



MASSACHUSETTS  
Department of  
Higher Education

## **Massachusetts Definition of College and Career Readiness and Civic Preparation<sup>1</sup>**

*Approved by Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education on February 26, 2013; Massachusetts Board of Higher Education on March 12, 2013.*

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### **Overview**

Massachusetts students who are college and career ready and prepared for civic life will demonstrate the knowledge, skills and abilities that are necessary to successfully complete entry-level, credit-bearing college courses, participate in certificate or workplace training programs, enter economically viable career pathways, and engage as active and responsible citizens in our democracy. In order to meet this goal, the Commonwealth has defined a set of learning competencies, intellectual capacities and experiences essential for all students to become lifelong learners; positive contributors to their families, workplaces and communities; and successfully engaged citizens of a global 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Beyond achieving college and career ready levels of competence in English Language Arts / Literacy and Mathematics, all high school students should develop a foundation in the academic disciplines identified in the MassCore course of study,<sup>1</sup> build competencies for workplace readiness as articulated in the Integrating College and Career Task Force Report,<sup>2</sup> and focus on applying academic strategies to problem solving in diverse professional and life contexts, appropriate to individual student goals. Massachusetts will use its 2011 curriculum frameworks,<sup>3</sup> which include the Common Core State Standards, as the basis for an educational program that provides students with the academic knowledge, skills and experiences that are essential to postsecondary educational career, and personal success.

<sup>1</sup>This definition adds a section on Civic Readiness (see page 3) to the joint definition of College and Career Readiness that the Board of Higher education and board of Elementary and Secondary Education approved in 2013. The two boards met jointly on January 26, 2016, and discussed the revised definition, and possible amendments. The Board of Higher Education subsequently voted to approve the revised definition, as amended, based on that discussion. This revised definition was adopted by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education on February 23, 2016.

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## Essential Competencies

### ***Learning***

Students who are college and career ready in English Language Arts / Literacy will demonstrate the academic knowledge, skills, and practices necessary to enter into and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing courses in College English Composition, Literature, or technical courses; certificate or workplace training programs requiring college-level reading and writing; or a comparable entry-level reading and writing course at the institution. College and career ready students in English Language Arts/ Literacy will be ***academically prepared*** to:

- Read and comprehend a range of sufficiently complex texts independently
- Write effectively when using and/or analyzing sources
- Build and present knowledge through research and the integration, comparison, and synthesis of ideas
- Use context to determine the meaning of words and phrases

Similarly, students who are college and career ready in Mathematics will demonstrate the academic knowledge, skills, and practices necessary to enter into and succeed in entry-level, credit bearing courses in College Algebra, Introductory College Statistics, or technical courses; certificate or workplace training programs requiring an equivalent level of mathematics; or a comparable entry-level math course at the institution. College and career ready students in Mathematics will be ***academically prepared*** to:

- Solve problems involving the major content with connections to the mathematical practices
- Solve problems involving the additional and supporting content with connections to the mathematical practices
- Express mathematical reasoning by constructing mathematical arguments and critiques
- Solve real world problems, engaging particularly in the modeling practice

Successful achievement of specified levels of competence in English Language Arts / Literacy and Mathematics will be required for students to be placed into entry-level courses in college or participate in certificate or workplace training programs without the need for remediation.

### ***Workplace Readiness***

Student preparation for college and career should emphasize career awareness, exploration and immersion as well as development of the foundational knowledge and skills necessary to successfully navigate the workplace. Students who are college and career ready and prepared for civic life will demonstrate:

### **Work Ethic and Professionalism**

- Attendance and punctuality expected by the workplace
- Workplace appearance appropriate for position and duties
- Accepting direction and constructive criticism with a positive attitude and response
- Motivation and taking initiative, taking projects from initiation to completion
- Understanding workplace culture, policy and safety, including respecting confidentiality and workplace ethics

### **Effective Communication and Interpersonal Skills**

- Oral and written communication appropriate to the workplace
- Listening attentively and confirming understanding
- Interacting with co-workers, individually and in teams

Proficiency in these skills is common for success in all workplaces and should be viewed as the foundation upon which additional workplace and career skills are added based on the specifics of any job.

