

**APPENDIX A**  
**MODIFIED COMPETENCY DETERMINATION—FAQS**

## Modified Competency Determination – Frequently Asked Questions

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*The purpose of this document is to provide clarification on the process that the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) will use to determine whether certain high school students meet modified competency determination requirements.*

### Background

In response to the suspension of in-person instruction and the cancellation of the spring 2020 MCAS assessments due to the COVID-19 emergency, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) voted to temporarily modify the competency determination (CD) requirement for certain high school students.<sup>1</sup> Under this change, certain students may earn their CD through successful completion of a relevant Department-identified high school course, according to the criteria below:

- **For students in grade 12 in the 2019-2020 school year** (at the time of the April 2020 BESE vote), as well as other actively enrolled students who were on track to graduate in the 2019-2020 school year, the CD will be awarded in each subject as follows:
  - *For English language arts and mathematics* – upon district certification that the student earned credit for a course aligned to the curriculum frameworks in the relevant subject matter and has demonstrated competency in that subject.
  - *For science and technology/engineering* – upon district certification that the student earned credit for a course aligned to the curriculum frameworks in the relevant subject matter and has demonstrated competency in one of the four tested disciplines (biology, chemistry, introductory physics, and technology/engineering) during their high school career.
- **For students in the classes of 2021 and 2022**, the CD will be awarded in each subject as follows:
  - *For English language arts and mathematics* – upon district certification that the student earned full credit for a relevant course aligned to the appropriate curriculum framework in that subject matter and has demonstrated competency in that subject.
  - *For science and technology/engineering* – upon demonstration that the student earned credit for a course in the relevant subject matter and demonstrated competency in one of the four tested disciplines (biology, chemistry, introductory physics, technology/engineering) during their high school career.
- **For students in the class of 2023**, the CD in science and technology/engineering shall be awarded upon demonstration that the student earned credit for a course in the relevant subject matter and demonstrated competency in one of the four tested disciplines (biology, chemistry, introductory physics, technology/engineering) during their high school career.

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### *Accessing the Competency Determination Tool*

#### **Is the modified CD process required?**

Yes. All districts that graduated students in 2020-2023 have students who are eligible for the modified CD due to the cancellation of the 2020 MCAS assessments, and therefore must use this tool to submit information to DESE for review. Districts will not be able to issue diplomas to students who have not earned their CD via MCAS testing or this modified process.

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<sup>1</sup> The BESE voted to modify CD requirements on four occasions: [April 2020](#) (in ELA, mathematics, and science for students in grade 12 and those who were on track to graduate in 2020); [May 2020](#) (in science only for students in the classes of 2021-2023); [January 2021](#) (in ELA and mathematics for students in the class of 2021); and [April 2021](#) (in ELA and mathematics for students in the class of 2022).

### **How do I report CD information to DESE?**

The Department created the 'Competency Determination' application in the [Security Portal](#), which districts must use to submit the required information.

### **Can I provide the required information to DESE in a different way (e.g., via email, in a dropbox, over the phone, etc.)?**

No. Data must be submitted through the Security Portal's 'Competency Determination' tool, which includes a final certification by the district's Superintendent.

### **How do I access the 'Competency Determination' tool?**

To access the 'Competency Determination' application in the [Security Portal](#), each district must assign the *Competency Determination* security role to the individual(s) who will be responsible for submitting and certifying data. This role must be assigned in Directory Administration, by the district's [Directory Administrator](#).

### **Who should be given access to the tool?**

The *Competency Determination* security role should be assigned as follows:

- **For each school**, the role should be assigned to the individual(s) who will be responsible for reviewing and verifying course and credit information for each eligible student. Individuals assigned the *Competency Determination* security role for a school will only be able to see student-level information for students enrolled in that school. An individual may be assigned the role for more than one school, if appropriate.
- **For each district**, the role should be assigned to the Superintendent and any other individual(s) who require access to student-level data for eligible students in all district schools, including students educated in out-of-district settings. To formally submit the data to DESE, at least one person (the Superintendent) should be assigned the *Competency Determination* security role for the district. Only individuals with the district-level role will be able to submit the final certification for the entire district.

### **How does the *Competency Determination* security role work?**

The role allows individuals to access the 'Competency Determination' application in the Security Portal. It can be assigned at the school level, the district level, or both. Depending on the level of access, users have different permissions:

- **When assigned at the school level**, users will only see data for the school(s) to which they have been granted access. School-level users can enter and confirm information for individual students but are not able to submit the final district-level certification to DESE. There is no overall school-level certification. An individual may be assigned the role for more than one school, and multiple individuals may be assigned the role for a single school.
- **When assigned at the district level**, users will see data for all district schools that have eligible students, as well as for any eligible out-of-district students. District-level users can enter information for any student or school. Only district-level users can submit the single, final certification for the district as a whole, and only if data has been entered completely for all schools. There is no overall school-level certification.

### ***Student Eligibility***

#### **Which students are included in the tool?**

The modified CD collection tool has been designed to collect data for two groups of students: those eligible for the modified CD in ELA, mathematics, and science (i.e., the classes of 2020-2022), and those eligible for the modified CD in science only (i.e., the class of 2023). The Department identifies eligible students using [Student Information Management System \(SIMS\)](#) and [Student Course Schedule \(SCS\)](#) data which has been submitted to DESE by districts. For the October 2023 modified CD collection period,

DESE is collecting course information for eligible students in the classes of 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023, based on October 2024 SIMS. See the [Modified CD Eligibility table](#) at the end of this document for details.

**Is the modified CD an option for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)?**

Yes. Certain students with IEPs are eligible for the modified CD if they meet the eligibility criteria outlined in this document. Districts may graduate students with IEPs if those students: (1) have received a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), (2) have completed all local graduation requirements, and (3) have earned their CD. See [Administrative Advisory SPED 2018-2: Secondary Transition Services and Graduation with a High School Diploma](#) for further information on graduation requirements for students with IEPs. See the question below for specific information on students with IEPs enrolled beyond grade 12.

Excellent two-way communication with students and parents is particularly important when the student is about to exit from school. Districts should always communicate with families and confirm in writing via the IEP or the IEP Notice of Proposed School District Action (N1) that families are aware of the upcoming graduation or aging out date. Districts should contact parents to let them know that they have applied for the modified CD and to offer a Team meeting to discuss further. As described later in this document, IEP page 8 of the MA IEP forms (“Additional Information” and “Response” sections) or an N1 reflecting the student’s graduation date and the parent’s agreement must be submitted through the ‘Competency Determination’ tool during an open collection window. Districts are also reminded of their obligation to provide the student and/or parent(s) with a Summary of Student Performance (SOP) as required by 34 CFR 300.305(e)(3). Schools and districts must be prepared to provide the SOP to DESE upon request.

**Are out-of-district students included?**

Yes. All eligible students who are educated in out-of-district settings are included in the tool, under a single “Out of District” section that can be accessed by individuals with the district-level security role. Districts are responsible for submitting information for their out-of-district students and should communicate with their students’ outplacement settings to determine whether each eligible student has fulfilled the modified CD coursework requirements, in addition to following the guidelines stated in the previous question.

**Are SP students (students with IEPs enrolled beyond grade 12) included?**

Students reported as SP in SIMS who were originally members of the graduating classes of 2020-2023 may be eligible for the modified CD if they have an anticipated graduation date prior to October 1, 2024, as noted in their most recent signed IEP. A student reported as SP whose anticipated graduation date on their current, signed IEP is on or after October 1, 2024, is eligible for the modified CD only if the IEP Team reconvenes and agrees to change the graduation date to a new date prior to October 1, 2024.

Excellent two-way communication with students and parents is particularly important when the student is about to exit from school. Districts should always communicate with families and confirm in writing via the IEP or N1 that families are aware of the upcoming graduation or aging out date. Districts should contact parents to let them know that they have applied for the modified CD and to offer a Team meeting to discuss further. As described later in this document, IEP page 8 of the MA IEP forms (“Additional Information” and “Response” sections) or an N1 reflecting the new date and the parent’s agreement must be submitted through the Competency Determination tool during an open collection window. Districts are also reminded of their obligation to provide the student and/or parent(s) with a Summary of Student Performance (SOP) as required by 34 CFR 300.305(e)(3). Schools and districts must be prepared to provide the SOP to DESE upon request.

**What about students who transferred in after End-of-Year 2023 SIMS?**

Eligible students who transferred into a Massachusetts public school after End-of-Year 2023 SIMS will be included in a future modified CD collection if they were previously enrolled in a Massachusetts public high school as a member of an eligible class (2020-2023).

**What about students who earned their certificate of attainment during the 2022-2023 school year, and were reported as such in End-of-Year 2023 SIMS?**

These students are included in the current modified CD collection if they have not yet earned CD.

**What about students who finished high school without a diploma prior to the 2019-2020 school year, are no longer enrolled, but were planning on taking the MCAS tests this year?**

In accordance with the BESE vote, these students are not eligible for the modified CD.

**Can I add or delete students to/from the tool?**

No. The Department has prepopulated the student lists based on eligibility, which was determined using data that districts submitted to DESE in previous SIMS collection periods.

