

## [Question 2: Should MCAS exam remain a graduation requirement?](#)

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Published: 10-18-2024 4:04 PM  
Modified: 10-18-2024 7:43 PM

GREENFIELD — On Election Day, voters will have the opportunity to determine the future of high school graduation requirements in Massachusetts with a vote on Question 2.

The measure, which has been spearheaded by the Massachusetts Teachers Association, proposes eliminating the requirement that a student passes the 10th grade Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) exam in mathematics, English, and science and technology to receive a high school diploma.

Instead, the proposed law would require students to complete coursework certified by the student's district as "demonstrating mastery of the competencies contained in the state academic standards in mathematics, science and technology, and English, as well as any additional areas determined by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education," according to the summary included in the state voter information packet, which is written by the attorney general.

In a nutshell, a "yes" vote would eliminate the requirement that students pass the MCAS in order to graduate, but still require students to complete coursework that meets state standards. A "no" vote would make no change in state laws requiring students to pass the MCAS to graduate high school.

A 'no' vote

Even if approved, opponents of Question 2 say the MCAS will still need to be proctored due to federal requirements and while it doesn't provide the full assessment of student skills, the exam is still an important snapshot of where Massachusetts students stand.

Locally, Ralph C. Mahar Regional School District Superintendent Elizabeth Zielinski said she opposes the measure for that reason. She said she believes only one Mahar student in the past 10 years did not graduate due to the MCAS requirement.

"There are federal regulations that we comply with. There would be no change in anything other than it won't be counted as a graduation requirement," Zielinski said. "[A 'yes' vote] is really not going to change much. It doesn't mean the MCAS goes away. We have to have a test."

The Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents' Executive Committee voted to oppose the ballot measure in September, issuing a statement that Question 2 "fails to stipulate a replacement for the MCAS exam as a graduation requirement." While the association adopted the "No on 2" position, it should be noted that does not mean all superintendents maintain the same position.

“If passed, Question 2 would undermine the high standards that are the cornerstone of Massachusetts’ successful work in education reform over the past thirty years,” said association President Armand Pires, who also is superintendent of Medway Public Schools, in a news post on the organization’s website. “We believe it is critical for the commonwealth to have a statewide standard for earning a high school diploma.”

That being said, the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents notes the grade 10 MCAS exam alone is an insufficient standard for graduation and it urges state leaders to develop and adopt a “more comprehensive set of requirements for students to demonstrate competency.”

Secretary of Education Patrick Tutwiler, in an interview with [WCVB-TV’s On the Record](#), said he was “adamantly opposed” to Question 2, emphasizing the MCAS is a piece of the puzzle that allows Massachusetts to be a “beacon of success” in education.

“The ballot question seeks to take a piece of this away and we’re deeply concerned about it,” Tutwiler said, noting Gov. Maura Healey “shares this very strong feeling.”

“Remember what the MCAS is — it is simply a measure of the Massachusetts learning standards and students’ mastery of learning standards,” he continued. “The ballot question does not replace what we have right now with a system, it just eliminates the current system.”

Gill-Montague Regional School District Superintendent Brian Beck also said he is opposed to Question 2, as there is no proposed alternative to fill the void.

A ‘yes’ vote

Proponents of the measure, however, say there are other ways to measure student success and an exam shouldn’t be the barrier that stops a student from walking across the graduation stage.

“Without a diploma, there’s a lot of doors closed to you, even if you’ve completed the coursework,” said Mohawk Trail Regional School District Director of Curriculum and Instruction Sarah Jetzon.

In a joint statement issued by the Yes on 2 Campaign, Massachusetts Teachers Association President Max Page and Vice President Deb McCarthy said the measure would end high-stakes testing in the state, which disproportionately impacts students of color, English language learners and students with learning disabilities.

“With over 50 legislators joining our efforts, the Yes on 2 campaign is growing stronger than ever as we fight for students, teachers and the strength of our state’s high education standards,” Page and McCarthy said in a statement. “These legislators understand that the MCAS graduation requirement is not serving our students or our communities, and their support shows that Massachusetts is ready to embrace a more inclusive and balanced system of accountability that upholds our state’s high standards and gives all students the opportunity to succeed.”

Among those legislators is state Rep. Susannah Whipps, I-Athol, who said the stakes are too high when it comes to the MCAS, as students spend a dozen years in school and placing their chance to graduate shouldn't come down to a series of exams.

“By the time graduation comes along, a student in the commonwealth has invested 12 years of their life attending school. One test for ‘all of the marbles’ is a ton of pressure,” Whipps wrote in an email. “I believe standardized tests are an appropriate bellwether regarding the success of a student, or even their teachers, but one test is not an appropriate gauge of a lifetime in school. It’s a lot of pressure to have your future riding on one assessment.”

Whipps added that teachers have been “chained to ‘teaching to the test’” and they “deserve our support and confidence that they are educating our children.”

Other area legislators in support of the Yes on 2 Campaign include Sen. Jo Comerford, D-Northampton; Sen. Paul Mark, D-Becket; Sen. Jacob Oliveira, D-Ludlow; Rep. Patricia Duffy, D-Holyoke; and Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa, D-Northampton.

Several members of the state’s federal delegation have also endorsed the Yes on 2 Campaign, including U.S. Reps. Jim McGovern, Ayanna Pressley, Lori Trahan and Bill Keating, as well as U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren.

“In Massachusetts, we believe that every student deserves a high-quality education that sets them up for success — and the opportunity to demonstrate their true potential, regardless of whether or not they are good at standardized testing,” McGovern, D-Worcester, said in a statement. “That’s why I believe we need to move beyond the MCAS high school graduation requirement. As the brother of two public school teachers, I am proud to support Question 2. I stand with educators and students across the commonwealth who believe in a more comprehensive approach to assessing student readiness.”

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*Source : <https://www.recorder.com/Question-2-57489390>*