



HAMPDEN CHARTER SCHOOL OF SCIENCE

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Competency Determination (CD) Policy

It is the philosophy of the Hampden Charter School of Science that students respond more positively to the opportunity for success than to the threat of failure. We seek, therefore, through our instructional programs, to make achievement both recognizable and possible for students. We emphasize achievement in our processes of evaluating student performance. We report achievement through the use of letter grades. A student earns full credit by completing the course with at least a D (65 average). A student shows mastery in a course by completing a series of requirements for a course. These requirements include unit assessments, end of quarter assessments and/or a portfolio project.

All students must satisfactorily complete the following coursework in English Language Arts to meet the graduation requirements: Four years of English Language Arts

9th grade: ELA 9 or ELA 9 Honors

10th grade: ELA 10 or ELA 10 Honors or ELA 10: AP Seminar

11th grade: ELA 11 or ELA 11 Honors or AP English Language and Composition

12th grade: ELA 12 or ELA 12 Honors or AP English Literature and Composition

The Massachusetts English Language Arts and Literacy (ELA) Curriculum Framework identifies essential skills across four strands:

Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language. Students must master the ability to **comprehend, interpret, and analyze** a diverse range of complex literary and informational texts, cite textual evidence, and understand how **craft and structure** impact meaning. They must also learn to **produce clear and coherent writing** for various tasks, purposes, and audiences, developing and strengthening their work through **revision and editing** while demonstrating a command of **Standard English conventions** and a rich **vocabulary**. A student demonstrates mastery in ELA by consistently applying these integrated skills in **high-quality work**, such as **analyzing and making arguments** based on evidence from texts, participating **effectively in collaborative discussions**, delivering **purposeful oral presentations**, and successfully completing **standards-aligned assessments**, including the **MCAS**, which certify their readiness for college, careers, and civic participation.

A student will show mastery in English Language Arts (ELA) by consistently **integrating and applying** the skills across the four strands—Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language—as outlined in the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework. Mastery is demonstrated when a student can effectively **analyze complex literary and informational texts**, citing strong evidence to support interpretations of theme, structure, and author's craft; **produce clear and coherent writing** for various purposes (argument, exposition, narrative), exhibiting command of Standard English conventions, a robust vocabulary, and a routine process of revision; and **participate constructively in collaborative discussions**, presenting ideas logically and persuasively. Ultimately, this integrated application is certified through **high-quality, standards-aligned work**, including successful performance on portfolio tasks and state assessments like the **MCAS**, which require synthesizing these skills for sophisticated communication and analysis.

A students must satisfactorily complete the following coursework in Mathematics to meet the graduation requirements: Four years of Mathematics

9th grade: Algebra 1 or Geometry Honors

10th grade: Algebra 2 Honors or Geometry or Geometry Honors

11th grade: Algebra 2 or PreCalculus or PreCalculus Honors

12th grade: Probability and Statistics or Calculus or Calculus Honors

The Massachusetts Mathematics Curriculum Framework is built on two key components: the **Content Standards** (which define the knowledge and skills across domains like Number and Quantity, Algebra, Functions, Geometry, and Statistics and Probability) and the **eight Standards for Mathematical Practice** (which describe the habits of mind for mathematical reasoning). A student demonstrates mastery by integrating both. This means they must not only show **procedural fluency** in calculating and manipulating mathematical expressions (the "how"), but also **deep conceptual understanding** of *why* those procedures work. Mastery is shown when a student can **make sense of problems and persevere in solving them**, **reason abstractly and quantitatively** by moving between problem contexts and mathematical symbols, **construct viable arguments** to justify their reasoning, and **model with mathematics** by applying concepts to real-world situations. Ultimately, a student proves mastery by consistently producing **rigorous solutions** to complex problems, demonstrating precision in their work, and successfully completing **standards-aligned assessments**, including the **MCAS**, which require them to synthesize and apply their skills and knowledge.

A student will show mastery in Mathematics by **synthesizing both conceptual understanding and procedural fluency**, as defined by the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework. This mastery is demonstrated when a student not only efficiently performs calculations and manipulations (procedural fluency) but also deeply understands *why* those methods work (conceptual understanding). The ultimate sign of mastery is the consistent application of the **eight Standards for Mathematical Practice**, enabling the student to **make sense of problems, reason abstractly and quantitatively, model real-world situations** using mathematical concepts, and **construct viable arguments** to justify their logical processes. This integrated proficiency is formally assessed and validated through **high-quality, standards-aligned work** that provides rigorous solutions to complex, multi-step problems and successful performance on state assessments, such as the **MCAS**.

A students must satisfactorily complete the following coursework in Science to meet the graduation requirements: Three years of Science with Lab

9th grade: Biology or Biology Honors

10th grade: Chemistry or Chemistry Honors

11th grade: Physics or Physics Honors

A student demonstrates mastery of the Massachusetts Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) Curriculum Framework by integrating the **three dimensions**—Disciplinary Core Ideas (DCIs), Scientific and Engineering Practices (SEPs), and Crosscutting Concepts (CCCs)—rather than simply recalling facts. The **knowledge and competencies** required include understanding the **DCIs** across Physical Science, Life Science, Earth and Space Science, and Technology/Engineering, which are the fundamental concepts and principles. Crucially, a student must be able to apply the **SEPs**, which are the skills scientists and engineers use, such as **developing and using models, planning and carrying out investigations, analyzing and interpreting data**, and **constructing explanations or designing solutions**. Furthermore, they must use

CCCs like **cause and effect** and **systems and system models** as intellectual tools to connect and organize knowledge across different scientific fields.

