

MASSACHUSETTS BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

"ABCD" In 2003

The Community College Pathway for Students Leaving High School With All But the Competency Determination

Public higher education seeks to assist the Commonwealth in meeting its commitment to students who have met "All But the Competency Determination" (*ABCD*) for graduation from high school. As of September 2002, 19 percent of the high school class of 2003 had yet to pass the Massachusetts Competency Assessment System (MCAS) exam. An unknown number of these students may be aspirants to higher education and capable of succeeding there. In the words of BHE Chairman Stephen P. Tocco, "We are not going to close the door on students who need additional help in passing MCAS, getting their diplomas and continuing on to college. Public higher education will do its part to keep the door open and help students across the threshold."

Community colleges are in an excellent position to help *ABCD* students reach their academic goals, and higher education leaders, including community college presidents, have been meeting for several months to help define options that community colleges may provide for *ABCD* students.

The community college pathway is not the only choice for *ABCD* students. Other choices for access to MCAS remediation, for example, include a high school, vocational school, community-based organization, or even the work place. Broadly defined within the community college pathway, however, there are two options.

The first step on the community college pathway requires that *ABCD* students take an examination known as the federal Ability-to-Benefit test or ATB test. Results on this test will help students determine the next step – namely, the selection of the appropriate option for them.

(Option A) Passing the ATB test allows students to become eligible to apply for community college admission and to apply for federal financial aid.

(Option B) Students who do not pass the ATB test may access community college transitional programs developed to address English and math deficits identified in individual student success plans. New courses and programs that are needed to provide transitional assistance to students should be funded with MCAS remediation dollars. Alternately, students who do not pass the ATB test may choose to prepare for the General Educational Development Test (GED) at an existing community college or other Adult Basic Education/GED preparation center. *ABCD* students who pass the MCAS or the GED will receive a diploma and will be eligible to apply for admission at any college and to apply for federal financial aid.

Option A – For *ABCD* Students Who Pass the Ability-to-Benefit Test

Students without a high school diploma who pass a federally approved ability-to-benefit test (ATB) become eligible to apply for admission at a community college and to apply for federal student financial aid.

To help the Commonwealth assist *ABCD* students, all fifteen community colleges are now making provisions to offer a federally approved ability-to-benefit test. Campuses must adhere to strict requirements regarding test administration and mandatory academic support services in order to preserve their institutional eligibility to award financial aid.

Class of 2003 students who have not earned the competency determination will have an early opportunity to take the ATB test starting in March 2003 after results of the December retest and first round of appeals are known.

Option B – For *ABCD* Students Who Do Not Pass the Ability-to-Benefit Test

1. MCAS Remediation Transitional Program

ABCD students may seek MCAS remediation at high schools, vocational technical schools, community-based organizations, work places, or at community colleges that offer transitional programs developed with partnership school districts and funded through Department of Education (DOE) grants for MCAS remediation.

High schools will provide individual student success plans identifying specific English and math skill deficits for each student seeking to attend an MCAS remediation transitional program. Funding support for MCAS remediation will follow the student from the local school district to the community college or other provider. Upon passing the MCAS and obtaining the MCAS high school diploma, students will be eligible to apply for admission at any college and to apply for financial aid.

2. GED Transitional Programs

Students without a high school diploma may choose to prepare for the GED examination.

Upon passing the GED exam, students will receive a Massachusetts High School Equivalency Diploma and will be eligible to apply for admission at any college and to apply for financial aid.

Adult Basic Education (ABE)/GED centers, supported by special Department of Education grants, are located at several community colleges. The challenge, however, is that most centers are at capacity, and centers with the longest waiting lists tend to be located in the very communities that have the lowest MCAS performance rates. ABE/GED center capacity in these communities may have to be expanded to accommodate *ABCD* students.

Summary Considerations

Both options will require some additional resources for faculty, facilities and program management at community colleges. Until the data become available on the number of *ABCD* students in each community college region, the impact on community college resources at individual campuses is unknown. Ultimately, the course of each option will be shaped by realities and limitations posed by student choice, the mission and role of community colleges and the K-12 sectors, as well as the availability of funding, physical plant capacity, and human resource constraints. Successful implementation will depend on the availability of sufficient resources.

