



Maine Educational Assessments Security Handbook

The Maine Department of Education Assessment Team

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Maine Assessment Security Handbook

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Introduction

Assessing student learning is an essential aspect of education, as it provides data that can lead to improved outcomes for students. As required by Maine Statute [20-A §6202](#), the Maine Department of Education (DOE) must establish a statewide assessment program to measure and evaluate, on a continuing basis, the academic achievement of students in Maine’s public schools, charter schools, and private schools whose school enrollments include at least 60% publicly funded students. Results from these statewide assessments contribute to educational decisions made at the federal, state, and local levels in the planning and allocation of resources/programming for students. It is critical that assessment results are accurate, fair, and comparable.

To that end, the Maine DOE has established policies and defined procedures to ensure the integrity of the state assessment system. Adherence to Maine’s assessment security requirement ensures that the assessments will yield high-quality data that can be trusted to support valid and fair conclusions related to academic achievement.

The inability to follow Maine’s assessment administration and security requirements can potentially lead to one or more of the following consequences:

- Delay in reporting of student, school, district, or state results.
- Invalidation of student, school, district, or state results.
- Further review by the Maine DOE for additional technical assistance, including possible corrective action.

Importance of Assessment Security

Standardized assessments present all students with questions from a common item bank and are scored in a standard, consistent manner, which makes it possible to compare the relative performance of individual students or groups of students. Assessment security is an important condition for the standardization of assessments.

Unusual things do happen before, during, and after assessments are administered, and these incidents are referred to as assessment irregularities. Assessment irregularity is any event, act, or omission which can compromise the integrity and validity of Maine Educational Assessments or the results data. Assessment irregularities can be unintentional occurrences such as power outages, innocent mistakes in the assessment administration, or they can be more deliberate. In all cases, it is the joint responsibility of state and local assessment leaders to evaluate potential implications and reach the best possible resolution.

Section 1 – Prevention of Assessment Irregularities

When it comes to standardized assessment, the consequences of a security breach can be costly on many levels. The aim of this section is to highlight ways that state and local assessment personnel can work together to avoid irregularities. An assessment irregularity is any event, act, or omission which can compromise the integrity of Maine state assessments or the results data.

There are many types of events that could impact the validity and comparability of assessment results, some intentional and some unintentional. The focus of assessment security is to avoid and address irregularities that may compromise the validity of the results.

Maine has several different state-level assessments designed to assess grade level content for eligible students. These are collectively known as the Maine Educational Assessments (MEA). The principles and guidance in this *Maine Assessment Security Handbook* apply across the assessments listed below. Requirements for each assessment are

specified in the corresponding test administration and coordination manuals, and/or training provided by the Maine DOE.

Maine Educational Assessments		
Content Assessed	Assessment Name	Required Participants
Mathematics & Reading/English Language Arts	Maine Through Year Assessment	Students in grades 3-8 and second-year high school students
	Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA)*	Students in grades 3-8 and third-year high school students with the most significant cognitive disabilities
Science	Maine Science Assessment	Students in grades 5, 8, and third-year high school
	Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA)*	Students in grades 5, 8, and third-year high school with the most significant cognitive disabilities
English Language Proficiency	ACCESS for ELLs	Multilingual learners in grades K-12
	Alternate ACCESS	Multilingual learners in grades K-12 with the most significant cognitive disabilities

*Alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards (**AA-AAAS**) are designed for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. This determination is made by the local IEP Team utilizing state resources for eligibility.

Local assessment personnel

The SAU Superintendent has ultimate responsibility for assessments within the SAU. The Superintendent designates a staff member to act as District Assessment Coordinator (DAC). The DAC should be listed in the [NEO Staff Module](#) at the beginning of the school year. The DAC is the key point of contact for communication with the Maine DOE Assessment Team. At the school level, the building administrator has the responsibility to ensure the security and integrity of each assessment administration within their building.