**We believe a student should be on our list of eligible students, but they are not included in the 'Competency Determination' tool in the Security Portal. How can our district fix this?**

Please review all student eligibility information provided in this document. If you still believe that a student was omitted from your eligibility list, contact DESE's Office of Data Analysis and Reporting at [data@doe.mass.edu](mailto:data@doe.mass.edu).

***Entering Data***

**What student-level information is included in the tool?**

Where possible, DESE has prepopulated the tool using student-level information that has previously been submitted and certified by the district through the SIMS and SCS data collections. Prepopulated data include the name, date of birth, SASID, and class/graduation year for each student who has not yet earned the CD in one or more subjects; for each subject (ELA, mathematics, and science), an indication of whether the student has already earned the CD; and, for the subject(s) in which the student has not yet earned a CD, relevant course and credit information that DESE has on file (if any).

**What information am I required to provide?**

For the subject(s) in which a student has not yet earned a CD, the district must review and certify the prepopulated course and credit information, or make changes as needed. In some instances, the tool may display incorrect course and/or credit information for a student, based on inaccurate data that was previously submitted to DESE by the district. In these cases, the district should correct the information as needed. Alternatively, DESE may not have any course information for a student. In those cases, no course information is prepopulated, and the district must select the appropriate course from the dropdown menu and indicate whether full credit was earned. If a student did not complete or earn credit in any of the eligible courses (and therefore would not earn the CD in that subject), the district should choose "No Course Taken" from the dropdown menu.

Additionally, districts with special education students enrolled beyond grade 12 (reported as 'SP' in SIMS) must indicate whether each SP student in the tool has an anticipated graduation date before October 1, 2024. For each eligible SP student who will graduate before October 1, the district must provide all required course and credit information, and must also upload one of the following two documents into the 'Competency Determination' tool:

- Page 8 of the MA IEP forms (“Additional Information” and “Response” sections) of the student’s most recently signed IEP. This signed page of the IEP should include information about the student’s anticipated graduation date and indicate student and/or parent agreement **with a student and/or parent signature**. Please submit the signature page *as one document attached to Page 8* if the signature is not at the bottom of Page 8.
- IEP Notice of Proposed School District Action (N1). The N1 form may be submitted in lieu of Page 8 of the student’s IEP if it contains up-to-date information about the student’s anticipated graduation date and indicates student and/or parent agreement.

### **Which courses meet the modified CD requirements?**

The Department has identified [specific courses in ELA, mathematics, and science](#) that fulfill the modified CD requirements. The list of courses was made available to districts in May 2020 and is also available in the ‘Competency Determination’ application in the Security Portal. Districts should report course information in the tool based on NCES course codes, not local course codes or names.

### **If a student did not earn full credit in a prepopulated grade 12 course, can we use eligible course information from an earlier grade?**

Yes. The subject-specific dropdowns include eligible courses from grades 9 through 12.

### **What if there are students in the tool that have not yet met CD coursework requirements?**

You must submit information for all students included in the tool. If a student has not yet met CD coursework requirements, that should be indicated in the tool by selecting “No Course Taken” from the course dropdown menu, selecting “No” under *Full Credit Earned*, and checking the confirmation checkbox.

### **I entered data for my high school. Why can’t I certify and submit it to DESE?**

To certify and submit the data to DESE, data must be confirmed and saved for each student in the school list(s) and for each student in the out-of-district list. The out-of-district list will only appear in the tool for users who have been assigned the *Competency Determination* security role for the district. Additionally, only users who have been assigned the role for the district are allowed to certify and submit the data to DESE.

### **Can I change data after it has been certified by the district?**

Data may be saved (but not certified) at any time. However, once the final certification has been submitted by the district, data cannot be changed.

## ***Modified Competency Determination Requirements and MCAS Appeals***

### **Does this process replace the MCAS appeals process?**

No. While many students are expected to be certified by their district through the modified CD process, MCAS appeals continue to be available for students who meet eligibility requirements who may not be eligible for certification by the district for the grade 12 CD modification. For example, appeals may be appropriate for students who were not enrolled in a course authorized by DESE to receive a CD; or students with disabilities in special programs and those in programs beyond grade 12.

### **If I already filed an MCAS appeal, should I disregard that application?**

No. Both the appeals and modified CD processes may yield a CD. If an appeal was submitted and the student is also included in the modified CD process, DESE will accept whichever is the higher result. Please see above.

### ***Timeline for Awarding the Competency Determination***

#### **What is the timeframe for submitting this information to DESE?**

The Round 17 (February) modified CD collection window opens on January 29, 2024, and closes on February 9, 2024.

