

gb #6-251 To review the technology capabilities regarding the MCAS 2.0 Test

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) is releasing a new test, informally called MCAS 2.0, in the spring of 2017. In a memo from the ESE dated 9/6/2016, the ESE stated: "students in grades 4 and 8 will be expected to take computer-based MCAS English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics tests in spring 2017, with exceptions for students who have been determined to require a paper-and-pencil version of the assessment." In the same memo, ESE released the technology specifications for the new test. This includes the device specifications as well as the Internet bandwidth required.

The Worcester Public School district formed a technology review group to evaluate the technology specifications to determine if the district is able to adequately support the new test. This group consisted of staff from the accountability, professional learning, and information technology offices. The group concluded that the district meets all the technical specifications for grade 4 and 8 without significantly impeding computer-based instruction during the weeks of testing.

Computers:

The leased district computers all meet the specification.

Mobile devices:

The district has over 2,500 iPads in the district. With wired keyboards, these could be used for additional testing platforms.

Internet bandwidth:

On October 1, 2016, the district moved all schools to the new fiber network. All schools are now connected to the core at 10Gbps. The district has adequate Internet bandwidth, with a 5Gbps Internet connection. In addition, the district will use the proctor caching feature which keeps cached information on the school servers, which significantly lowers the network impact of the test.

IT, Professional Learning, and Accountability Staffing:

The district has 8 computer technicians, 2 network staff, 3 trainers, and 2 accountability staff supporting the new MCAS 2.0 test. Given this testing period will only cover grades 4 and 8, the administration believes the staffing is sufficient to support this testing period.

Worcester has chosen to only test grades 4 and 8 on computers for the spring 2017 MCAS 2.0 test. This is to insure that there is adequate support to assist schools. The administration is concerned about expanding the computer based testing beyond grades 4 and 8. The test is not time based, and the biggest constraint will be computer lab space and the ability of the school to rotate the number of students through the computer labs in a practical amount of time. In addition, the administration is concerned about the disadvantage urban students may be at, given the effect poverty has on the lack of exposure to computer technology at home. The administration will work with the other urban districts to voice these concerns to the ESE.