

June 2026

K-12 Statewide Graduation Requirements
Final Recommendations

Dear Massachusetts Education Community,

The Massachusetts K-12 Statewide Graduation Council has developed a proposed graduation framework that outlines a comprehensive set of recommendations to better prepare all students for success after high school. It is important to note that these recommendations are not yet finalized and are not currently in effect; they represent a proposed direction for the Commonwealth's future graduation requirements until legislation is filed.

To help support understanding, this document includes a set of frequently asked questions (FAQs) that respond to common topics raised by families, students, and educators. These FAQs are intended to provide clear and straightforward information about the proposed graduation framework and what it could mean for students and schools, while additional details continue to be developed.

In the months ahead, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) will provide ongoing guidance, communication, and opportunities for engagement to help families, students, and educators have a clear understanding of the proposed framework and its potential implementation.

As part of this effort, we plan to conduct a statewide roadshow to share key elements of the framework, gather feedback, and provide additional clarity on next steps and timelines.

If you have questions or would like additional information, please contact the Graduation Council team at graduationcouncil@pcgus.com

We appreciate your continued partnership as Massachusetts works to strengthen and modernize the high school experience for all students, providing Strong Foundations for Bright Futures.

Sincerely,

Stephen Zrike
Secretary of Education

Pedro Martinez
Commissioner of Elementary & Secondary Education



Frequently Asked Questions

Overarching Questions

- **What are the local flexibilities for implementing the new graduation requirements?**

Districts would have flexibility in how they design courses, learning experiences, and supports that meet statewide requirements, allowing them to tailor implementation to local context while still meeting consistent state-defined standards.

- **Are students expected to complete all components of the graduation requirements?**

Yes. Students would be expected to complete all core components (Foundational Coursework, End-of-Course Assessments, Postsecondary Planning, and a Culminating Experience) and the components embedded within these (financial literacy, AI and digital literacy, work-based learning, FAFSA/MASFA completion, and civics education), which together define the recommended statewide graduation requirements and pathway to a diploma.

- **What is required?**

The **Primary Components** (Foundational Coursework, End-of-Course Assessments, Postsecondary Planning, and a Culminating Experience) and **Embedded Components** (financial literacy, AI and digital literacy, work-based learning, FAFSA/MASFA completion, and civics education) of the graduation framework would be requirements for all students. Districts and schools have flexibility for how students meet these requirements.

- **What does flexibility look like for special populations (i.e., students with disabilities, English learners, newcomers)?**

DESE would continue to support districts in providing flexibility for students who need it. As an example, English as a Second Language (ESL) courses can count toward the English Language Arts requirements (see Foundational Coursework section below).

- **How is this approach better than the prior system (i.e. MCAS as the statewide graduation requirement)?**

Unlike the stand-alone MCAS requirement, this approach uses a comprehensive system, combining rigorous coursework, multiple demonstrations of mastery, and postsecondary planning to more fully capture student readiness for life after high school. This approach also incorporates the new [Vision of a Massachusetts Graduate](#), promoting the competencies that will set graduates up for long-term success.

- **Are the new graduation requirements already in effect?**

No. Legislative action would need to take place before the full set of requirements would officially be in place.



- **What is the timeline and runway for implementation, and how would districts be supported financially and technically? What funding is available for districts to implement the new graduation requirements?**

Implementation would begin with planning in 2026-27, with full requirements phased in for incoming 9th grade cohorts starting in 2027-28 (Foundational Coursework) and 2028-29 (other components), alongside state-provided guidance and support.

- **How would the state clearly communicate expectations to students, families, and educators?**

The state would provide clear guidance, tools, professional learning, and multilingual communications to build shared understanding among students, families, and educators throughout implementation.

- **Are there actions districts are expected to take now to prepare for these graduation requirements?**

Yes. In 2026-27 (the first year of planning), DESE would support districts as they begin planning, conduct needs assessments, engage stakeholders, and build capacity (e.g., professional learning and communication) ahead of phased implementation.

- **Who is responsible for tracking and monitoring implementation?**

The state would be responsible for establishing data systems and monitoring infrastructure, while districts would be responsible for local implementation, data reporting, and ongoing feedback to support statewide oversight and planning.

- **Are there different sets of requirements, depending on whether a student plans to go to college, pursue a trade, or enter the workforce or military?**

No. There is a single, unified set of graduation requirements designed to prepare all students for multiple postsecondary pathways, keeping options open for college, career, military, or other pursuits.

Foundational Coursework (MassCore)

- **What is MassCore?**

[MassCore](#) is a program of study designed in Massachusetts to support high school students in achieving success in college, career, and civic life. For successful completion of MassCore, students must take:

- 4 units of English
- 4 units of mathematics
- 3 units of a lab-based science
- 3 units of history/social science
- 2 units of the same world language



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- 1 unit of the arts
- Physical Education
- 5 additional “core” courses

- **What is the primary purpose (“the why”) of MassCore?**

MassCore provides all students with a rigorous, research-based program of study that aligns with higher education admissions expectations and keeps all postsecondary options open, helping promote readiness for college, career, and beyond.

- **How will the state determine if MassCore courses are aligned with state curriculum frameworks?**

All MassCore courses should be rigorous and based on the appropriate grade-level standards in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Districts have flexibility in designing teaching and learning around the standards.

- **How much flexibility would districts have within MassCore (e.g., which courses can count towards the subject area requirements)?**

MassCore contains flexibilities that allow districts to design course offerings that meet the MassCore subject requirements. The recommendation is for MassCore to become a statewide requirement, including all existing flexibilities. For example, MassCore allows students to count certain Computer Science courses towards their Mathematics and/or Science requirements.