#### **Will DESE implement a process to review compliance with the guidelines established for the modified competency determination?**

Yes. The Department has established a process for reviewing documentation provided by districts for compliance with the guidelines of the modified CD. This process includes an examination of various factors such as the percentage of students a school or district submits for consideration. Additionally, relevant documentation for students with disabilities may be requested and reviewed.

#### **When will DESE notify districts about final competency determination decisions?**

For eligible students reported during the February 2024 modified CD collection window, DESE will begin reviewing the information submitted by districts after the application closes and intends to make final CD decisions within 7 days.

#### **Does submitting this information to DESE mean that a student will automatically be awarded the CD?**

No. Providing this data to DESE does not constitute the awarding of the CD. The Department will notify districts about the award of the CD, and at that time the students will be eligible to receive a Massachusetts high school diploma if the school district determines they meet local graduation requirements and, in the case of students with IEPs, have been provided FAPE.

#### **If DESE awards the CD to a student, does that mean the student automatically earns their diploma?**

No. Diplomas are issued by the district, not by DESE. If DESE awards the CD to a student through this modified process, the student must still meet all other local graduation requirements and have been provided FAPE by the district before the district issues a diploma.

#### **If DESE cannot issue CD determinations prior to my school's graduation, does this mean that these students cannot participate in the ceremonies?**

This is a local decision. These students may be eligible to participate in graduation ceremonies (for example, as certificate of attainment earners) if the district determines that they have met local graduation requirements; however, they may not receive a diploma unless DESE awards the CD.

#### **Should students who meet state and local graduation requirements after DESE has issued final CD decisions be reported as graduates in the next SIMS collection?**

Yes. Students can be reported as graduates in the next SIMS collection if the district receives confirmation from DESE that the CD has been awarded in all three subjects and the student meets local graduation requirements.

## Contact Information and Resources

Topic	Email	Resources
Modified CD	<a href="mailto:data@doe.mass.edu">data@doe.mass.edu</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>List of accepted courses: <a href="https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/accepted-courses.xlsx">https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/accepted-courses.xlsx</a></li> <li>Modified CD tool demonstration video: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6sbfC8Fbuac">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6sbfC8Fbuac</a></li> </ul>
MCAS testing	<a href="mailto:mcas@doe.mass.edu">mcas@doe.mass.edu</a>	<a href="https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/">https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/</a>
MCAS performance appeals	<a href="mailto:mcasappeals@doe.mass.edu">mcasappeals@doe.mass.edu</a>	<a href="https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcasappeals/">https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcasappeals/</a>
Graduation requirements	<a href="mailto:mcas@doe.mass.edu">mcas@doe.mass.edu</a>	<a href="https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/graduation.html">https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/graduation.html</a>
Edwin Analytics Report w/ CD Status	<a href="mailto:mcas@doe.mass.edu">mcas@doe.mass.edu</a>	<a href="#">PE613 Assessment History Summary</a>



## Modified Competency Determination (CD) Eligibility

### ***Students in the Classes of 2020-2022***

Students who were enrolled in grade 12 during the 2019-2020 school year, students who were on track to graduate in 2020, and students in the classes of 2021 and 2022 are eligible for the modified CD in ELA, mathematics, and science. See the [MCAS Graduation Requirements website](#) for more information.

Round (Collection period opens)	Class/ graduation year(s)	Subject(s)	Notes
Rounds 1-16	2020, 2021, & 2022	ELA, mathematics, science	Students were included if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They were enrolled in grade 12 or SP at the time of the modified CD data collection, or</li> <li>• They were enrolled in SIMS at the time of collection and were originally members of graduation classes 2020 through 2022</li> </ul>
Round 17 (February 2024)	2020, 2021, & 2022	ELA, mathematics, science	Students are included if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They were included in the Round 16 collection (October 2023) as a member of the 2020, 2021, or 2022 graduation class and are still enrolled in October 2023 SIMS, but have not yet met coursework requirements in one or more subjects</li> </ul>

### ***Students in the Class of 2023***

Students in the class of 2023 are eligible for the modified CD in science only. See the [MCAS Graduation Requirements website](#) for more information.

Round (Collection period opens)	Class/ graduation year(s)	Subject	Notes
Rounds 12-16	2023	Science	Students were included if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They were enrolled in grade 12 or SP at the time of the modified CD data collection, or</li> <li>• They were enrolled in SIMS at the time of collection and were originally members of the 2023 graduation class</li> </ul>
Round 17 (February 2024)	2023	Science	Students are included if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They are enrolled in grade 12 or SP in October 2023 SIMS and are not members of an earlier graduation class, but have not yet met coursework requirements in science; or</li> <li>• They are members of the 2023 graduation class and are still enrolled in October 2023 SIMS but have not yet met coursework requirements in science.</li> </ul>