



April 2, 2014

| MSDE Home | Newsroom | MDReportcard.org | School Improvement |



**A few words
from State
Superintendent
of Schools
Lillian M.
Lowery**

We cannot say enough great things about Dr. Jim Gates, a member of the Maryland State Board of Education and an internationally acclaimed physicist. Fortunately, others say things for us.

The latest is this terrific piece from the *Baltimore Sun* last week. Take a few moments to read the profile, and get to know Jim Gates a little bit better. "UM physics professor a lauded scientist, passionate teacher"

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We are hoping the long winter is over. Local school systems last week began the process of readjusting their calendars, looking for ways to carve out additional instructional time in the aftermath of this year's many snow days.

The State Board last week gave me the authority to waive up to five days from the 180-instructional day calendar. Each request from a local system is reviewed individually and a determination is made on each system's individual circumstances. We are working collaboratively with each system, and will attempt to answer each request quickly and fairly.

In the meantime, let's all think Spring.

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Our efforts to improve Maryland schools through the Race to the Top program are paying off, according to a new U.S. Department of Education report release last month.

Federal colleagues recognized Maryland's success in providing resources and training to educators,

MARYLAND SCHOOLS TAKE PARCC FOR TEST DRIVE

Maryland and 11 other States last week began field-testing the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) assessments. The new, computer-based assessments, covering English language arts/literacy and mathematics in grades 3-8 and at the high school level, are aligned with the new Maryland College and Career-Ready Standards, which were built on the Common Core State Standards.



Students at Anne Arundel County's Marley Elementary try out the PARCC tutorial.

The field test in Maryland is one of the nation's most extensive. Nearly every Maryland elementary, middle and high school is involved, with at least one classroom in each school slated to take part. Approximately

65,000 students in the State will be taking either the math or the English language arts/literacy exam.

The PARCC assessments have been three years in the making. They are replacing the Maryland School Assessments (MSA), which have been in place for the last decade. These new advanced assessments are aligned to new standards, the user experience will be totally different, the scoring is different, and for the first time, Maryland will be able to examine deeper learning, critical-thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills needed for career and college readiness.

Both the English language arts/literacy and mathematics portions of the test are designed to be taken online, although a paper and pencil version

school and school district leaders to support the transition to the State's new standards, assessments and evaluations. The work has set us on a path of preparing world-class students for college or career.

We must continue to support our teachers with the resources they need to be successful in the classroom and support our students by providing them with the skills and knowledge to be successful after graduation—without remediation.

You can find Maryland's full report at this link.

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We announced last week that the Maryland State Department of Education nominated two schools for the U.S. Department of Education's 2014 Green Ribbon Schools (GRS) Award.

This is a terrific competition. State education agencies in 39 states, in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education, are participating in the third year of the GRS award program. Four Maryland schools were honored with the award during the inaugural year of 2012 and two schools and one school district were honored in 2013.

The two schools nominated are: Travilah Elementary School (Montgomery County Public Schools) and North Carroll High School (Carroll County Public Schools). All applications for the award were evaluated by a committee comprised of staff from State and national government agencies, State and regional environmental organizations, and private businesses.

"Environmental education is one of the most effective ways to empower young people to care for and save our planet," said Governor Martin O'Malley. "By making the better choice to invest in forward-thinking environmental education programs, we'll equip our students with the knowledge necessary to become better environmental stewards for our world and fashion a stronger, more sustainable future for generations to come."

These nominees represent the great work taking place in classrooms and schools throughout our State. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan is scheduled to announce the recipients of the GRS awards on Earth Day, April 22. Our fingers are crossed!

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will be available for at least three years. PARCC is working to keep the assessments "device neutral," allowing students to take PARCC on a range of devices including desktops, laptops, netbooks, and tablets.

Next year, PARCC will replace the MSA in reading and mathematics for students in grades 3-8 and the HSA in algebra/data analysis and English 10 for students entering grade 9. The PARCC assessments will measure the content and skills contained in the new standards.

