



**Dr. Jessica Boston Davis**

*Assistant Superintendent of Academics*

[www.somerville.k12.ma.us](http://www.somerville.k12.ma.us)

[jbostondavis@k12.somerville.ma.us](mailto:jbostondavis@k12.somerville.ma.us)

617-625-6600 ext. 6035

To: Somerville Public Schools School Committee

From: Dr. Jessica Boston Davis, Assistant Superintendent of Academics

Cc: Dr. Rubén Carmona, Superintendent  
Ms. Alicia Kersten, Principal of Somerville High School  
Ms. Margaret DePasquale Green, Principal of Full Circle High School

Date: February 3, 2025

Subject: Quarter Two Academic Update: Competency Determination without MCAS

**Purpose:**

In November of 2024, Massachusetts voters passed Question 2: Elimination of MCAS as a High School Graduation Requirement. The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests mathematics, science and technology, and English. The purpose of this memo is to provide clarity on what this means for the students in Somerville Public Schools and a recommendation for a future process.

**Framing:**

MCAS is no longer used for competency determination. However, our District's participation in MCAS is still required by federal and state law and the ballot question did not change this requirement. DESE's accountability system will continue to use assessment participation rates (and the resulting achievement and growth data) in its annual determinations, reflected in the district and school accountability system. MCAS scores are still used for the State Seal of Biliteracy and two state scholarships. More importantly, the MCAS provides a summative snapshot on how students are performing academically. Although the MCAS data does not tell the whole story, it is valuable and valid as we continue to move toward academic excellence in SPS.

*The District now needs to determine the Competency Determination for the graduating class of 2025.*

**Competency Determination:**

Massachusetts students have to meet both their **district's local graduation requirements** (see Appendix A and B) and the standards of **competency determination (CD)** to earn a high school diploma. This has not changed.

- Prior to Question 2, a passing score on High School MCAS (ELA, Math, and Science) served as the CD
- Now, locally we need to determine CD to 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 described in section one I administered in 2023.*" This needs to be approved by the School Committee.

Per [Massachusetts DESE guidance issued on December 11, 2024](#), Somerville Public Schools students in the class of 2025 who have previously earned a CD through MCAS “are not impacted by the change in statute.” Students who have not yet earned a CD “can no longer earn a CD through an MCAS test or retest process.” The new law states that a student who has not yet earned a CD may obtain a CD through completion of district certified coursework that is aligned with state academic standards and frameworks in areas measured by MCAS tests. DESE and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education may offer future guidance or regulation on the new law. **Therefore, our task is to first focus on the class of 2025. This CD would be applicable for Full Circle and Somerville High School Students.**

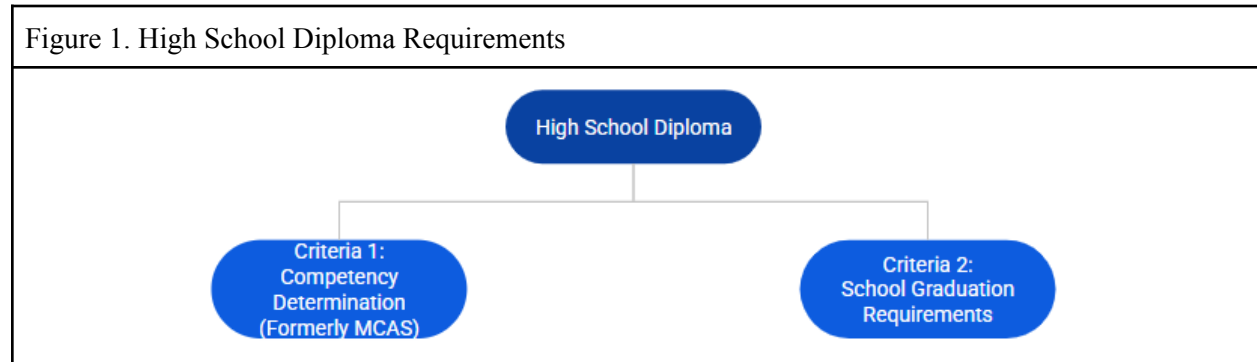


Figure 2. Change in [Mass. General Laws c.69 § 1D](#) on Competency Determination Since Question 2

Before Question 2	Now
<p>“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 <b>[as measured by] the 10th grade ELA, Math and Science MCAS Exams.</b>”</p>	<p>“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 <del>as measured by the 10th grade ELA, Math and Science MCAS Exams.</del> <b>[as measured 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 framework in the areas measured by the MCAS High School tests administered in 2023.</b>”</p>

**Recommendation For Class of 2025:**

We recommend that the School Committee approve the following proposal for the Competency Determination:

For the Class of 2025 at Somerville High School and Full Circle, a successful Competency Determination (CD) requires a qualifying score on the MCAS prior to December 5, 2024 or a passing grade in the following coursework:

- English 1 and 2
- Algebra 1 and Geometry
- Biology or Physics or Chemistry or Technology/Engineering  
*\* or their equivalent courses.*

The Somerville Public Schools reserve the right to substitute any courses for the above stated courses provided they fully align with the appropriate MA Curriculum Framework Standards and the State Law regarding Competency Determination M.G.L. c.69 §1D.