### ***Civic Readiness***

To be college and career ready and prepared for civic life, students must also possess a deep understanding and knowledge of U.S. History and its foundational documents, along with the knowledge, intellectual skills, and applied competencies that citizens need for informed and effective participation in civic and democratic life. They must also acquire an understanding of the social values that underlie democratic structures and practices. Civic knowledge, skills, and competencies can be obtained in a variety of settings and ways, including in the classroom, across content areas, through service-learning, discussion of controversial issues, student government, and extracurricular opportunities. Key knowledge, skills, and dispositions that students should possess to be prepared to engage as active citizens include:

- Core civic content knowledge and the ability to apply that knowledge to different circumstances and settings.
- Civic intellectual skills, including the ability to identify, assess, interpret, describe, analyze and explain matters of concern in civic life.
- Civic participatory skills, including knowing how to work collaboratively in groups and organizational settings, interface with elected officials and community representatives, communicate perspectives and arguments, and plan strategically for civic change.
- Civic dispositions including interpersonal and intrapersonal values, virtues and behaviors (respect for freedom of speech and thought, respect for others, commitment to equality, capacity for listening, capacity to communicate in ways accessible to others, etc).

### ***Qualities and Strategies***

Preparation for college, career, and civic life should help students develop a wide range of quantitative and qualitative abilities that go beyond the minimum levels of competence needed for entry-level college courses and employment. In high school, students should demonstrate:

- Higher order thinking skills of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation
  - The ability to think critically, coherently, and creatively
  - The ability to direct and evaluate their own learning, be aware of resources available to support their learning, and have the confidence to access these resources when needed.
  - Motivation, intellectual curiosity, flexibility, discipline, self-advocacy, responsibility, and reasoned beliefs
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Together these attributes provide the framework for college and career readiness and support educational and workplace success, as well as serve as the basis for being an active participant in our democracy.

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<sup>1</sup> [MassCore](#) is a rigorous and comprehensive four year course of high school study recommended by the Commonwealth as preparation for college and career. MassCore is also the vehicle through which high school students can gain competence in computational, scientific, visual, creative, and critical thinking and can engage in opportunities for “hands-on” application and exploration of new areas of knowledge and experiences.

<sup>2</sup> See [ICCR Task Force Report](#)

<sup>3</sup> See current [Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks](#).

## Background

### Development of Massachusetts Definition of College and Career Readiness

In September 2010 Massachusetts came together with 22 other states in the nation to form the [Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career \(PARCC\)](#). PARCC consortium states are working together to develop a common set of K-12 assessments in English language arts/literacy and mathematics aligned to the Common Core State Standards and anchored in what it takes to be ready for college and careers. The new assessments will help build a pathway to college and career readiness by the end of high school, track students' progress toward this goal, and provide teachers with timely information to inform instruction and provide student support. These next-generation assessments will also send clear signals to students about their readiness for postsecondary coursework while they still have time to address any gaps. In addition, the entire effort is designed to lead to better alignment between higher education and K-12 with regard to a definition of college readiness.

Higher education and elementary and secondary education in the PARCC states are collaborating closely in developing the PARCC assessments. Working together at the national level, representatives of the two sectors developed a structure by which both sides have an equal voice in deciding key matters affecting the character of the assessments—such as the underlying definition of college and career readiness—that affect both higher education and K-12. Each PARCC state, including Massachusetts, committed to developing structures within their states that would similarly engage both sectors in close collaboration, information sharing and decision making.

During the spring and summer of 2011, the Massachusetts Departments of Elementary and Secondary and Higher Education worked together to develop an engagement structure for the Commonwealth that would afford meaningful input and deliberation on the PARCC work—starting with defining college and career readiness—from education stakeholders at the local, regional and statewide levels. The structure included the provision that major policy decisions on key matters related to the PARCC assessments would be brought to the Board of Higher Education and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. Massachusetts hosted a statewide launch conference for this work in October 2011.

