduation standard after voters in November threw out the old requirement of passing the 10th grade Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System test.

“Where we find ourselves today, it’s a mess right now,” DESE chair Kathleen Craven said Tuesday morning during a BOE meeting at their headquarters in Everett.

Under federal statute, states must give annual assessments in language arts, science and math for high school students. It is up to each state to determine what is evaluated and if it will be weighed towards degree requirements.

In her State of the Commonwealth address earlier this month, [Gov. Maura Healey announced an executive order creating a council to determine new standards](#). According to state officials, the voter referendum gave the BOE broad power to determine what comes after MCAS.

Despite this, no meaningful legislation has been passed regarding competency determination since the voter referendum passed in November, state officials say.

Education Secretary Patrick Tutwiler, who will co-chair the council with Interim DESE Commissioner Russel Johnston, said that Healey gave the council two years to come up with a solution to the competency determination problem.

“We believe that we can move a lot in a fashion that's a lot easier than that,” Tutwiler said. “We don't think it's going to take two years. We feel pretty confident that this will move along quickly.”

State officials are preparing to change legislative language about competency determination first since it is centered around the MCAS. After that, they said they will determine if 10th grade students should also be assessed on social science and a world language in addition to the English language arts, math and science.

State officials said they will have to determine if enough 10th graders were in these classes to warrant some sort of state assessment.

During the 2023-2024 school year, there were 69,406 10th graders in Massachusetts. Almost 2,000 of those students were not taking a history class and almost 14,500 were not taking a world language class.

Johnston said that no matter what gets decided, the new evaluation format would not be a test.

“The language in the statute is about mastery of coursework and satisfactory completing coursework,” he said. “We would not be reintroducing any kind of test.”

Officials said they do not think any new requirements will be set for the class of 2025. If a new standard is not set by the spring, the class of 2026 might not be subjected to new requirements either due to scheduling for the next school year.

“There's a short amount of time where the penalty for not doing something is great,” Rob Curtin, chief officer for data, assessment and accountability said. “You lose an entire year by, in essence, not doing something in a two or three month period of time.”

While some districts have set their own standards, state officials stress the need to figure out a solution fast.

“Until legislation, if and when it gets passed, we are in a limbo,” Craven said. “We don’t have anything out there.”