Assessment Administrators (AA) are the personnel administering the assessments with students. These are also sometimes referred to as Proctors or Test Administrators (TA). Generally, AA should be selected in the following preferred order.

1. Certified teachers or administrators employed by the school district
2. Paraprofessionals or non-licensed administrative personnel
3. Substitute teachers or contracted employees

In the instance of a student with an Individualized Education Program (IEP), 504 Plan, or Individual Language Access Plan (ILAP), familiarity with the student’s assigned and regularly used accommodations

Preparation of assessment personnel

All SAU and school staff involved in implementation of any state assessment must participate in required training. The DAC is responsible for ensuring that clear and comprehensive annual training has been provided on assessment

administration and security procedures for all applicable staff. The DAC should ensure that local training procedures are documented on an annual basis.

Assessment Security and Student Data Privacy Agreement

After the applicable staff are fully trained, they are required to sign (in writing or digitally) the *Security and Student Data Privacy Agreement* (found in the appendices of this handbook). These agreements must be maintained by the SAU/DAC for the current academic year. In the case of an irregularity the Maine DOE may need to review the signed agreements during technical assistance.

Prohibited assessment preparation practices

The following prohibited assessment preparation practices must be avoided:

- Discussing, retaining, or reproducing any secure state assessment questions, materials, or student responses to secure questions (example: taking a photo).
- Using secure assessment questions or altered versions of secure assessment questions to prepare students.

Assessment Administration Environment

The school shall designate an area for assessment administration that minimizes distractions and disruptions for students (e.g., classroom, computer lab, or library). A “Do Not Disturb” sign should be placed on the door to alert that an assessment is taking place. If a student communicates that they are experiencing distractions in the testing environment, steps should be taken to remove distraction if possible.

Instructional materials

All information regarding the content being measured or assessment-taking strategies displayed in the assessment room, in any manner or form, must be removed or covered. Students should not have access to unauthorized notes, textbooks, or other instructional materials. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Content displays/posters
- Word lists
- Writing formulas
- Definitions
- Charts or maps
- Desk tags

Appropriate student seating

Students must be seated so there is enough space between them to minimize opportunities to review each other’s work. Maine DOE does not require that seating charts be created to show where each student was sitting for a particular assessment session.

Prohibited electronic devices

Students are not permitted access to any prohibited electronic devices used for communication, for capturing images of the assessment itself or the room, or for data storage that can be used to compromise the validity or security of the assessment. Prohibited devices include smart phones, smart watches, cell phones, book readers, electronic tablets, pagers, cameras, non-approved calculators, music players (including listening to music), or voice recorders.

Security of Assessment Materials

The District Assessment Coordinator (DAC) should work with School Assessment Coordinators (SAC) to ensure proper and secure handling of materials before, during and following the assessment administration. a. Specifically, school personnel **must** follow these assessment security practices:

- Printed secure assessment materials must be kept in a locked storage area that is only accessible to the SAC and designees. Materials should be locked before and after administration.
- Secure items include, but are not limited to assessment booklets (such as a Braille or paper form as necessitated by the student's IEP), assessment tickets, answer documents, scratch paper, materials used to provide accommodations, and ancillary materials specific to assessments (e.g., Listening & Speaking CD for ACCESS for ELLs).
- Distribute and collect secure assessment materials, including test tickets, to/from students individually at the beginning and end of each session.
- Implement careful inventory procedures to account for secure materials as they are checked in and checked out by designated staff.
- Securely destroy all student test tickets and scratch paper.
- Maintain packing lists, shipping records, and documents used to track the delivery and custody of materials for one year following the administration (if applicable). These will be helpful if a discrepancy arises, or if the receipt of materials cannot be confirmed.

If the security of assessment questions or forms are compromised, the appropriate State Assessment Coordinator identified on the cover of this document must be immediately contacted.

Assessment Administration

At all times during the assessment administration, an Assessment Administrator must be present. The administrator has a critical role in ensuring a successful assessment administration that results in meaningful information about student achievement. Assessment Administrators must be actively monitoring student behavior closely, moving frequently and unobtrusively throughout a room. They should refrain from distractions such as:

- Holding extended conversations with each other
- Reading newspapers or books
- Eating
- Using a computer, cell phone, or other device unless directly required for the assessment
- Tending to other unrelated duties (e.g., grading papers)

Section 2 – Detection of Irregularities

An assessment irregularity is any event, act, or omission which can compromise the integrity of Maine state assessments or the results data. Examples of assessment irregularities can be found in appendices of this handbook.

Reporting Irregularities

Any suspected irregularity related to assessment security must be reported as soon as possible. Many irregularities can be remediated without significant consequences if caught and reported in a timely fashion.

Reporting by Assessment Professionals

In most cases, the staff directly involved in the assessment administration are in the best position to notice an irregularity. The Assessment Administrators must report irregularities to the SAC/building administrator. This is especially important for any irregularities that:

- involve a breach of assessment item security,
- lead to assessment invalidation,
- involve student misbehavior, and
- involve educator misbehavior.

The SAC/building administrator must contact the appropriate Maine DOE assessment coordinator to report irregularities.

Reporting by Others

Occasionally, there will be other parties with concerns about a particular assessment practice. Students might discuss concerns with their parents. Other educators might observe questionable practices. To capture information from all available sources about potential irregularities, the Maine DOE has created an [Anonymous MEA Tip Link](#). This link is posted on the [Maine DOE MECAS homepage](#) and should be communicated to educators and parents along with other assessment information. This is an anonymous tip link, and follow-up conversation will not be possible. Therefore, it is critical that complete information be provided about the concern.

Data Forensics Analysis

During and following the assessment administration, the assessment contractors and/or Maine DOE may conduct multiple statistical analyses on student assessment data. Data forensics analyses help the Maine DOE flag potential irregularities.

Monitoring Social Media

To the extent practical, the Maine DOE, in collaboration with SAUS and assessment contractors, is responsible for monitoring the internet and social media for any disclosure of secure assessment questions or materials. SAU or school staff that encounter secure materials on the internet or hear about students posting such information must immediately report the incident to the appropriate Maine DOE assessment coordinator, as identified on the cover of this document.

Section 3 – Investigation of Irregularities

In investigating irregularities, there are three overarching questions:

- Did the irregularity lead to a breach of assessment item security?
- Did a misadministration affect the validity of any student performance and resulting scores?
- Was the irregularity deliberate; is there evidence of academic fraud?

For more complex irregularities, the Maine DOE assessment coordinator may determine that further investigation is necessary to ensure an appropriate resolution. The Maine DOE assessment coordinator will communicate with the DAC and any other appropriate administrators throughout the investigative process.

The Maine DOE protocol to preserve assessment security is as follows:

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1. If the event involves inappropriate exposure of secure assessment material, the most critical action is that the exposure be immediately contained.
2. The Maine DOE assessment coordinator and the DAC will determine the applicable staff to support with information gathering.
3. If student(s) are allegedly involved, a family member must be notified by the SAU.
4. The Maine DOE assessment coordinator may request the following information from the SAU. This information will be provided utilizing the [Assessment Irregularity Reporting Form](#).
 - Student State IDs (not names) for any students involved
 - Names and roles of involved educators
 - Grade level(s) and session(s) affected
 - Documentation of assessment security training
 - Record of signed Security and Student Data Privacy Agreements
 - Whether in the opinion of the SAU assessment security was violated
 - Scope of any secure assessment material exposure: what material, exposed to whom, for what period of time, and any actions taken
 - Any additional information as requested
5. The Maine DOE Assessment Team will review the documentation within one week of receipt.
6. The Maine DOE Assessment Team will determine whether any student, school, or SAU assessment results must be invalidated and communicate that decision to the DAC/Administrator and the associated assessment contractor. Students whose assessment results are invalidated are identified as non-participants in the state accountability system.
7. The Maine DOE Assessment Team will determine whether there are questions about teacher or administrator conduct.
8. The Maine DOE Assessment Team will submit documentation with recommendations to the Chief of Federal Programs upon completion of review.
9. The Chief of Federal Programs may advise further action: (a) additional information is needed; (b) delay in reporting student, school, or district results; (c) invalidation of student, school, or SAU results; (d) additional review by the Maine DOE for possible certification action.
10. The Maine DOE Assessment Team will communicate with the SAU following the completion of the review. The response will outline the Maine DOE process, documentation, determinations, and any appropriate actions.
11. The Maine DOE Assessment Team will support the SAU as needed to ensure that all appropriate actions are implemented.

