

## School Report Cards

*Parents, report cards aren't just for kids anymore!*

*Under the **No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)**, you as parents now receive a new kind of report card that tells you how well the school is doing educating your children. These report cards are different from the report cards teachers send home during the year. They are also different from the reports that let you know your children's scores on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests. Those reports tell you how your child is doing. **School report cards** tell you how your child's **school** is doing.*

### Why are school report cards important?

**P**arents can be an important force for changing schools for the better. School report cards give parents and the public vital data they can use to make good choices for their children and to help schools improve.

The school report card (and cover letter) will tell you if your child's school must offer certain options. For example, struggling students in low-performing schools may be eligible for FREE tutoring services.

### What's in the report cards?

NCLB sets specific rules that each state must follow for what

they have to include in school report cards. Schools may also include additional information. Although they may differ from school to school and from district to district, Massachusetts school report cards are generally divided into three parts:

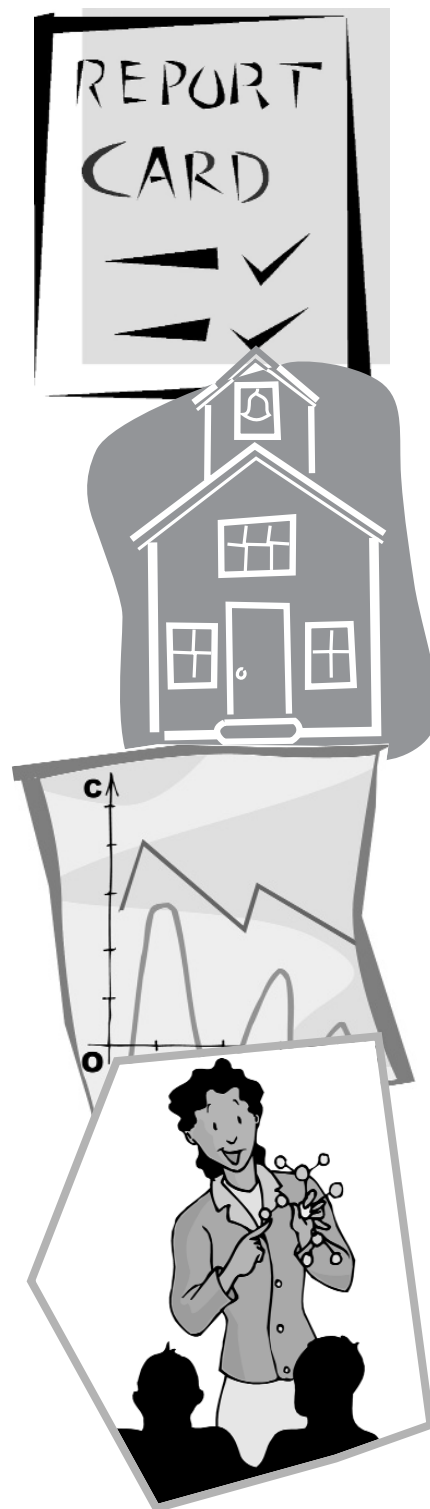
### Part I: Teacher Qualifications

This section gives data about two important standards:

1. the percentage of teachers who are "certified" or "licensed" to teach in Massachusetts, and
2. the percentage of teachers who are "**highly qualified**" to teach in the **core subject areas**: mathematics, science, reading, history, English language, foreign languages, economics, civics and government, geography, and the arts.

"Highly qualified" means that the teacher has taken enough courses to teach a subject effectively. This change is important because, in the past, teachers who were qualified to teach one subject could be assigned to teach in other areas.

NCLB says that teachers for all core subjects must be "highly qualified" by the end of the 2005-2006 school year.



## Part II School Achievement in Mathematics and Reading

This section tells you how well the students in your school did on the last round of MCAS tests for math and reading. This data is usually given in a chart form. NCLB requires that the data be broken down by grade level, subject area, and the overall performance of these different groups in the school:

- All students
- Students with limited English proficiency

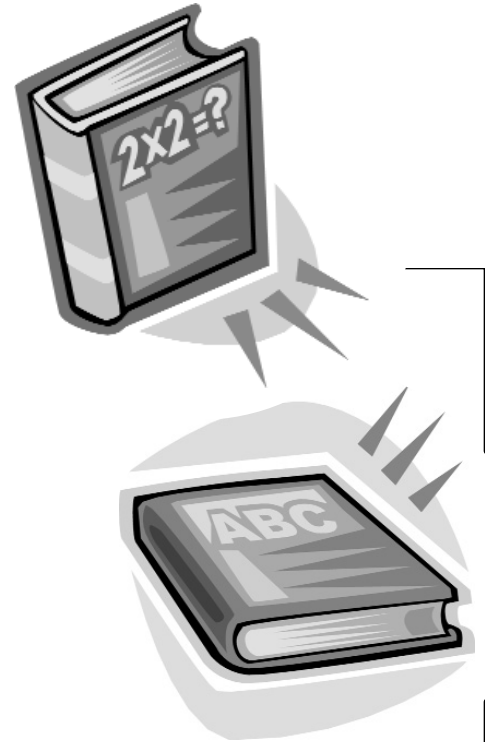
- Students with disabilities
- Students from different racial and ethnic groups
- Gender
- Low-income status
- Migrant status

This section shows you how the school district and the state did overall on the MCAS reading and math tests. Thus, you can compare your school's rating to those of the district overall and the state.

MCAS performance results show the percentage of students

who scored at each of the four performance levels:

- Advanced (A)
- Proficient (P)
- Needs Improvement (NI)
- Warning/Failing (W/F)



### Let's take a look at how a school might report its Grade 8 Mathematics data:

This school's report card shows that: 124 students in regular education took the 8th grade mathematics MCAS. These 124 children account for 95% of the students in 8th grade regular education at the school. Of these 124, 2% scored in the Advanced range on the test, 18% in the Proficient range, 31% in the Needs Improvement range, and 50% in the Warning/Failing range.

#### Anytown Middle School Mathematics

#### Grade 8

	Participation		% Students at Each Performance Level			
	#	%	A	P	NI	W/F
<b>STUDENT STATUS</b>						
Regular	124	95	2	18	31	50
Disabled	76	93	1	0	9	89
Limited-English Proficient	59	95	0	8	10	81
<b>RACE/ETHNICITY</b>						
African American	86	96	0	3	24	72
Asian/Pacific Islander	2	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Hispanic	105	98	1	5	20	74
Mixed or other						
White	53	88	4	32	17	47
FREE LUNCH	190	97	0	9	20	71
<b>ALL STUDENTS</b>	246	95	1	11	21	67
<b>DISTRICT</b>	4828	98	1	11	21	67
<b>STATE</b>	78456	99	12	25	30	33

\* NA means "not applicable." MCAS results for groups with fewer than 10 students are not shown in order to protect student confidentiality.

### If this were your school's report card, you would be able to tell that:

- 3% of African-American students, 5% of Hispanic students, and 32% of White students received scores in the Proficient range.
- 1% of the school's students got scores in the Advanced range, as did 1% of the District's students overall, and 12% of the State's students overall.

## Part III

### Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Status

This section tells you if your school made “adequate yearly progress.” “Adequate yearly progress,” or AYP, is a new term for most of us. It is a measure of progress toward an important goal set by NCLB. The goal is that *all* students will be proficient in reading (English language arts or ELA, in Massachusetts) and mathematics by the year 2014. **Adequate yearly progress is a description of how well the school is doing each year to meet the 2014 proficiency goal.**

Students’ scores on MCAS tests in both English language arts (ELA) and mathematics are used to judge AYP. High schools must also use graduation rates. Elementary and middle schools must use attendance rates.

Because AYP is a measure of change, schools with low MCAS scores may still make AYP.

A major goal of NCLB is to close the achievement gap for minority students, low-income students, students with disabilities, and students with limited-English proficiency. Therefore, each group of students must make progress toward the goal. Even though a school might do well educating *most* students, it will not meet AYP unless *all groups of students* are making progress.

This graph shows that this school **DID NOT** make AYP in 2003. Why? It *did* make AYP for ELA in the aggregate (average

Adequate Yearly Progress History										
Students	English Language Arts					Mathematics				
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Aggregate	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
All subgroups	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No

of all the students), and for each and every subgroup. But it *did not* make AYP in mathematics in 2003, because not every subgroup made AYP. A quick way to see if a school made AYP for the most recent year is to look at the two boxes (*aggregate* and *all subgroups*) for ELA and the 2 boxes for Mathematics for the last year. A “No” in any of those 4 boxes means that the school did not make AYP.

#### Parent Options

All parents whose children attend Title I\* schools should pay close attention to whether or not the school made AYP. NCLB gives special options to parents when schools do not meet AYP.

- **Option to Transfer:** A Title I school that does not meet its AYP goals for two or more years in a row is called a school “in need of improvement.” These schools must give their students the option to transfer to a school that has made AYP. The school district must also provide transportation to the new school for eligible students. This option continues until the school has improved.
- **Free Tutoring:** Title I schools that do not make AYP for three or more years in a row must also pay for some students to receive “supplemental

educational services.” These services can be tutoring or other academic help, outside school hours. Although schools must tell parents if the school must provide supplemental services, **it is up to parents to ask for them.** While not every student will be found eligible, parents should still ask.

The letter that comes with the report card should state very clearly whether or not students in the school have the option to transfer or if they are eligible for supplemental educational services (free tutoring).

Parents of students in special education programs should also note that some special rules apply. As with all students, the U.S. Department of Education expects that students with disabilities will progress academically along with other students. However, it allows schools to calculate the scores of some students with significant cognitive disabilities using modified criteria. This rule applies to only 1 percent of the students being tested. Thus, these students benefit from NCLB’s charge that *all* students learn to high standards. At the same time, by using the modified criteria, schools will still be able to meet AYP.



\* Title I provides federal funding for schools to help students who are behind academically or at risk of falling behind. Funding is based on the number of low-income children in a school, generally those eligible for the free lunch program. NCLB has special rules for Title I schools.

## Action Pointers

Parents and community members can use the report cards as a useful tool for improving schools. You can use them to ask questions, advocate for additional support, and generally get more involved with your local school. Here are some questions to get you started:

### ► Did you get your school report card?

The Massachusetts Department of Education is asking districts to release school report cards in the Spring. Most schools send them home with the students.

If you don't get a copy of your school's report card, ask the school for a copy.

### ► Is the school report card easy to understand?

School report cards should be clearly written and easy to understand. If you have trouble understanding anything on it, ask the school principal for help. Let the principal and the school district know how parent-friendly the report card is (or is not).

### ► What else would you like to know about your child's school?

NCLB sets minimum requirements for what must be in the report cards, but schools may add more information. For example, some schools include data on class sizes, courses offered, enrollment in Advanced Placement classes, and/or the level and quality of parent involvement. What do you want to know that isn't on the school report card? Work with other parents and community members to identify key items, and ask to have this information added.

### ► Can you identify your school's strengths and weaknesses?

What do you know about the school that could explain low scores? If reading scores are low, ask what the plan is for improvement. If the school has high scores in one subject, or for one group of students, find out what is working. Ask how that success can expand to other areas and/or students.

### ► Are there achievement differences for students from different groups?

By giving data for different groups of students, school report cards can show where the achievement gaps are within the school. You can also see how the school performs compared to the district and the state. If some groups are excelling while others are not doing so well, ask the school principal what the school is doing to close any gaps. Ask, for example: Why do the school's students with Limited English Proficiency have difficulty with math? The problem may be a reading problem. Ask if the students with disabilities are improving along with the other students. Discuss with teachers and other families what you think should be done. Use the report card to help create equality.

### ► What are other parents saying?

Talk with other parents about the report cards and your school in general. If families don't know about them, help them get a copy of the school report card. Schools often hold school meetings to explain the report cards. Attend the meeting, or organize a school or community meeting to discuss the reports and education.



### For more information

The *No Child Left Behind Act* views parents as key partners in helping their children succeed in school. Parents' PLACE helps parents get the information they need to make important decisions about their children's education. If you would like to receive more information on school report cards, public school choice, supplemental education services, MCAS tests and standards, or any other aspect of NCLB, Parents' PLACE is here to help! We offer print resources, workshops, a toll-free helpline, and a website and regular publications on education in English, Spanish, and Portuguese.

Call us toll free at  
**1-877-471-0980**

Visit us at  
**[www.pplace.org](http://www.pplace.org)**



**PARENTS LEARNING ABOUT  
CHILDREN'S EDUCATION**

Parents' PLACE is the Massachusetts Statewide Parent Information and Resource Center (PIRC). It is funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, Grant #U310A060075. The views and opinions expressed in *Parents' PLACE Pointers* do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. Permission is granted to copy or reprint this newsletter, or any portion of it, with the exception of articles we have reprinted with permission. Please credit *Parents' PLACE Pointers*, the Federation for Children with Special Needs, and original author if indicated.

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Parents' PLACE thanks the Massachusetts Department of Education for support in developing this issue of *Parents' PLACE Pointers*.