**English 10 Name:**

**Mr. Fisher**

**MCAS English Language Arts (ELA): An Overview**

**1. What does MCAS stand for?** Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

**2. What does that mean?** It doesn’t really matter.

**3. When are the MCAS?** Good news! Instead of one day of MCAS, you guys get three whole days!

Day 1: Tuesday, March 27: ELA Composition Sessions A and B (two tests, 45 minutes each)

Day 2: Wednesday, March 28: ELA Reading Comprehension Sessions 1 and 2 (two tests, 45 minutes each)

Day 3: Thursday, March 29: ELA Reading Comprehension Session 3 (one test, 45 minutes)

**4. What if 45 minutes is not enough time? I’m a slow test taker.** No worries. The 45 minute limit is actually just a suggestion. You have unlimited time.

**5. Why should I care about the MCAS?** If you do not pass the test, you cannot graduate.

**6. But what if I have straight As? I don’t, but what if I did?** It doesn’t matter. You can’t graduate without passing this test.

**7. Are there any other MCAS tests other than the ELA?** Yes, but they are not nearly as cool. They are Mathematics; Science and Technology/Engineering; and maybe, one day, History and Social Science.

**8. What is MCAS 2.0?** Good question! That’s what most of your teachers have been asking now for two years or so. No one knows. That being said, possibly later this year, the 10th graders will get to “test out the test.” So, you have nothing to worry about (provided you pass this year).

**9. What types of questions do they have on this test?** For the MCAS ELA, there are three types of questions:

a) Multiple-choice questions are included on only the ELA Reading Comprehension and require students to select the correct answer from a list of four options. Responses to multiple-choice questions are machine scored. There are 36 Common Questions (1 point each) and 12 Matrix-Sampled Questions.

b) Open-response questions are included on only the ELA Reading Comprehension and require students to generate, rather than recognize, a response. Students should create a one-paragraph response to answer the question asked. Responses to open-response questions are scored using a scoring guide, or rubric, for each question. The scoring guides indicate what knowledge and skills students must demonstrate to earn 1, 2, 3, or 4 score points. Answers to open-response questions are not scored for spelling, punctuation, or grammar. Grade 10 ELA tests are scored by two scorers independently. Those scores are then averaged together. There are 4 Common Questions and 2 Matrix-Sampled Questions.

c) Writing prompts are included only on ELA Composition tests and require students to respond by creating a written composition. The student compositions are scored independently by two scorers for:

* + - Topic development, based on a six-score point scale, with students receiving from 2 to 12 points (the sum of scores from each of the two scorers)
		- Standard English conventions, based on a four-point scale, with students receiving from 2 to 8 points (the sum of the scores from each of the two scorers).

**8. Uhh…Matrix-Sampled Questions? What the hell is that, Neo?**  They’re questions that don’t count. Mr. Fisher will now explain what that means. He’s running out of space here!

**9. Thanks for the explanation, Fisher. You know, you could have made the font smaller if you need more space. Whatever! So, what if I get a zero on the test?** You won’t.

**10. Yeah I will. I’m stupid. I’ll get a zero and show you!** No, you don’t understand. Here is how the test is scored:

* First, add up all the multiple choice questions that you answered correctly (0-36)
* Then, add to this number all the open response (4-16) and writing prompt (2-20) points.
* Together, this is your raw score.
* This score is then “scaled.” Your scaled score falls between 200 and 280.
* Your scaled score is then given a label. The four labels are:
	1. Advanced: Students at this level demonstrate a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of rigorous subject matter, and provide sophisticated solutions to complex problems. (260-280)
	2. Proficient: Students at this level demonstrate a solid understanding of challenging subject matter and solve a wide variety of problems. (240-258)
	3. Needs improvement: Students at this level demonstrate a partial understanding of subject matter and solve some simple problems. (220-238)
	4. Failing: Students at this level demonstrate a minimal understanding of subject matter and do not solve simple problems. (200-218)

**11. Okay. Who grades it?** A computer grades your multiple choice test, and a teacher grades your essays.

**12. Can I pick the teacher?** No. They are hired by the state, and will not be a teacher from this school.

**13. Do you have any tips or strategies that will help me do well on the test?** Yes, I do. First of all, you should know that if you have been doing your work in school, paying attention to MCAS review, and maybe even studying a little on your own, you stand an excellent chance of passing. However, the following strategies can help you a little bit more:

* After you read a passage, there will often be a set of multiple choice questions followed by an open response question. Do the multiple choice questions first! They help you focus on important information in the passage.
* This is not the old SATs. You are not penalized for a wrong answer. Therefore, answer all the multiple choice questions. A skipped question is no different from a wrong answer. Therefore, you might as well take a guess.
* Utilize the Process of Elimination (POE) when answering the multiple choice questions. Cross out the wrong answers, and then take a guess from the ones that remain.
* You should be supplied with a dictionary for the five-paragraph essay. Use it! Sure, it’s one of those old-fashioned, book-type dictionary, not a new-fangled, electro-magno-techno-pocket dictionary that can also figure out your taxes and play "It's Raining Men" over and over, but hey, it’s still a dictionary. The first word you should look up is "woohoo!"

**14. There are so many more questions I have. What types of subjects do the multiple choice questions cover? How do I write an essay for this? Does spelling count? If a tree falls in a forest and no one hears it, will it be made into paper that will eventually be used on this exam? Who killed Kennedy? Where did I put my car keys?** Whoa, hold on there! There is plenty of time to answer these questions any more! This is just an overview. In the upcoming weeks, we will learn the answer to these and other exciting questions!