



*News from Commissioner Jeffrey C. Riley & the
MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education*

On the Desktop - March 31, 2019

Important Announcement Regarding the 10th Grade English Language Arts MCAS Test

Dear Superintendents, Charter School Leaders, and Assistant Superintendents,

Late last week, the Department received reports from several school administrators about reactions from some students to one of the three essay questions on the 10th grade English language arts MCAS test. The administrators reported that students had encountered material that affected their ability to be tested fairly.

The Department has a thorough process for vetting test questions that includes review by educators, review by a committee that looks at possible biases, and field tests of all questions before they are used toward students' scores. However, out of an abundance of caution and in the interest of student fairness, we have decided not to use the results from this particular question as part of students' scores. Students who have already answered the question will not have it scored, and students who take the makeup test this week will be instructed not to answer that question.

I am making this decision now, because we are nearing the end of the testing period and in recognition of the high-stakes nature of the 10th grade test. The issue of what is appropriate content for future tests warrants further discussion among students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the public at large. We plan to have such a discussion at the appropriate time.

We cannot say more about the question at this time, because it is one of several questions associated with a reading passage. The other questions will still be scored for all students, whether they have already completed the test or are taking a makeup test this week. After all testing is completed, the question will be released along with the other questions on the 10th grade test.

We are confident that scores for the 10th grade English language arts MCAS test will be fair and reliable. The test will still have a similar ratio of writing to other content as in past years, even with this essay question removed.

Separately from this email, we will send principals specific directions to distribute to test administrators instructing students who are taking a makeup test this week to disregard the

question. If you have any questions, please contact Student Assessment Services at 781-338-3625 or mcas@doe.mass.edu.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner