



Lowell Public Schools
Lowell High School
50 Fr. Morissette Blvd
Lowell, Massachusetts 01852-1050



Michael Fiato
Head of School

Tel. (978) 937-8900
Fax (978) 937-8902
Email: MFiato@lowell.k12.ma.us

TO: Liam Skinner, Superintendent of Schools
FROM: Michael Fiato, Head of Schools
DATE: December 16, 2024
RE: *Recommended updates to Graduation Requirements for Class of 2025*

On November 5, 2024, the state of Massachusetts passed a ballot measure to remove MCAS as a graduation requirement. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has provided the guidance below for districts:

DESE recommends all districts serving high school students should develop a process that is:

- Aligned with the new language of the statute in a way that allows districts to demonstrate students have met the new requirements
- Approved by the governing board of the district (e.g., school committee, board of trustees, etc.)
- Shared with all students, families/guardians, and district stakeholders
- Publicly available in multiple languages

Based on this guidance, Lowell High School has reviewed our graduation requirements. At this time, the Class of 2025 must meet the following requirements in order to graduate:

- Must pass ten (10) credits in U.S. history.
- Must pass twenty (20) credits in English. English must be selected and passed each year. No more than two core English courses may be taken during a semester without the approval of the English Department Chair.
- Must pass fifteen (15) credits in Mathematics (5 credits in Algebra, 5 credits in Geometry, and 5 additional credits in mathematics).

- Must pass fifteen (15) credits in Science.
- Must select Physical Education each year and pass four (4) semesters in Physical Education for (10) credits. AFJROTC, Dance, Band, or Show Choir may be substituted each year for this requirement. This requirement may be waived only by the Head of School for documented medical excuse, for critical course conflicts, or for other extenuating circumstances.
- Must select Health Education A in the ninth (9th) grade and Health Education B in the tenth (10th) grade. Both health courses (2.5 credits each) must be passed for a total of five (5) credits. AFJROTC, Dance, Band, and Show Choir may be substituted each year for this requirement.
- Must fulfill the standard requirement of ninety (90) credits of which at least twenty (20) credits must be earned in the senior year.
- Must pass the MCAS exam in ELA, Mathematics, and Science.

Based on the current removal of MCAS as a graduation requirement by the state, it is our recommendation that the requirement of passing the MCAS exam in ELA, Mathematics, and Science be removed from our local graduation requirements, beginning with the Class of 2025.

The current guidance provided by DESE states that retest will continue to be offered this year for the benefit of students trying to earn the Adams Scholarship or the Koplik Award. The participation guidelines as laid out by DESE (found here: <https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/highschool.html>) state that the only students eligible to participate in the retests are:

- Students in grade 9 or 10 (and students in grade 11 or 12 who skipped grade 10) who have completed or are expected to complete a high school course in biology or introductory physics and have not yet taken a high school science test (Results will be used for accountability purposes and to determine Adams Scholarship and the Koplik Award eligibility.)
- Students repeating grade 10 and students in grade 11 who have not yet taken a high school science test and are attempting to qualify for the Adams Scholarship and/or the Koplik Award
- Students repeating grade 10 and students in grade 11 who have previously taken a high school science test and are attempting to raise their score to qualify for the Koplik Award.

The following students are not eligible to participate in the retests:

- Grade 9 students who have not yet completed a biology or introductory physics course
- Grade 12 students

DESE has also indicated that students will no longer be able to earn alternative paths to graduation previously available to students through a Competency Determination or MCAS Appeal. The elimination of these paths would place our students at a disadvantage in meeting

graduation requirements both this year and moving forward. By not being able to test Grade 12 students on the retests, we have 134 seniors who have not passed the Science MCAS who no longer have an opportunity to achieve a passing score. These students would not be allowed to graduate without the elimination of the graduation requirement that students must pass MCAS to graduate.

In defining local graduation requirements, DESE has indicated that districts should ensure that students have “satisfactorily completed coursework aligned with state academic standards and curriculum frameworks in English Language Arts, Mathematics, and at least one Science discipline (Biology, Introductory Physics, Chemistry, or Technology/Engineering).” Our current requirements within these content areas meet these requirements:

- **ELA:** Students must pass twenty (20) credits in English.
- **Mathematics:** Students must pass fifteen (15) credits in Mathematics (5 credits in Algebra, 5 credits in Geometry, and 5 additional credits in mathematics).
- **Science:** Students must pass fifteen (15) credits in Science.

It is important to note that while MCAS has been removed as a graduation requirement, participation in MCAS is still required by federal and state law and will continue to be administered on an annual basis in Grade 10. As we have done in the past, we will continue to use this student achievement and growth data to help refine our instructional practice and curriculum to best meet the needs of all students within LHS.

Additionally, while we are asking for the removal of MCAS as a graduation requirement, over the past few years, LHS has been working to align our graduation requirements to meet MassCore. MassCore is a state-recommended program of studies that aligns high school course work with college and workforce expectations. In 2022, the following changes to our graduation requirements were approved by School Committee:

For the Class of 2026 and Class of 2027:

- 1 additional year of mathematics (not Algebra 2)
- 1 additional year of social studies (World History)
- 1 additional year science

As part of this work, for the Class of 2029 and beyond we will seek to phase in additional requirements and opportunities to fully align with MassCore requirements. These requirements include:

- Algebra 2
- 1 Fine Arts course
- Flexible paths towards graduation

For these reasons, we are respectfully requesting your permission to update our graduation requirements to remove the requirement that students, “Must pass the MCAS exam in ELA, Mathematics and Science” for the Class of 2025 and beyond.