Students who do not meet the required passing grades in the above prescribed courses may enroll in summer school, credit recovery courses, or be scheduled by their counselor to take additional coursework that meets the same MA Curriculum Framework Standards. These opportunities will provide a student who has yet to meet the CD requirements additional opportunities to meet this standard for graduation.

In the event that a student transfers into Somerville High School or Full Circle at any point during their high school career, a transcript review will be conducted to ensure that the coursework from the previous school is aligned with SHS or FC coursework for the CD and graduation requirements. The Principal shall be the arbiter for all disagreements in transcript review. An appeal of the principal's decision may be made to the Superintendent. The Superintendent's decision on transcript reviews as related to CD is final.

**Additional Considerations & Next Steps**

- The CD is inclusive for students in Career and Technical Education (CTE), students in special education programming, and students who are multilingual learners.
- The SHS and Full Circle Administration are currently considering interventions for students in the Class of 2025 who are at risk of not meeting the new Competency Determination
- Consistent with past practices, students placed in out-of-district programs/schools will undergo a transcript review to ensure they have met the SHS's or FC's CD graduation requirements. If they do not meet these requirements, students may be eligible for interventions as outlined above, or interventions by their out-of-district program/schools. Please note that some out-of-district programs/schools have their own CD requirements which allows students to receive a diploma from that program/school.

Appendix A - Somerville High School Graduation Requirements

This information can be found in the [Somerville High School Program of Studies](#).  
 The change in Competency Determination **does not** impact SHS graduation requirements listed below.

<b>REQUIREMENTS: GRADUATION, PROGRAM &amp; PROMOTION</b>		
<b><u>PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS/RECOMMENDATIONS</u></b>		<b><u>CREDITS NEEDED TO BE PROMOTED</u></b>
<b>Freshman (Grade 9)</b>	<b>Sophomore (Grade 10)</b>	<b>to sophomore class 25 credits</b>
English 1	English 2	<b>to junior class 50 credits</b>
Mathematics	Mathematics	<b>to senior class 70 credits</b>
Science (Biology)	Science	
World History	U.S. History Themes	<b>Full-Year courses (2 semesters): 5 credits/class</b>
Health Education 1	Phys. Ed/Health	<b>Half-Year courses (1 semester): 2.5 credits/class</b>
World Language	World Language	
<b>Junior (Grade 11)</b>	<b>Senior (Grade 12)</b>	<b>ALL STUDENTS in grades 9-12 must carry a full-time program equaling 990 hours of instruction each year.</b>
English 3	English 4	
Mathematics	Mathematics	
Social Studies Choice	Phys. Ed/Health	
Phys. Ed/Health		
Science		

**GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS:**

- Successful completion of **105** credits, with at least **20** credits earned in senior year
- Enrollment in high school for four years beyond eighth grade
- English 1, 2, 3 and 4 or appropriate ELL courses  
NOTE: Students may not take more than two major English courses in one year with the exception of senior year. A student who has failed a major English course must either pass the failed English course in the subsequent summer school session or repeat the failed English course in the succeeding academic year. Placement in English courses should be sequential. An exception to the sequential rule can be made for seniors.
- Mathematics, 20 credits  
NOTE: Including a sequence of Algebra 1/Geometry/Algebra 2 or the equivalent (with approval of the Department Head).
- Science, 15 credits
- Social Studies, 15 credits  
NOTE: Starting with the class of 2026, students are required to pass World History and US History. In 11th grade students satisfy a required 5 credits of social studies choice by selecting two 11th grade semester electives OR a yearlong grade 11 AP offering. Students in the class of 2025 must have taken the U.S. History 1, U.S. History 2, and World History and students must have passed one year of U.S. History to graduate.
- World Language, 10 credits  
NOTE: Students are required to pass two years of the same World Language. Students must pass the Career and Technical Education Program for at least 2 years, beginning with 10th grade, to be eligible for the modification of the World Language requirement. Consideration

of the World Language requirement for Special Education students will be included as part of the I. E. P. Team decision. English Language Learners’ proficiencies in their native language will satisfy the graduation requirement.

- Physical Education, 5 credits and Health, 5 credits  
NOTE: All students are required to take a minimum of one Physical Education or Health Education course each year. All students are required to pass Health Education 1, Health Education 2 or a Health elective, and two semester courses in Physical Education.  
 Suggested Physical Education/Health Education Course Sequence:  
     Grade 9 – Health Education 1                      Grade 10 – Physical Education  
     Grade 11 – Health Education 2                    Grade 12 – Physical Education
- Fine or Performing Arts, (Music, Visual Arts, Theatre, or Media Art), 5 credits.
- MCAS Prep courses may be counted in meeting requirements.