In December 2011, Richard Freeland, Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, and Mitchell Chester, Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, initiated two related “readiness activities” in the P-16 community. Commissioner Freeland requested that all public college and university presidents establish Engagement Teams on each campus, bringing together faculty and staff with P-12 teachers and school/district leaders, and that these Teams collaborate in the development of a shared definition of college readiness for Massachusetts by organizing discussions at the local level and through the Regional Readiness Centers.

During the spring of 2012 the P-16 Campus Engagement Teams, collaborating with over 500 P-16 educators, developed statements on college readiness which, while distinctive in style and language, shared a focus in three interrelated areas—a set of core academic competencies; cognitive skills and strategies; and dispositions and habits of mind. The Engagement Teams also urged support for a Massachusetts definition that would encompass all high school students' preparation for their postsecondary paths by addressing both college and career readiness. By June 1, 2012, the 25 institution presidents submitted their [P-16 Campus Engagement Team reports on defining college readiness](#).

In December 2011, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) appointed a 36-member task force of business, education, and community leaders to develop recommendations on better integrating college and career readiness into K-12 education. The Integrating College and Career Readiness Task Force (ICCR), chaired by BESE member Gerald Chertavian, included Commissioner Freeland and other representatives from higher education as members. The Task Force was charged to identify: "power" standards (knowledge and skills) inherent in a core career development education program; indicators of career readiness, including student assessments; and policies and programs that provide multiple pathway options to integrate knowledge and skills for career and postsecondary education readiness; as well as to adopt a clear, measurable definition of career readiness.

The ICCR Task Force defined career readiness as follows: "Career readiness means an individual has the requisite knowledge, skills and experiences in the academic, workplace readiness and personal/social domains to successfully navigate to completion an economically viable career pathway in a 21st century economy." The [ICCR Task Force Report](#) was presented to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education on June 26, 2012.

The definitions developed and submitted by the P-16 Campus Engagement Teams and the ICCR Task Force in the spring of 2012 stated clear support for the integration of college and career readiness in Massachusetts' work to develop a shared statewide definition. The readiness perspectives of the Engagement Teams and ICCR Task Force were synthesized and a draft Massachusetts definition was prepared for review by a statewide 14-member coordinating council co-chaired by Commissioners Chester and Freeland and comprised equally of P-12 and higher education representatives. A draft definition of college and career readiness reflecting the council's feedback was circulated among education, business and community groups during the summer of 2012. Of more than 1360 survey participants who responded by October 2012—47% from higher education, 48% from P-12 and 5% other—more than 80% supported the draft definition. In November, the statewide coordinating council convened to finalize the shared draft definition and to recommend its consideration by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Board of Higher Education.

Massachusetts' draft definition conveys that a high school graduate who is "college and career ready" is a student prepared, on a college path, to enroll in entry-level, credit-

bearing college courses without the need for remediation; and on a job and career path, to participate in certificate training programs and workplace training programs.

The definition also builds upon the Commonwealth's focus on English language arts and mathematics as the specific academic areas that will be assessed by PARCC and then used in the postsecondary environment to help determine readiness for—or placement into—entry-level, credit-bearing courses. Thus, Massachusetts' definition of college and career readiness is designed to link to the Commonwealth's future K-12 assessment instruments and higher education placement policy for English language arts and mathematics.

Finally, the definition is based on the foundation that students will have developed consistent, challenging, intellectual growth, in all subject areas, throughout their high school program as a result of the full implementation of the [Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks](#) (which include the Common Core State Standards) and the [MassCore](#) recommended course of study. Underpinning Massachusetts' definition of College and Career Readiness are all of the Commonwealth's P-12 teaching and learning policies that address students' diverse learning challenges and support the abilities of all students' to learn and achieve.

Recognizing that, as articulated by the Board of Higher Education's Study Group on Civic Learning and Engagement, the definition did not "address the specific civic learning and engagement competencies which entering college students must demonstrate," the definition was revised in January 2016. The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education's Working Group on Civic Learning and Engagement included among in its final report a recommendation that the Department establish an interagency group to "revise the definition of college and career readiness to include readiness for civic life." A working group comprised of representatives from ESE and DHE met in December 2015 to revise the definition, which was approved by the Board of Higher Education on January 26, 2016 and Board of Elementary and Secondary Education on February 23, 2016.