

Excerpt from 11/20/25 Buildings and Grounds Subcommittee



Excerpt: Start Times & Buses

Issue:

The purpose of this excerpt from the presentation made at the Buildings and Grounds Subcommittee on November 20th and raise the possibility of transition from the current three-tiered start times system to a two-tiered start times system in order to improve on-time performance by CPS transportation vendors.

Why:

Persistent failure for all buses to arrive at school on time, particularly among the “late tier” schools starting class at 8:45AM.

How:

Collapsing the early and mid tiers (currently 7:45AM and 8:15AM).

When:

SY 26-27

Opportunity:

To identify as a FY 27 budgetary priority the staffing structure necessary to open schools earlier, optimize bus routes and capitalize on before-school time to allow for better academic, social and nutritional foundations for preK - 8 students on a daily basis.



Transportation Tiers

- CPS provides bus transportation for 22 school communities; 18 CPS schools and 2 Public Charter and 3 Private Schools located within the City of Cambridge.
- Cambridge is obligated to provide equivalent school transportation to Public Charter & Private Schools located in Cambridge per M.G.L. c. 76, § 1.
- Schools with similar start and end times are grouped into Tiers.
- Four AM arrival tiers
- Eight PM dismissal tiers
- Wednesday early release days for CPS.



AM Arrival Tiers

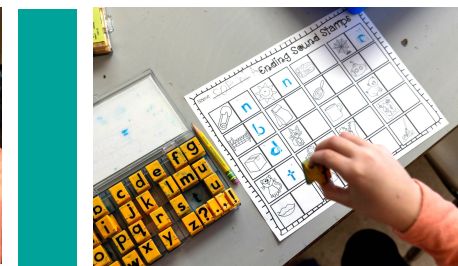
Tier	Schools	School Day Start	Contractual Time	Actual Time
1 “Early”	FMA, Dr. MLK, Jr.*, Haggerty, Tobin, <i>Benjamin Banneker Public Charter International School of Boston</i>	7:45AM 8AM	7:30AM	7:35AM
2 “Mid”	Cambridgeport, G&P, Morse	8:15AM	8AM	8:05AM
2-A	CRLS/ RSTA, HSEP (DTD Only) <i>Community Charter School of Cambridge</i> <i>École Française de Boston</i> <i>Fayerweather Street School</i>	8:30AM	8:15AM	8:20AM
3 “Late”	Amigos, Baldwin, DVUS, PAUS, King Open/ CSUS, Peabody/ RAUC	8:45AM	8:30AM	8:35AM

PM Dismissal Tiers (M, T, R, F)

Tier	Schools	PM Dismissal	Earliest PM Dismissal by contract	“On-time” Departure
1	Haggerty, Tobin	2:15PM	2:20PM	2:55PM
2	Cambridgeport, G&P, Morse	2:45PM	2:50PM	2:55PM
3	CRLS/ RSTA, HSEP (DTD Only) <i>Benjamin Banneker Public Charter</i> <i>École Française de Boston</i>	3PM	3:05PM	3:10PM
4	<i>Fayerweather Street School</i> Amigos, Baldwin, DVUS, PAUS, King Open/ CSUS, Peabody/ RAUC	3:15PM	3:20PM	3:25PM
5	<i>Community Charter School of Cambridge</i>	3:25PM	3:30PM	3:35PM
6	<i>International School of Boston</i>	3:35PM	3:40PM	3:45PM
7	FMA	3:45PM	3:50PM	3:55PM
8	Dr. MLK, Jr.	3:55PM	4PM	4:05PM

Transportation Routes

- CPS has 35 AM and 35 PM daily ‘large yellow’ bus routes serving students in the general population.
- 35 school buses are deployed 6:50 - 9AM and 2 - 5PM daily
- Each route serves 1 - 3 schools in different Tiers, or “runs” including combination of schools’ students on individual vehicles to increase efficiency
- Approx. 75+ door to door vehicles are deployed during the same windows



Transportation Contracts

Eastern Bus

- Neighborhood service; Serves set stops along predetermined routes
- 35+ vehicles daily
- Contract in place through FY 2030
- FY27 costs (Year 2)

\$185,400 per bus annually

NRT Transportation

- Door to Door service; Specialized needs defined by IEP or housing status
- 75+ vehicles daily
- Contract in place through FY 2027
- FY 27 Costs (Year 3)

Variable based on vehicle type, distance outside of Cambridge

\$96,480 per minibus annually

\$63,720 per van annually

Run 1 vs Run 2 Cumulative Comparison

	Run 1 (60 min buffer)	Run 2 (30 min buffer)
	Tiers 1 & 2	Tiers 2 & 3
On Time	88%	70%
Before Bell/Late	10.36%	24.28%
LATE	0.71%	6.43%

Takeaway: 30 minute buffer is inadequate to transport students across 19 schools.



