

Making a Case for the Validity of MCAS-Alt



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*CCSSO Large Scale Assessment Conference
June 2007*

What's Going On in Massachusetts?

MCAS Alternate Assessment (MCAS-Alt):

- Flexible participation guidelines
- Two alternate assessments, based on:
 - **Alternate** achievement standards
 - **Grade level** achievement standards

Performance Levels

MCAS Test:

Warning (Failing at Grade 10)	Needs Improvement	Proficient	Advanced
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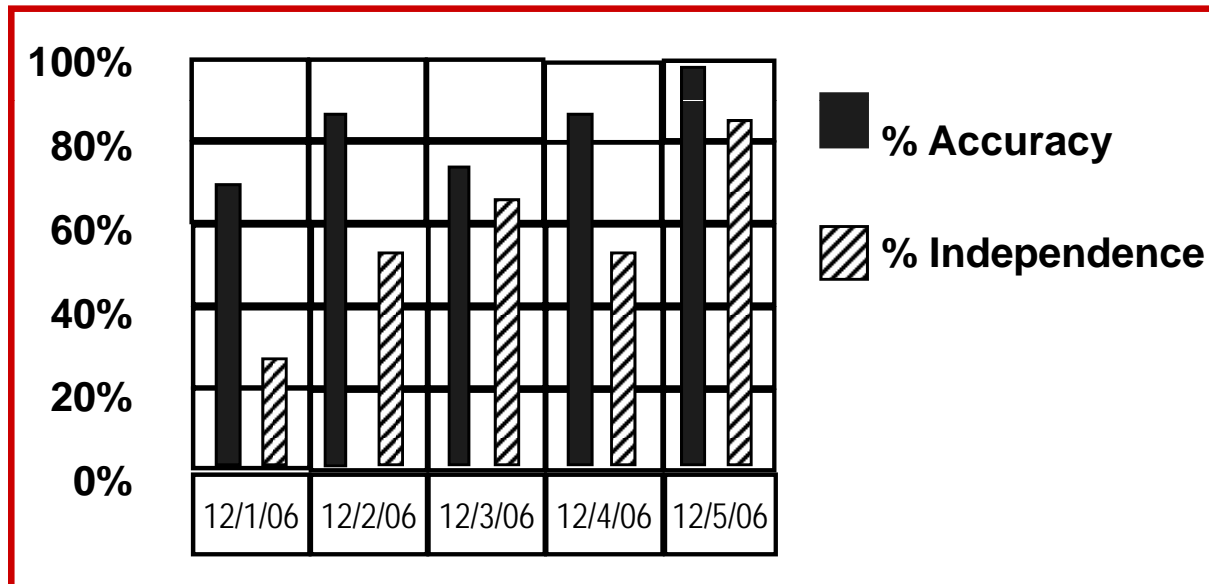
MCAS-Alt:

Awareness	Emerging	Progressing	Needs Imp.	Prof.	Adv.
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MCAS-Alt: A “structured portfolio”

- Measures **complexity** of tasks, plus student’s **accuracy** and **independence** in required subjects/subdomains
- Work samples and data collected on teacher-designed tasks/activities based on “entry points”

Data chart



Access to the General Curriculum: **Mathematics**

*Essence: Solve for
the missing quantity*

Match pictures
& objects to
create and
compare sets

Understand
symbols and
meaning of:

- * addition +
- * subtraction -
- * equal to =

Solve simple
one- and two-
digit number
sentences

Example:

$$1 + 1 + 1 = x$$

$$2 + x = 5$$

$$3x + 8 = 29$$

Grade 7-8
Learning
Standard #2
for Algebra:

Solve simple
algebraic
expressions for
given values

Example:

$$3a^2 - b = x$$

where $a=3$, $b=7$

'Entry Points'

Standard 'as
written'

← **Less Complex**

More Complex →



Peer Review: Where the Validity Discussion Started

For their alternate assessments, states were required to document, among other things, that:

- Alternate achievement standards were adopted
- A validated process was used to set achievement standards
- Alignment existed among
 - academic content standards
 - alternate achievement standards (performance levels)
 - the alternate assessment



...And, to Document the “Validity” and “Reliability” of the Alternate Assessment

- Decisions and consequences based on assessment results are consistent with the purposes of the alt assessment
- Assessments measure only the knowledge and skills in academic content standards (and not any others)
- Assessments are consistent with content standards being taught
 - “Taps intended cognitive processes” for a student in that grade level
 - Appropriate “cognitive complexity” and “level of difficulty”
- Scores are reliable



Some Tricky Areas for MCAS-Alt

- “Test item inter-relationship”
 - But, tasks are selected and/or designed by teachers, and
 - There is little standardization across portfolios
- “Assessment reflects full range of content standards”
 - But, portfolios cannot cover the same breadth of standards, and
 - Non-regulatory guidance says these students won’t necessarily access all the standards
- Reliability of scores when responses are so diverse
 - Scorers validate linkage of each task using Resource Guide
- Validate that modified outcomes are based on grade-level standards
- MISSING from the criteria: Documentation that improvement in instruction occurred as a result



Describing What Happened: Validating the Process

We carefully documented...

- Each step in the development process
 - What do we want to measure?
 - How do we describe the student's performance?
 - How do we calculate a score?
 - How does a score translate to a performance level?
 - Where does one PL end and another begin?
- How each decision was made
- Who helped make the decisions
- How content alignment was validated



Validating the Decisions: Who Was There?

- Who was at the table?
- Who reviewed drafts and final products?
 - Guidelines and requirements for compiling a portfolio
 - Curriculum guide
- Who signed off?
 - Learning progressions
 - Performance level descriptors
 - Cut scores
 - Structure and required contents of portfolios



“Did the MCAS-Alt Meet Its Intended Purposes?”

- Tell our story:
 - Did the assessment do what we said it would do?
 - If not, how did we fix it?

This criterion allowed us to document...

- Whether the student was provided access to curriculum
- Whether new, challenging skills were taught
- How well student’s learned new skills, content, concepts
- Whether teaching and learning improved as a result of MCAS-Alt



What Did We Learn (from Peer Review and from NHEAI)?

- 1) **Alternate assessment and measurement** experts need to share their assumptions about validity, vocabulary, theories of learning, and inclusive assessments
 - Acknowledge the varying purposes of alternate assessments



What Did We Learn?

2) An important part of the **validity** argument for Alt Assessment includes careful documentation of the development process

- Were stakeholders involved?
- How was content identified? Were content experts included?
- Were different approaches and options considered?
- How were decisions made?
- Do opportunities exist for continual improvement?



What Did We Learn?

3) Given the diversity among portfolios,

Alt Assessments should wherever possible:

- Include **more repetitions of the same task**
(e.g., data charts based on performance of the same skill)
- **Standardize** where possible to improve validity, comparability, and aggregation of results (e.g., prescribed standards, tasks, outcomes)



Benefits of Participation in NHEAI

- Opportunity to bring measurement experts from the “mother ship” into our “dinghy”
 - Achieve common understanding and vocabulary
 - Discuss learning theories and how they apply
- Research that followed (available at www.naacpartners.org/products.aspx)
 - “Dealing with Flexibility in Assessments for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities” (B. Gong & S. Marion)
 - “The Assessment Triangle and Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities: Models of Student Cognition” (H. Kleinert, D. Browder, E. Towles-Reeves)
 - Posted to www.naacpartners.org



Resources

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- Dan Wiener – dwiener@doe.mass.edu
- MCAS-Alt Website: www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt