

A Publication from the Maryland State Department of Education

# Maryland Classroom

## A Parent's Guide to the MSA

If your child attends a Maryland public school, you may already be aware that he or she will take a test called the Maryland School Assessment—MSA for short.

But what is the Maryland School Assessment, and how can you help your child prepare for it? What subjects will the test cover, and what do the questions look like? This publication answers these questions and points you toward more MSA information on the Web.

### What is the Maryland School Assessment?

The MSA is a reading and math test given to elementary and middle school students every spring, usually in March. In 2007, the test will be given from March 12 through March 21.

Students in each grade take the test over four days—two days for reading and two days for math—and spend no more than 90 minutes in active testing each day. Testing sessions are broken into shorter time blocks for tests on specific skills.

### Why is the MSA given?

The MSA measures how well children are learning so that parents and educators can be sure every child has the opportunity to succeed. Along with other measures (such as homework, classwork, quizzes, and projects), the MSA provides information about students' academic progress—information that can help teachers and parents better support students' school work.

Also, under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, every state is required to measure reading and math achievement at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Maryland fulfills this requirement with the MSA in elementary and middle school and with the High School Assessments in high school.

### What does the MSA test?

The MSA covers content that your child should be learning in reading and math classes. The content is from Maryland's Voluntary State Curriculum (VSC). All public schools use either the VSC or a curriculum that includes it. You can see the VSC—along with tools and resources that help teachers teach it—on [MdK12.org](http://MdK12.org) (VSC Reading Toolkit and VSC Math Toolkit).

The reading MSA tests three topic areas: general reading processes, informational text comprehension, and literary text comprehension. The math MSA tests five topic areas: algebra/patterns, geometry/measurement, statistics/probability, number concepts/computation, and processes of mathematics.

### Science MSA

In April, students in grades 5 and 8 will “field test” a science MSA in preparation for its full inclusion in the state testing program next year. The science MSA tests skills and processes, earth/space science, life science, chemistry, physics, and environmental science. A little less than half of all tested students will likely take the science MSA online, while the rest will take a traditional paper-and-pencil test.

The No Child Left Behind Act requires that, by the 2007–08 school year, states annually test and report the science achievement of elementary, middle, and high school students. However, the law does not currently require science results to be factored into states' accountability programs.

### What does the MSA look like?

The test includes multiple-choice, short-answer, and (in grades 5–8) long-answer questions. Unfold this publication to see sample MSA test questions.

For more sample questions, go to: [MdK12.org/instruction/curriculum/reading/assessments.html](http://MdK12.org/instruction/curriculum/reading/assessments.html) or [MdK12.org/instruction/curriculum/mathematics/assessments.html](http://MdK12.org/instruction/curriculum/mathematics/assessments.html).



### The Maryland School Assessment

- **Is a reading and math test given statewide to students in grades 3–8.** This year the test will be given from March 12–21.
- **Is required by the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).** While schools and school systems are accountable for making adequate progress each year toward NCLB's student achievement goals, students' scores do not appear on their report cards, nor are they factored into their course grades.
- **Includes multiple-choice, short-answer, and long-answer questions.** Parents can see sample questions at [MdK12.org](http://MdK12.org).
- **Measures how well students have learned the curriculum.** Parents can see Maryland's Voluntary State Curriculum on [MdK12.org/instruction/](http://MdK12.org/instruction/).
- **Produces scores for students, schools, districts, and the state.** Parents will receive their child's score report in June. School, school system, and state scores are posted on [www.MdReportCard.org](http://www.MdReportCard.org).

### What if my child is absent during testing?

Students absent during regular testing must take the MSA on one of the scheduled make-up days. This year, the make-up days are March 22–27.

### How is the MSA scored?

The MSA's multiple-choice questions are scored by machine; the short- and long-answer questions are scored by at least two trained scorers. The highest possible score on each MSA is 650; the lowest possible score is 240.

MSA scores are reported in terms of basic, proficient, and advanced performance. **Basic** indicates that a student is not passing standards and that more work is needed to meet grade-level expectations. **Proficient** indicates that a student is passing standards. Proficient is considered a realistic and rigorous level of achievement. **Advanced** indicates that a student is performing above standards. Advanced is considered a highly challenging and exemplary level of achievement. (In 2003, Maryland teachers, principals, and school system officials set the cut-off scores for each performance level. The cut-off scores vary by subject and grade.)

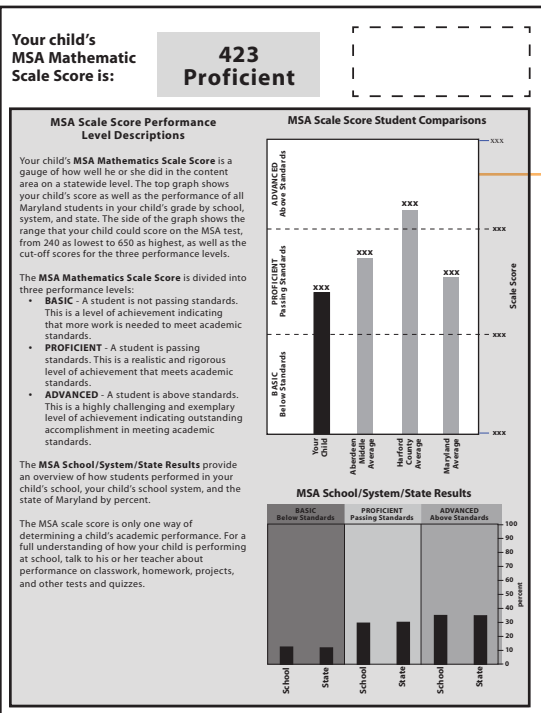
The No Child Left Behind Act requires that all students reach grade-level proficiency in reading/language arts and math by 2013–14, which means that all Maryland students should score at the proficient or advanced level on the MSA in seven years' time. Each year, schools and school systems must make a certain amount of progress toward the 100% proficiency goal to avoid intervention or sanctions.

### When will I see my child's results?

You'll receive your child's scores from your local school system, most likely in June. The score report contains MSA results for your child, your child's school and school system, and the state. See the [back page](#) for a sample math score report.

Look Inside  
to see sample MSA test questions and answers

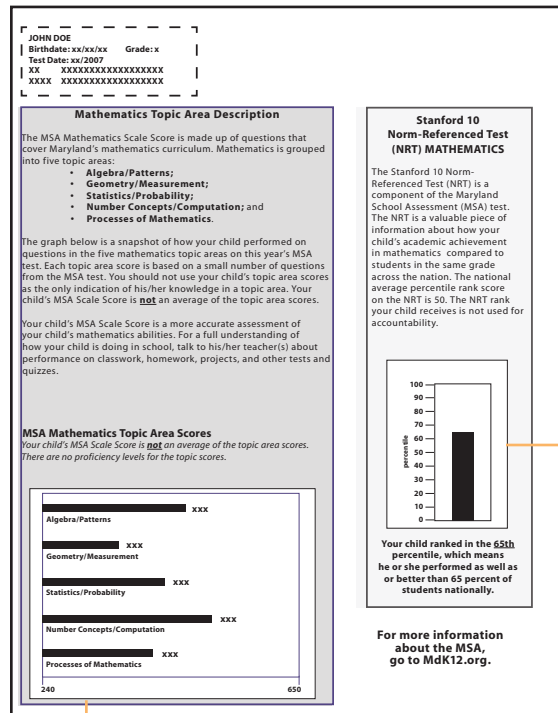
# Sample Score Report: Math MSA



This graph shows the percentage of students in the school, school system, and state scoring at each performance level.

This graph shows your child's scale (numerical) score and where it falls in the range of basic, proficient, and advanced performance. It also shows the average score of students in the school, the school system, and the state.

Maryland uses these scores for state and federal accountability.



This graph shows how your child's performance on a portion of the MSA compares to students nationwide.

Performance is reported as a percentile rank. (A child scoring in the 65th percentile, for instance, performed as well as or better than 65 percent of students nationwide.)

This graph shows how your child performed on various topic areas within the math curriculum.

Because each topic area consists of a very small number of questions, your child's scale score is a better indicator of his or her math performance than topic area scores.

Your child's scale score is NOT an average of the topic area scores.

## Are students with special needs tested?

Yes. Federal law requires that all students—even those with special needs—be included in state tests. And since Maryland is committed to improving achievement for every student, measuring the progress of students with disabilities and those learning English is very important.

### Accommodations

But just as students have a legal right to be included to the fullest extent possible in all statewide tests and to have their test results be a part of Maryland's accountability system, students also have a legal right to instructional and testing accommodations that will help them succeed on those tests. Your child's teacher can explain the accommodations to which your child is entitled. Additional information is available in the *2006–2007 Maryland Accommodations Manual* at [www.MarylandPublicSchools.org/MSDE/testing/](http://www.MarylandPublicSchools.org/MSDE/testing/).

### Mod-MSA

The U.S. Department of Education has given states permission to develop modified tests for a small number of students with disabilities who are able to make progress toward grade-level standards, but not in the same time-frame as other students. The federal government will soon send final test-design requirements to states, which means the Modified MSA (Mod-MSA) could be available by the 2008 test administration. The Mod-MSA will be based on a modified version of Maryland's curriculum.

### Alt-MSA

Students with significant cognitive disabilities who cannot take the MSA, even with accommodations, take the Alternate MSA (Alt-MSA). The Alt-MSA is a portfolio assessment that measures students' progress on indicators and objectives individually selected from the state's reading and math standards. For more information on the Alt-MSA, go to [www.MarylandPublicSchools.org/MSDE/testing/alt\\_msa/](http://www.MarylandPublicSchools.org/MSDE/testing/alt_msa/).

## How can I help prepare my child for the MSA?

There are many ways to encourage your child to achieve. The best preparation takes place throughout the school year.

- Talk with your child's teachers regularly about your child's progress and what you can do to help him or her improve.
- Set high expectations for your child. Make it clear that school should be priority #1.
- Dedicate at least 15 minutes each day to talking with your child and reading with him or her.
- Provide a quiet place for your child to study.
- Help your child with homework.
- Show interest in what your child is doing in school.
- Limit the amount of television your child watches and discuss what he or she sees on TV.
- Monitor the time your child spends playing video games and is on the Internet.
- Encourage your child to eat a balanced breakfast.

## For more information

Visit these Web sites to learn more about the MSA. You can also contact your child's school, or call the Maryland State Department of Education at 1.888.246.0016.

### General MSA Information

[www.MarylandPublicSchools.org/MSDE/testing/msa/](http://www.MarylandPublicSchools.org/MSDE/testing/msa/)  
Basic facts and links to more in-depth information, such as sample test items, sample score reports, and technical reports.

### MSA Content

[MdK12.org/mspp/k\\_8/whattest.html](http://MdK12.org/mspp/k_8/whattest.html)  
Specific curricular skills and content tested by the MSA.

### Sample Test Items

[MdK12.org/mspp/k\\_8/looklike.html](http://MdK12.org/mspp/k_8/looklike.html)  
Sample MSA questions with sample or actual student responses, scoring information, and question-by-question links to the portion of the curriculum tested.

### School, District, and State Scores

[www.MdReportCard.org](http://www.MdReportCard.org)  
School, school system, and state results for the MSA, Alt-MSA, and other Maryland tests, broken down by students' race, gender, and special services received.

### Alt-MSA Information

[www.MarylandPublicSchools.org/MSDE/testing/alt\\_msa/](http://www.MarylandPublicSchools.org/MSDE/testing/alt_msa/)  
Alt-MSA participation guidelines and links to resources like the *2007 Alt-MSA Handbook*.

## Maryland Classroom

A Publication from the Maryland State Department of Education

### Office of Academic Policy

Ronald Peiffer, Deputy State Superintendent  
Nan Mulqueen, Editor-in-Chief

Edward L. Root, President, State Board of Education  
Nancy S. Grasmick, Secretary-Treasurer of the Board  
State Superintendent of Schools  
Martin O'Malley, Governor

The Maryland State Department of Education does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, age, national origin, religion, disability, or sexual orientation in matters affecting employment or in providing access to programs. For inquiries related to departmental policy, contact the Equity Assurance and Compliance Branch, Maryland State Department of Education, 200 W. Baltimore Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21201.