What problem(s) are we attempting to address?

Too many students are getting to school too **late**.

Troubleshooting **suboptimal transportation routes** is taking too long into the school year.

Too many students are having **inadequate time** to consume breakfast and/or get settled for the school day subsequent to arrival.

Some students are at bus stops **earlier in the morning** than we would prefer.

Preserving **stability** and reliability for staff, students and families.

\$13m in transportation **costs**.

Opportunities/Goals:

1

Transport more
students to school
on-time

2

Create more
opportunities for
students to capitalize
on before-school
time
(i.e. breakfast,
tutoring,
extracurricular
activities, etc.).

3

Move more
students through
city traffic before
conditions worsen.

Next Steps

01

Follow up communication to potentially affected school communities.

02

Pressure testing of route optimization.

03

Exploration of current routing and route assignment technology (new version instituted in October following technical mishaps at start of SY 25-26).



Background

In November 2024, Massachusetts voters passed [Ballot Question 2](#) to eliminate MCAS as a high school graduation requirement. The state has since issued [guidance](#) for districts to develop local Competency Determination (CD) policies that detail how students in the class of 2026¹ and beyond will demonstrate:

- **mastery of skills** in English language arts, mathematics, and science as measured by (1) the final assessment for a course; or (2) a capstone or portfolio project; or (3) an equivalent measure identified in the district's CD policy.
- and the **satisfactory completion of relevant coursework** aligned to the standards measured by the high school English language arts, mathematics, and science MCAS assessments administered in 2023.

The regulations further require that students in the Class of 2027 and beyond also satisfactorily complete one course in United States History. This policy must address considerations for students with disabilities, English learners (ELs), and late-enrolling students and include an appeals process and how MCAS may be used in limited circumstances. Additionally, the regulations require that districts submit competency determination and graduation requirement policies by December 31, 2025.

Competency Determination vs. Local Graduation Requirements

The CD is one requirement a student must satisfy to graduate with a diploma from a Massachusetts public high school.

1. **Meet Competency Determination:** CD only considers the skills, competencies, and knowledge contained in the state academic standards and curriculum frameworks *through grade 10*. To graduate, a student must fulfill the CD requirement, as determined by the local school district and in compliance with the requirements;
2. **Meet Local Graduation Requirements** (see [here](#) for CPS). These are the sole discretion of the district and *cover through grade 12*. Local graduation requirements may align with the CD policy but cannot take the place of the CD policy.
3. **Receive a free and appropriate public education** ([FAPE](#)) for *students with disabilities*.

¹ Students who met the CD standard in English language arts, mathematics, and/or science prior to January 3, 2025 (i.e., students who earned a CD through a regular or retest administration of the MCAS, or through a DESE appeal process) retain that benefit.

Approval & Dissemination

The proposed policy must be approved by School Committee, shared with all students, families/guardians, and district stakeholders, and made publicly available in multiple languages. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) will publish each district's CD policy and local graduation requirements this winter.

Proposed CPS CD Policy

Use of MCAS for Classes of 2026 and 2027

CPS will use **high school MCAS scores prior to January 2025 as an initial basis for competency determination for the Classes of 2026 and 2027 only**. Students in the Class of 2026 who earned a CD through MCAS prior to January 2025 retain that benefit, as do students in the Class of 2027 who earned a CD in Science through Science MCAS. *Beginning with the class of 2028 and beyond, MCAS will only be used for late-enrolling students and those students with limited access to transcripts, as detailed below.*

Determination of Satisfactory Completion of Coursework and Demonstration of Mastery

Students will demonstrate **satisfactory completion of relevant coursework** by earning credits from [this detailed list of CRLS courses](#). All content area courses on the list, including those specifically for students with disabilities and English learners, are aligned to the curriculum frameworks and the priority standards for those content areas. Satisfactory completion means earning full credit in a course with a **final grade of 60 or higher**. The final grade may be represented on the transcript as a "P" or a letter grade of D- or higher.