**COURSE/GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS FOR CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION STUDENTS:**

A student must be enrolled in the Career and Technical Education Program for four years, beginning with “Exploratory”, to be eligible for the modification of the Math requirement. Students must pass the Career and Technical Education Program for at least 2 years, beginning with 10th grade, to be eligible for the modification of the World Language requirement. Students electing a vocational program for career-entry positions must also accumulate minimum credit requirements according to the following:

- Successful completion of **105** credits, with at least **20** credits earned in senior year
- English 1, 2, 3 and 4 or appropriate ELL courses  
NOTE: Students may not take more than two major English courses in one year with the exception of senior year. A student who has failed a major English course must either pass the failed English course in the subsequent summer school session or repeat the failed English course in the succeeding academic year. Placement in English courses should be sequential. An exception to the sequential rule can be made for seniors.
- Mathematics, 20 credits  
NOTE: Freshmen, sophomores and juniors will take math courses offered in the math department, at minimum up to and including Algebra 2. If a student completes Algebra 2 with a passing grade and earns a proficient score on the Math MCAS, they will be eligible to satisfy the fourth year of math requirement from the embedded academic portion in the career area. Students must pass their vocational class in their senior year to be eligible for this exemption.
- Science, 15 credits  
NOTE: Human Anatomy and Physiology is embedded in Health Careers 3 and Dental 3. Upon successful completion of the course, 5 credits of the 15 required science credits are fulfilled. STEAM Design & Engineering I and II are embedded in Drafting & Engineering 3 and Advanced Manufacturing 3. Upon successful completion of the course, 5 credits of the 15 required science credits are fulfilled.
- Social Studies, 15 credits  
NOTE: Starting with the class of 2026, students are required to pass World History and US History. In 11th grade students satisfy a required 5 credits of social studies choice by selecting two 11th grade semester electives OR a yearlong grade 11 AP offering. Students in the class of 2025 must have taken the U.S. History 1, U.S. History 2, and World History and

students must have passed one year of U.S. History to graduate.

- World Language, 10 credits

NOTE: Students are required to pass two years of the same World Language. Students must pass the Career and Technical Education Program for at least 2 years, beginning with 10th grade, to be eligible for the modification of the World Language requirement.

- Physical Education, 5 credits and Health, 5 credits

NOTE:

- Grade 9: Health Education 1 is embedded in the Exploratory program AND fulfills the Health 1 requirement.
- Grade 10: Students in CTE must enroll in at least one semester of physical education course.
- Grade 11 and 12: Health Education 2 and one Physical Education course are embedded in CTE 3 and 4 courses AND fulfills Health Education 2 and one semester of physical education.
- All students are required to take a minimum of one Physical Education or Health Education course each year. All students are required to take and pass Health Education 1 and Health Education 2 or a Health elective along with two semester courses in physical education.
- One Fine or Performing Arts, (Music, Visual Arts, Theatre, or Media Art), either a 2.5 or a 5 credit course.
- MCAS prep courses may be counted in meeting requirements.
- CTE students who are classified as Special Education or as English learners or former English learners during their high school years may request a 2.5 or 5 credit graduation requirement waiver during 11th and 12th grade that can be applied to courses not required by state or federal regulations. Students who wish to request this waiver should contact the school counselor.

Appendix B - Full Circle High School Graduation Requirements  
*The change in Competency Determination **will remove MCAS** as a graduation requirement at Full Circle.*

Full Circle Graduation Requirements

<b>MCAS</b> ELA Math STE	<b>Credits</b> Minimum of 720	<b>Requirements</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 4 yrs of ELA <input type="checkbox"/> 3 yrs of Math <input type="checkbox"/> 2 years Social Studies/History <input type="checkbox"/> 1 year Health <input type="checkbox"/> 1 year PE	<b>Essay</b> What Full Circle means to me / my high school experience
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**MCAS:** Science MCAS: 9th or 10th grade, Biology (467 or higher) or Physics (470 or higher)

**Credits:** Students can earn a maximum of 90 credits each trimester / max 270 credits for the year. Students need to earn a minimum of 180 credits to move on to the next grade level:  
 Min 180 = 10th grade  
 Min 360 = 11th grade  
 Min 540 = 12th grade  
 Min 720 = Graduation

Earning credit:

- Reading Period = 10 credits (60% attendance)
- Courses = 20 credits each course / 60 credits for all 3 courses (2/C or higher grade)
- Counseling Group/St. Gov't = 5 credits (60% attendance)
- WIN = 5 credits (60% attendance)
- Connections = 5 credits (60% attendance)
- Electives = 5 credits (1 credit per class 60% attendance)
  - It is recommended that students earn at least 70 credits each trimester to stay on track.
  - Honor roll: 70 credits plus 3's & 4's in all classes
  - Super honor roll: 90 credits plus 4's in all classes

**Requirements:** Students must pass courses in the following content areas:

- 4 yrs of ELA
- 3 yrs of Math
- 2 years Science
- 1 year Social Studies
- 1 year US History
- 1 year Health
- 1 year PE

**Trimesters** are 60 days long.

1 trimester course = semester requirement

2 trimesters = 1 year

Students have an opportunity to earn 1 and ½ years of requirements in one school year.

**Essay:** Complete an essay from your point of view about your high school experience - your accomplishments, goals, plans....