Over time, the computer-based PARCC assessments will yield results more quickly than traditional paper-and-pencil tests, delivering information on student learning that teachers can use to help inform instruction. The PARCC assessments will also be more engaging to students, asking them to solve problems, write essays, and answer questions that resemble the kind of high-quality coursework found in effective classrooms.

The PARCC assessments in English and mathematics are completely new exams, based on new Standards, and scored on a different scale. The results will not be able to be compared with MSA results.

Maryland is a governing state in PARCC and Maryland educators in K-12 and higher education have participated in the test's design and development. Additionally, State educators are playing an important role in providing information about PARCC to their peers and public through the State's Educator Leader Cadre.

MSDE and PARCC are providing a variety of training tools to prepare school personnel for the field test and next year's full implementation of the PARCC assessments. Local Accountability Coordinators (LACs) in every school system have received training from MSDE on administering the field tests and the LACs are, in turn, providing training to local School Test Coordinators.

More information on the PARCC exams is available at <https://www.parcconline.org>

**KINDERGARTEN READINESS
IMPROVES; NEW TEST
COMING**

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Twitter users can connect with us @MdPublicSchools for fast-breaking information.

Calendar

April 2-4 – State of Maryland International Reading Association Council Spring Conference, Hunt Valley

April 7 – 2014 Maryland General Assembly Session Concludes, Annapolis

April 22 – Maryland State Board of Education meeting, Baltimore

**VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS****News From The Board**

March 25, 2014

March Board News includes a flurry of requests to make up snow days, a new Early Childhood Readiness program on the way, a survey on transition to College and Career Readiness Standards, and Board Briefs.

In the News

Maryland and DC Begin Testing New Assessments
Washington Post

Snow and Severe Weather Affect Student Learning
Washington Post

Some Maryland Students Take New Standardized Test
NBC-4

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Children entering kindergarten in Maryland public schools are walking in with better academic, physical, and social skills than ever before, according to a new report released last week by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE).

“Children Entering School Ready to Learn—School Readiness Information for School Year 2013-14,” a report by MSDE’s Division of Early Childhood Development, reveals steady progress across all demographic subgroups. Maryland students entering kindergarten fully prepared for learning stood at 83 percent in 2014. That is an increase of 69 percent over the past 12 years.

“Our nation’s achievement gap doesn’t suddenly materialize in third grade, eighth grade, or high school. It walks through the kindergarten door,” said State Superintendent of Schools Lillian M. Lowery. “The only way to eliminate gaps in achievement among racial and economic subgroups is by providing top quality early childhood education. The data is clear: it really works.”

The Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR), launched in 2001, is used to observe, evaluate, and document what each kindergartener knows and is able to do. That system is giving way next year to the new Ready for Kindergarten (R4K): Maryland’s Early Childhood Comprehensive System, which builds on the success of the MMSR, but sets a new baseline.

The R4K, developed through Maryland’s \$50 million Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Grant in partnership with the Ohio Department of Education, aligns with the new College and Career-Ready Standards. R4K looks at seven domains: social foundations, physical well-being and motor development, language and literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, and the arts. R4K has two components:

- **Early Learning Assessment**, measuring the progress of learning in young children, three to six years old, across the seven domains.
- **Kindergarten Assessment**, administered to all incoming kindergarteners, measuring school readiness in the seven developmental domains.

“R4K expands on Maryland’s leadership in early

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childhood education," said Dr. Rolf Grafwallner, Maryland's Assistant State Superintendent for Early Childhood Development. "The more we understand where children are when they start formal learning, the better prepared we are to provide support and set our youngest students on the path to succeed."

The release of the final MMSR data reveals dramatic improvement in kindergarten readiness over the past 12 years. For example:

- School readiness levels for African American children have increased from 37 percent in 2002 to 80 percent - a 43-percentage point jump.
- The percentage of Hispanic children who are ready for school increased from 39 percent in 2002 to 73 percent this year, even as the student population has increased.
- The readiness of English language learners has also improved. The number of English language learners fully ready for kindergarten stood at 35 percent in 2002. This year it is 72 percent - a 37-percentage point increase.
- The number of special education students considered fully ready for kindergarten improved 26 percentage points since 2002 to 56 percent.

The complete School Readiness report is available at [this link](#).

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