Demonstrating mastery shall mean that a student has passed a final assessment, capstone project/portfolio, or benchmark assessment that has been identified by the department as assessing the priority standards for a given subject area at or above the grade 9 level. Students who do not show mastery of skills on their first attempt will be given additional opportunities in the same or future courses so they have as many opportunities as possible to demonstrate mastery before their time of graduation. For some students with disabilities, alternative methods for demonstrating mastery based on the student's disability, modifications, and accommodations where they are unable to engage in traditional content area courses may be developed. This approach will be in alignment with other measures of mastery and will also assess the priority standards for the particular subject area.

Content-Specific CD Requirements

The following articulates the credits required in each content area, and the demonstration of mastery. *Teams will spend the remainder of SY2025-2026 developing the instruments that demonstrate mastery to ensure consistent high standards are applied across all areas.*

- 20 credits in high school **English Language Arts (ELA)** courses. Students will demonstrate mastery of skills by passing a final assessment or capstone project/writing portfolio that has been identified by the department as assessing priority ELA/Literacy standards at or above the grade 10 level. Below are additional considerations for English Learners:
 - Students at English Language Proficiency (ELP) 1-3 may complete up to two ESL courses (levels 1-3) to count toward ELA credit. In addition to providing students with rigorous English language development, the ESL 2 and 3 curriculum units are aligned to ELA grade-level MA content standards.
 - Students at ELP 4 or higher will be enrolled in a general education ELA class with an ESL co-teacher.
- 20 credits in high school **mathematics** courses, satisfactorily completing coursework in the equivalent of (i) one year of both Algebra I and Geometry; or (ii) one year of both Integrated Math I and Integrated Math II. Students will demonstrate mastery of skills by passing a final assessment, capstone project/portfolio, or benchmark assessment that has been identified by the department as assessing the priority standards at or above Algebra 1 & Geometry.
- 10 credits in either **Physics, Chemistry, or Biology**. Students will demonstrate mastery of skills by passing a final assessment, capstone project/portfolio, or benchmark assessment that has been identified by the department as assessing the priority standards in Biology, Chemistry, or Physics.
- 10 credits in United States **History**. Students will demonstrate mastery of skills by passing a student-led civic engagement project that meets criteria established by the state.

Additional Considerations for English Learners

EL students at the Beginning and Developing (Intermediate) stages of English Language Proficiency (ELP), as defined by ACCESS for ELs are appropriately placed in Sheltered English Instruction (SEI) content courses. These courses embed the linguistic and academic scaffolds essential for students navigating grade-level content while simultaneously acquiring the English language. This comprehensive approach ensures EL students receive equitable access to the curriculum, while building the necessary background knowledge and content literacy required for successful Competency Determination.

Students in Out-of-District Placements & Late-Enrolling Students

For students in out-of-district placements and those who enroll in CRLS after grade 9, transcripts and/or report cards are reviewed to complete a “Progress Toward Graduation” assessment. This process will now include reviewing prior courses for alignment with CD-related coursework. Components of the CD requirements will be awarded in a particular subject area based on transcripts and/or report cards.

Use of MCAS for Over-age Students and/or Those with Limited Access to Transcripts

Limited circumstances will apply for over-age students or those students with limited access to transcripts to earn a CD by attaining a qualifying score of “Meeting Expectations” or “Exceeding Expectations” achievement levels on the relevant high school MCAS assessment; or meeting the standard for a substituted equivalent that the relevant department certifies satisfies the same academic standards.

Appeals Process

Competency Determinations are awarded by the Principal based on CPS policy. A student or parent/guardian may reach out to the Assistant Principal to appeal the Principal’s determination that the student has not met the requirements of a specific CD. The student and/or family would submit relevant transcripts, report cards, measures of proficiency and/or additional documentation. The Assistant Principal would review all relevant documentation and may approve the appeal themselves (awarding the CD) or may present the case to the CPS CD Committee for the specific subject area. The committee would include the relevant CPS Dean of Curriculum, the K-12 Curriculum Director, and, when relevant, administrators from the Special Education and/or the EL Departments.