Determination

Based on the information collected, the Maine DOE Assessment Team will create a summary and make one or more of the following determinations:

1. No irregularity: The Maine DOE determines that there was no irregularity.
2. Irregularity resolved: The Maine DOE determines that there was an irregularity and that all applicable steps were completed.
3. Breach of assessment security: The Maine DOE determines that there was inappropriate exposure of secure assessment material.
4. Invalid assessment administration: The Maine DOE determines that there was a problematic irregularity in the assessment administration that may be accidental rather than deliberate.
5. Student misconduct: The Maine DOE determines that the assessment irregularity may involve deliberate student misbehavior (e.g., possible cheating attempt).
6. Educator misconduct: The Maine DOE determines that the assessment irregularity may involve deliberate teacher or administrator misbehavior (e.g., possible cheating attempt).



APPENDIX A: Maine Educational Assessment Security and Data Privacy Agreement

As a coordinator or administrator of the Maine Educational Assessments, I agree that:

1. I have participated in the required training for the applicable assessments, including related administration manuals and training materials.
2. I will provide a secure assessment environment and securely handle printed materials.
3. I will report any potential assessment security incidents to the SAC, DAC, and/or Maine DOE assessment coordinator as appropriate.
4. I will comply with the security guidance and understand technical assistance may occur to ensure that assessments are administered in accordance with established policies.
5. I understand that failure to address the above requirements may result in one or more of the following:
 - delay in reporting of student, school, or SAU results,
 - invalidation of student, school, or SAU results, and/or
 - additional review by the Department of Education

Student Data Privacy Agreement

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) is a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. No information may be disclosed during or following the assessment administration about individual students, including student demographics, student assessment settings and responses, and incidents that occur during administration, except to the District Assessment Coordinator as needed. I agree to protect the confidentiality of student information in compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and to only access student information that is related to the scope of my work.

I understand and voluntarily accept and agree to the conditions outlined above in the Assessment Security Agreement and the Student Data Privacy Agreement.

Name (print or type): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX B: Examples of Reportable Irregularities

This list is not comprehensive but constitutes the most common irregularities experienced by Maine SAUs.

Example of Irregularity	Rationale
Incorrect Test Ticket	The student took the assessment with the incorrect test ticket (i.e., logged in as a different student).
Incorrect Grade Level	If a student is assessed using the wrong grade level form, that student has not been provided with the opportunity to show what they know and can do in relation to grade level content. This does not meet federal and state requirements.
Cell phone usage	Students have been instructed specifically to turn off and remove access to prohibited devices including cell phones. A student may have used the cell phone during administration to commit academic fraud or resulting in a breach of assessment security.
Coaching	The coaching and leading of students to an answer/response would be deemed academic fraud.
Emergency Procedures (e.g., Fire alarm, lockdown)	The session would be paused/suspended; student data saved; all students ceasing participation in the assessment at the same time. In the event of an emergency, secure assessment content may be exposed.
Materials/Resources	Students should not have access to unauthorized instructional materials during the assessment.
Misadministration of Accommodations	Misadministration of accommodations impacts the validity and comparability of the student assessment results. This applies to both accommodations included in an IEP/504 Plan/ILAP but not provided during the assessment; as well as to accommodations being misapplied when not part of the IEP/504 Plan/ILAP.