

2016 Back-to-School Basics

How the state and local school districts work together to serve your child



Testing

Instruction

Curriculum

Standards

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY
EDUCATION

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A message to parents:

Massachusetts has statewide learning standards that outline what students are expected to know and be able to do in each subject area and grade level. The standards set high expectations for all students – regardless of the school district they live in.

More than 20 years of education reform

The 1993 Massachusetts Education Reform Act introduced the statewide learning standards, helped all districts provide at least a minimum level of school funding, introduced new requirements for teachers, and created a statewide test (MCAS) to measure students' progress on the standards.

From the middle of the pack to #1 in the nation

Since the implementation of education reform, Massachusetts students have moved from being at the middle of the pack compared to other states to leading the nation in academic achievement. Massachusetts students are also competitive on a global scale.

Yet while Massachusetts students perform well overall, some students are not achieving at a level that prepares them for success after high school. The state's education leaders

understand that preparing our students for the 21st century requires frequent re-examination of and improvements to our standards and assessments.

Teachers use standards and tests to help guide their instruction

Learning standards are not classroom curriculum, so while the state sets what students need to know and be able to do in each grade level, many decisions are made at the local level.

Curriculum, lesson plans, books, materials and other resources are all selected locally, sometimes at the district level, and sometimes, as in the case of specific materials, by individual teachers.

(Although some states have state – mandated curricula and textbooks, that is not true in Massachusetts.)

[Click to watch Commissioner Chester's video on why Mass. students are #1 in the nation](#)



Step by step, schools use state standards and testing to improve teaching and learning



4. Testing

State assessments help teachers, administrators and state officials figure out where students are mastering the material and where they need additional help.

3. Instruction

Teachers are responsible for providing instruction that helps students learn and retain information so that they build on their knowledge each year.

2. Curriculum

At the local level, school districts choose curriculum and assemble materials – lesson plans, assignments, text books, and other resources – to help students meet the learning standards.

1. Standards

The state, working with Massachusetts educators, establishes learning standards that describe what a student should know and be able to do at each grade level.