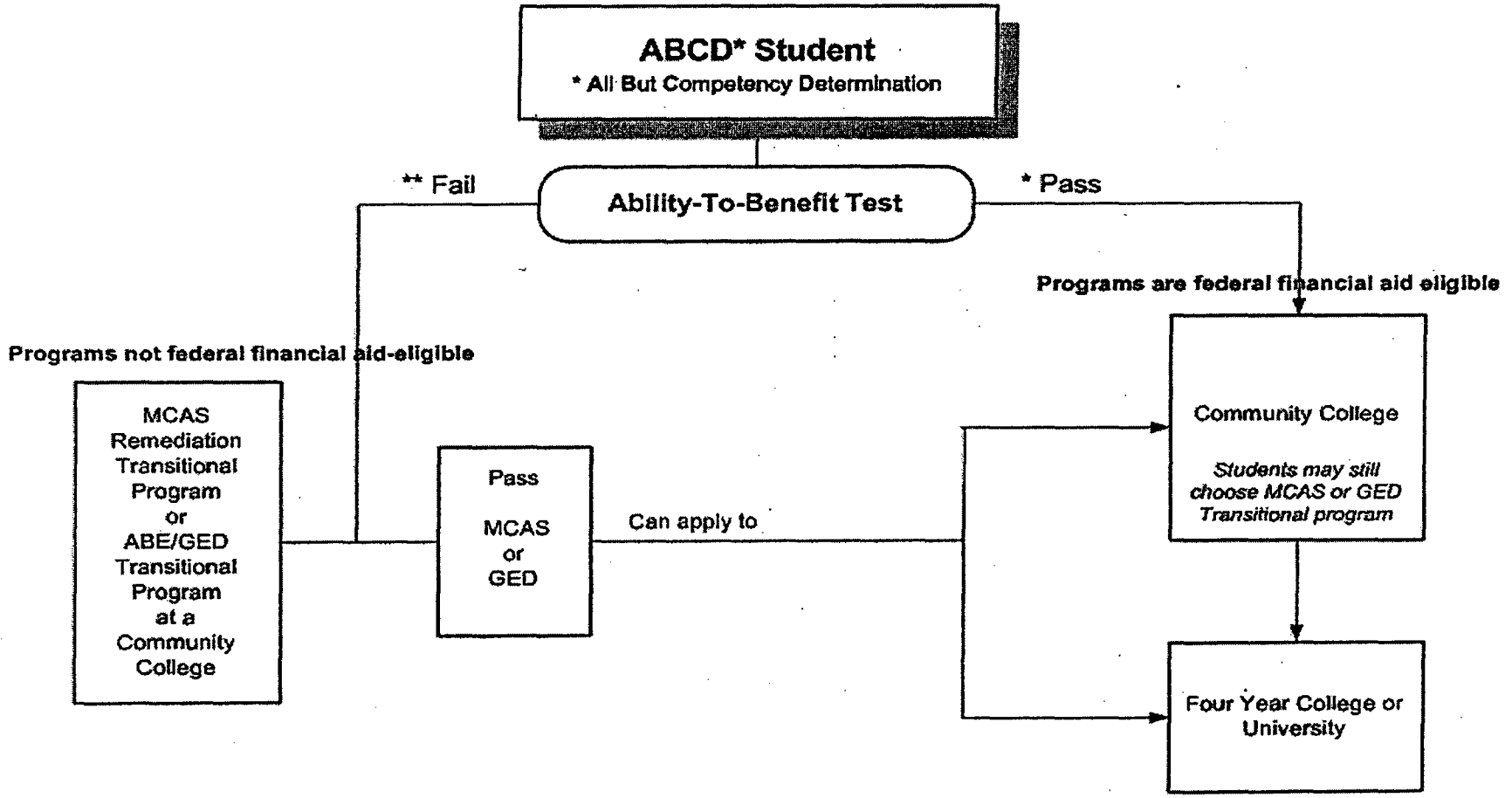
Despite the uncertainties that exist in this initial year of high-stakes MCAS, the Board of Higher Education is encouraging campuses to work with public schools for the provision of professional development for teachers and academic support for students preparing to earn their competency determination and continue on to college.

High school faculty, as the professionals most familiar with curriculum frameworks and the MCAS test, are vital colleagues to community college faculty and other providers who opt to participate in an MCAS remediation effort.

Assuming the availability of appropriate levels of funding, the Board of Higher Education calls upon campuses to partner with school districts in the development of MCAS remediation transitional programs to be implemented at community colleges over a two-year period beginning with students from the high school classes of 2003 and 2004.

The Board of Higher Education should review the continued need for these transitional options by the end of the fall semester in 2004.

Options for Students who complete all high school graduation requirements without earning the competency determination (MCAS 220 work).



** Students are not eligible to apply for financial aid

* Students are eligible to apply for financial aid