Phone: 410.767.0425 • TTY/TTD: 410.333.6442 • Fax: 410.333.2226

If you have any questions or comments about this publication, please contact Nan Mulqueen, editor, at 410.767.0475.

# Sample MSA Questions

The Maryland School Assessment contains a mix of multiple-choice, short-answer, and long-answer questions. On this poster are examples of the types of questions students can expect on the MSA. More can be found on the Web at [Mdk12.org](http://Mdk12.org).

Reading Grade 5

Public Release Item  
Brief Constructed Response Item for Grade 5

Standard 2.0 Comprehension of Informational Text  
Topic A. Comprehension of Informational Text  
Indicator 4. Determine and analyze important ideas and messages  
Objective c. State and support main ideas and messages  
Assessment limit: The whole text or a portion of the text

Read the story "Air Travel" and answer the following question.  
Explain the contributions that Orville and Wilbur Wright made to air travel. Use information from the selection to support your answer.  
Write your answer on your answer document.

Sample Student Response #1  
*They contributed their lives to airplanes. An adult they tried making planes by attaching a propeller and engine to a glider and made it fly in 1903 they were the first people to fly an airplane flight which lasted for 12 seconds they also built bicycles.*

Score for Sample Student Response #1: Rubric Score 3

Annotation, Using the Rubric: This response demonstrates an understanding of the complexities of the text. The student synthesizes information from the text to identify the Wright brothers' contribution to air travel, "their lives." The student effectively uses text-relevant information to show how this contribution affected air travel: "... making planes... first people to fly an airplane..." (the flight lasted for 12 seconds.)

Math Grade 7

Mathematics Grade 7 Sample Item - Instruction - School Improvement in Maryland

Standards

How do we test what students have learned? (MSA)

Sample Item Selected Response Item for Grade 7

Standard 5.0 Knowledge of Probability  
Topic B. Theoretical Probability  
Indicator 1. Determine the probability of an event comprised of no more than 2 independent events  
Objective a. Express the probability of an event as a fraction, a decimal, or a percent more than 2 decimal places  
Assessment limit: Use a sample space of no more than 35 outcomes and decimals with no more than 2 decimal places

To get dressed, Melanie randomly chooses a blouse from her dresser drawer. Then, she randomly chooses a blue skirt from her closet. Melanie has a  $\frac{2}{3}$  probability of being dressed in a blue blouse and blue skirt.

Which blouses does Melanie have in her dresser drawer, and which skirts in her closet, to result in a probability of  $\frac{2}{3}$ ?

A. Drawer - 2 blue blouses and 1 black blouse  
Closet - 1 red skirt, 1 green skirt, and 1 black skirt  
B. Drawer - 2 blue blouses and 1 red blouse  
Closet - 2 blue skirts and 1 brown skirt  
C. Drawer - 1 blue blouse and 1 green blouse  
Closet - 2 blue skirts and 1 black skirt  
D. Drawer - 1 blue blouse and 1 green blouse  
Closet - 1 black skirt

Correct Answer  
C

Math Grade 4

Mathematics Grade 4 Sample Item - Instruction - School Improvement in Maryland

Standards

How do we test what students have learned? (MSA)

Sample Item Selected Response Item for Grade 4

Standard 3.0 Knowledge of Measurement  
Topic C. Applications in Measurement  
Indicator 1. Apply measurement concepts  
Objective a. Determine perimeter  
Assessment limit: Use polygons with no more than 6 sides given the length of the sides in whole numbers (0 - 100)

The perimeter of the figure below is 80 inches.

What is the length, in inches, of the missing side?

A. 8 inches  
B. 18 inches  
C. 22 inches  
D. 28 inches

Correct Answer  
B

Reading Grade 8

Reading Grade 8 Public Release Item - Instruction - School Improvement in Maryland

Standards

How do we test what students have learned? (MSA)

Public Release Item Brief Constructed Response Item for Grade 8

Standard 3.0 Comprehension of Literary Text  
Topic A. Comprehension of Literary Text  
Indicator 6. Analyze and interpret important ideas and messages in literary texts  
Objective a. Analyze main ideas and universal themes  
Assessment limits:  
• Literal versus interpretive meanings of a text or a portion of text  
• Experiences, emotions, issues, and ideas in a text that give rise to universal themes

Read the story "Arachne" and "Damon and Pythias" and answer the following question.  
Choose one sentence from either "Arachne" or "Damon and Pythias" that best expresses the author's message. Explain how the sentence you chose best expresses that message. Support your choice with details from the myth.