Mastery is ultimately shown when a student consistently applies this integrated understanding to **solve novel problems and explain complex phenomena**. This is evidenced not through rote memorization, but through **performance tasks** and high-quality work that requires synthesis and application. For instance, a student shows mastery by successfully completing **engineering design challenges** that require defining a problem and optimizing a solution, or by carrying out a **full scientific investigation** where they gather evidence and engage in **argument from evidence** to support a scientific explanation. Successful performance on **standards-aligned assessments**, such as the **MCAS**, which test the ability to synthesize DCIs, SEPs, and CCCs, certifies that a student is proficient in thinking and acting like a scientist or engineer.

All students must satisfactorily complete the following coursework in History to meet the graduation requirements: Four years of History

9th grade: US History I

10th grade: US History II

11th grade: World History I

12th grade: World History II

A student demonstrates mastery in U.S. History, as guided by the Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework, by **synthesizing essential historical knowledge with critical analysis and inquiry skills**. The required knowledge includes major **Content Standards** related to key eras, turning points, significant ideas, individuals, and themes of United States history, as well as core concepts in Civics, Geography, and Economics. However, true mastery goes beyond factual recall, centering on the ability to perform the **Standards for History and Social Science Practice**. This means the student can **develop focused inquiry questions, evaluate primary and secondary sources** for purpose, point of view, and credibility, and **organize and synthesize information** from multiple sources to understand complex historical developments and differing interpretations.

This integrated competency is evidenced when the student can **construct well-supported historical arguments and explanations** using valid reasoning and textual evidence. For example, a student shows mastery by effectively **analyzing how core democratic and civic values have evolved** over time, demonstrating a nuanced understanding of their implications and limitations when taking informed positions on civic issues. Mastery culminates in the student's ability to complete **rigorous, multi-faceted tasks**, such as **Document-Based Questions (DBQs)**, sustained research projects, and the **Civics Project** (at the high school level), which require them to apply content knowledge and analytical skills to demonstrate **civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions** required for responsible citizenship.

All students are required to complete a Senior Research project (or AP Research) before graduation.

The district ensures students with disabilities have an **equal opportunity to meet the Competency Determination (CD) requirements** by implementing the federal **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** and Massachusetts General Law Chapter 71B (Ch. 766). For every student, an **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** is developed by the Team, which outlines the **specialized supports and modifications** necessary to access the curriculum and demonstrate competency. These supports may include **accommodations** (e.g., extended time, use of a word processor, preferential seating),

modifications to the curriculum (changing the content expectations, though the district ensures alignment with CD coursework requirements), and **specially designed instruction** tailored to the student's unique needs.

Crucially, the policy includes **alternative demonstration methods** to meet the CD requirements beyond the standard MCAS test or course completion for students whose disabilities preclude them from meeting the standard requirements even with accommodations. For students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, the **MCAS Alternate Assessment (MCAS-Alt)**, which uses a portfolio of student work aligned with "expanded" standards, is the primary alternative pathway to earn the Competency Determination. For other students, the IEP Team may implement **other alternative methods**, such as utilizing different evidence of mastery from course performance. The district's commitment is to provide a **Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)** and ensure that the student is afforded every reasonable opportunity to achieve the CD and local graduation requirements before exiting school.

The district provides English Learners (ELs) with an **equal opportunity to meet the Competency Determination (CD) requirements** by providing **Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) programs** and a continuum of specialized supports designed to develop both English language proficiency and content mastery simultaneously. All ELs receive **English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction** aligned with the **WIDA English Language Development Standards** and grade-level content standards, focusing on the four language domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In their content-area classes, ELs receive **Sheltered Content Instruction**, where core academic content (such as Math, Science, and History) is made comprehensible through **modifications, scaffolding, and accommodations**, including the use of visuals, graphic organizers, simplified language, and pre-approved bilingual dictionaries for assessments. For late-enrolling high school ELs, the district conducts a thorough **transcript review** to determine equivalent coursework and develops an expedited plan, including credit recovery or targeted support, to ensure timely completion of all CD coursework requirements.

Transcript Review and Course-Taking Opportunities

The initial step is a mandatory **transcript review** conducted by the school administration. This process ensures compliance with state requirements by:

- **Equivalent Course Length and Content:** We meticulously compare the student's prior coursework from their sending school(s) to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks' standards for the required graduation requirements. Courses from outside schools are certified as *equivalent* if the content and instructional time align with the **same academic standards** and the **equivalent of a course** in the required content area.
- **Demonstration of Mastery:** We accept the sending school's documentation of course completion and passing grade as initial evidence of mastery. If prior transcripts are unclear or incomplete, the student may be required to complete a **portfolio review**, a **performance-based assessment**, or a **district-certified end-of-course assessment** to demonstrate that they have mastered the core competencies of the missed course.

If the review indicates a **coursework deficiency**, the student is immediately provided with **course-taking opportunities** through an individualized academic plan, which may include:

- Enrollment in required courses during the current school year.
- Credit recovery options (e.g., summer school, online programs).

- Schedule adjustments to allow for accelerated or multiple required courses.

The district has established a two-tiered system for students and parents to appeal a final determination that a student has not met the Competency Determination (CD) requirements, starting with a **Local CD Appeal Process** focused on coursework and mastery evidence. A student or parent must submit a formal **written appeal** to the **High School Principal** within **15 school days** of receiving the final determination. The Principal, consulting with school administrators and relevant teachers, will review all academic evidence—including coursework, performance tasks, and local assessments—to determine if the student has demonstrated competency. The Principal then issues a decision in **writing** (including the policy rationale) within **15 school days** of receiving the appeal. If this appeal is denied, the student or parent may escalate the matter by appealing the Principal's decision to the **Superintendent** within **10 school days**, whose decision on local CD matters is considered final within the district.