- **How do courses taken in middle school (e.g., Algebra I, Spanish I) count toward MassCore and graduation?**

Districts have the flexibility to decide whether students will be awarded high school credit for courses taken in middle school, provided they are equivalent to high school courses and address the relevant high school grade level standards in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.

- **It’s a challenge to hire qualified instructors for specific subjects, such as World Language. What options do districts have if they experience these challenges?**

DESE would continue to support districts with strategies for workforce development, alternative licensure pathways, and other capacity-building efforts to help meet staffing needs.

End-of-Course Assessments (EOCs)

- **What is the primary purpose (“the why”) of EOCs?**

End-of-course assessments provide a consistent statewide measure of student mastery of course content and validate learning within the MassCore program of study, supporting readiness for more advanced coursework. They also promote equity as a common standard across districts.



- **Which subjects would EOCs be in? How many EOCs would students take?**

Students would take EOCs in English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science, with one assessment per subject. There is potential for an additional assessment in History and Social Science.

- **Who would design and score the EOCs?**

EOCs would be designed, administered, and scored by the state, with educator involvement in the assessment development process.

- **When would EOCs be administered, and would timing differ by subject or grade level?**

EOCs would be administered at the end of the relevant course, meaning timing is tied to when a student completes the course rather than a fixed grade level.

- **What happens if a student takes a course tied to an EOC in middle school?**

A student who completes an EOC-aligned course in middle school would take the EOC at that time.

- **How would EOC scores be counted for students?**

EOC results would meaningfully count toward a student's academic record and path to graduation, with the specific weighting and role to be determined through further state planning and stakeholder input.

Postsecondary Planning (MyCAP)

- **What is the primary purpose (“the why”) of MyCAP?**

MyCAP connects high school experiences to postsecondary goals by helping students plan, reflect on, and align their coursework and experiences with individualized college and career pathways.

- **How much flexibility would districts have within MyCAP?**

Districts would have significant flexibility to design and implement their own MyCAP scope and sequence, including selecting local activities, tools, and delivery approaches, as long as they incorporate the state-defined required milestones.

- **How is the state considering implementation of the FAFSA/MASFA requirement?**

The recommended FAFSA/MASFA requirement is an embedded milestone within MyCAP and is designed to equip all students with practical financial aid knowledge. After schools provide relevant information about the FAFSA/MASFA process and resources, students and families will either complete the FAFSA (or MASFA) or submit a simple opt-out form without disclosing specific reasons or sensitive personal information.



- **What is the MyCAP platform? Would districts be required to use a specific MyCAP platform?**

Districts would not be required to use a single system. While MEFA Pathways is recommended and provided free-of-charge by the state, districts would be able to utilize a state-approved platform.

- **What does high-quality MyCAP implementation look like across grade levels?**

High-quality implementation involves a structured, multi-year process where students set goals, develop plans, and complete state-defined milestones across personal, academic, and career domains. The MyCAP graduation requirement would apply to high school, though many districts may begin programming in middle school.

- **How tightly would MyCAP be connected to capstones, portfolios, and transition planning?**

MyCAP is designed to be closely connected to other components (informing choices for coursework, culminating experiences, and transition planning) so that all elements work together to support postsecondary readiness.

- **What staffing, training, and resources would districts receive to implement MyCAP with fidelity?**

The state would provide guidance, professional learning, technical assistance, and implementation resources to support districts in delivering MyCAP effectively.

- **What happens if a student does not complete all of the required MyCAP milestones? Would they be unable to graduate?**

Students would be expected to complete the state-defined MyCAP milestones as part of the graduation requirement, with districts responsible for providing supports so that students can meet these expectations.

Culminating Experiences (Capstones & Portfolios)

- **What is the primary purpose (“the why”) of the culminating experience?**

Culminating experiences allow students to demonstrate and apply their learning in meaningful, real-world ways, supporting deeper learning, student agency, and the development of key skills aligned to postsecondary success.

- **Would students have to do both a capstone and a portfolio?**

No. Students would be required to complete one culminating experience, either a capstone project or a portfolio of work. Districts would determine whether students complete a capstone, a portfolio, or have a choice between the two options.



- **When do students complete the culminating experience?**

The timing of the culminating experience would be determined locally, with districts deciding where and how it would be integrated into the high school program of study. Generally, the culminating experience would occur during a student's senior year, though junior year is a possibility, depending on local implementation decisions.

- **Would students be required to complete a culminating experience in every course?**

No. Students complete a single culminating experience.

- **Would there be common statewide expectations or rubrics?**

Yes. The state would define the expectations and provide a standardized rubric aligned to the Vision of a Massachusetts Graduate, which districts would use to assess student work.

- **How would quality and consistency be maintained across districts while preserving local flexibility?**

Quality and consistency would be supported through clear state-defined expectations and rubrics, while districts would retain flexibility in how they design and implement the culminating experience locally.

- **Are there existing experiences that may fulfill the culminating experience requirement?**

Yes. DESE would provide guidance on existing experiences that may fulfill the culminating experience requirement so long as they align with the state-defined criteria and rubric.

Seals of Distinction

- **What is a Seal of Distinction?**

Seals of Distinction are recognitions that allow students to demonstrate and be acknowledged for their achievements beyond the core graduation requirements. As an example, Massachusetts currently offers a [State Seal of Biliteracy](#) that recognizes high school graduates who have attained proficiency in two or more languages.

- **Are Seals of Distinction required for students?**

Students would not be required to attain Seals of Distinction in order to graduate. However, all districts would be required to offer a minimum number of seals that all students have the opportunity to attain.

Where can I find more information?

You can email graduationcouncil@pcgus.com if you have any questions.