Write your answer on your answer document.

Sample Student Response #1  
*The sentence that best expresses the author's message in "Arachne" is "... but how vain and foolish it is to contend with the immortal gods, from whom comes all skill!" This sentence expressed the message that it is foolish to compete with these more powerful and skillful than you just for pride. Arachne was so conceited and arrogant that it clouded her thinking and she was punished.*

Score for Sample Student Response #1: Rubric Score 3

Annotation, Using the Rubric: The response demonstrates an understanding of the complexities of the text. The student identifies a sentence from "Arachne": "... but how vain and foolish it is to contend with the immortal gods, from whom comes all skill!" The student interprets the author's message to mean, "... it is foolish to compete with those more powerful and skillful than you just for pride." The student clarifies this message through the effective use of text-relevant information: "Arachne was so conceited and arrogant that it clouded her thinking and she was punished."

Math Grade 3

Mathematics Grade 3 Sample Item - Instruction - School Improvement in Maryland

Standards

How do we test what students have learned? (MSA)

Sample Item Selected Response Item for Grade 3

Standard 5.0 Knowledge of Probability  
Topic B. Theoretical Probability  
Indicator 1. Identify the probability of one simple event  
Objective a. Describe the probability of an event using words  
Assessment limit: Use probability terms of more (or most) likely, less (or least) likely, or equally likely

Diane and Charlie are playing a game with a spinner. The spinner is shown below.

What can be said about the spinner?

A. All of the colors are equally likely.  
B. Red is more likely than yellow.  
C. Yellow is more likely than red.  
D. Red is more likely than blue.

Correct Answer  
A

Reading Grade 3

Reading Grade 3 Public Release Item - Instruction - School Improvement in Maryland

Standards

How do we test what students have learned? (MSA)

Public Release Item Brief Constructed Response Item for Grade 3

Standard 3.0 Comprehension of Literary Text  
Topic A. Comprehension of Literary Text  
Indicator 6. Determine important ideas and messages in literary texts  
Objective a. Identify and explain main ideas and universal themes  
Assessment limits:  
• In the text or a portion of the text  
• Literal versus interpretive meanings of a text or a portion of text  
• Message, moral, or lesson learned from the text

Read the story "Saved by a Fly" and answer the following question.  
What lesson could someone learn from this story? Use details from the story to support your answer.  
Write your answer on your answer document.

Sample Student Response #1  
*A lesson you could learn from this story is never give up. For example, when Fly kept on biting and buzzing at the end of the boat, he almost drowned, he didn't give up, he kept on going.*

Score for Sample Student Response #1: Rubric Score 3

Annotation, Using the Rubric: This response demonstrates an understanding of the complexities of the text. The student provides a lesson, "never give up," and uses specific events from the text to illustrate the lesson: "Fly kept on biting and buzzing... he almost drowned... he didn't give up he kept on going."

Math Grade 6

Mathematics Grade 6 Sample Item - Instruction - School Improvement in Maryland

Standards

How do we test what students have learned? (MSA)

Sample Item Selected Response Item for Grade 6

Standard 6.0 Knowledge of Number Relationships and Computation/Arithmetic  
Topic C. Number Computation  
Indicator 1. Analyze number relations and express answers in simplest form  
Objective a. Add and subtract fractions and mixed numbers and express answers in simplest form  
Assessment limit: Use proper fractions and denominators as factors of 60 (0-20)

George is making two cakes using two different recipes. One recipe uses  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cups of flour and the other recipe uses  $1\frac{3}{4}$  cups of flour. What is the total amount of flour, in cups, needed for both recipes?

A.  $2\frac{1}{12}$  cups  
B.  $2\frac{3}{4}$  cups  
C.  $3\frac{1}{12}$  cups  
D.  $3\frac{3}{7}$  cups

Correct Answer  
C