

1.0 Historical Overview

1.1 Overview of the Alternate Assessment

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 1997, as well as The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), mandate that states provide an alternate assessment when implementing statewide accountability systems. To qualify as a “true” alternate assessment, the assessment must be aligned to the State’s content standards, must report student achievement according to established proficiency levels with the same frequency and level of detail as the State’s regular assessment, and must serve the same purpose as the assessment for which it is an alternate (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2003).

The Alternate Maryland School Assessment (ALT-MSA) is an assessment designed for students with disabilities who are unable to participate in the regular Maryland School Assessment, even when accommodations are provided. The ALT-MSA is a way for all students with disabilities to take part in and benefit from a structured assessment system.

Background

Since 1995, students with disabilities who could not participate in the general education assessment participated in the Independence Mastery Assessment Program (IMAP). IMAP

- served as the alternate assessment for the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program, MSPAP, and was intended as a program evaluation;
- assessed students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 11; and
- assessed program performance by assessing students in personal management, as well as community, recreation/leisure, career/vocational, and communication/ decision making/interpersonal skills.

New federal mandates in the revised Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as NCLB 2001, prompted a revision of the general education assessment (MSPAP) as well as the IMAP by requiring that

- students receive an individual score in reading and mathematics and, by 2007, science; and
- students be assessed in grades 3-8 and a high school grade.

As a result of these new mandates both the general education assessment (MSPAP) and the IMAP were revised. The revised version of the MSPAP, the Maryland School Assessment (MSA), is administered to students in Grades 3-8 and 10 and tests students’ attainment of grade-level objectives in reading and mathematics. The revised version of the IMAP, the Alternate Maryland School Assessment (ALT-MSA) is administered in grades 3–8 and 10 and assesses attainment of individually selected objectives in reading and mathematics at the student’s instructional level.

Some milestones in the development of Maryland’s alternate assessment program are outlined below.

Chronology of Alternate Assessment Development in Maryland

1994	IMAP domains and indicators were developed.
1994-1995	First administration of the IMAP.
1997	Amendments to the IDEA required all children be included in statewide testing and accountability systems.
2001-2002	IMAP modified to include reading, mathematics, and writing.
Spring 2003	Design and development of the ALT-MSA.
Summer 2003	Standard setting for the reading and mathematics portions of the IMAP.
2003-2004	First administration of the ALT-MSA.
Summer 2004	ALT-MSA standards validation.

The new ALT-MSA differs from the previously administered IMAP in several important ways, as shown in the table below.

Comparing the ALT-MSA and the IMAP

	ALT-MSA 2003-2004	IMAP 2002-2003 Accountability Assessment Items	IMAP 2002-2003 Non- Accountability Assessment Items
Purpose	Intended to assess student attainment of individually selected objectives in mathematics and reading at the student's instructional level to support the requirements of NCLB.	Intended to assess student attainment of individually selected objectives in mathematics and reading at the student's instructional level to support the requirements of NCLB.	Assessed performance in writing, communication/ decision making/ interpersonal, personal management, community, recreation/leisure, career/vocational.
Grades Tested	3-8, 10, and 11*	3, 5, 8, 11	3, 5, 8, 11
Reporting	Student scores included in statewide results for reading and mathematics	Student scores included in statewide results for reading and mathematics	Scores not included in statewide accountability results
Score Use	Accountability, inform instruction, program evaluation	Accountability, inform instruction	Inform instruction

*(Note: In order to transition to a measurement in grade 10 from grade 11 in previous years, ALT-MSA was administered in grades 3-8, 10, and 11 in 2003-2004 only. Results for students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 11 counted toward NCLB Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in that year. For 2004-2005 and beyond, results from grades 3-8 and 10 will be included in AYP and students in grade 11 will no longer be assessed.)

	ALT-MSA 2003-2004	IMAP 2002-2003 Accountability Assessment Items	IMAP 2002-2003 Non Accountability Assessment Items
Assessment Specifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess reading and mathematics objectives based on Maryland content standards. • Test examiner identifies reading and mathematics objectives based on student’s instructional level. • Pre-assessment to determine baseline skills. • Authentic task/setting criteria (2 mastery objectives must be authentic and demonstrated in an authentic setting). • Detailed specifications for the design of assessment tasks (mastery objectives). • Assessment objectives customized to match the abilities of the student, incorporating appropriate prompts and supports to enable student participation. • Review of mastery objectives to ensure adequacy and alignment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessed reading and mathematics objectives based on Maryland content standards. • Test examiner identified reading and mathematics objectives based on student’s instructional level. • For each objective, selected artifacts were collected at baseline, mid year, and end of year to demonstrate student growth. • Some assessment tasks developed locally according to MSDE guidelines and others designed by MSDE for administration statewide. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individualized writing and communication/ decision making/ interpersonal objectives were selected by test examiners. • Students participated in 2 grade-specific performance tasks that assessed personal management, community, recreation/leisure, and career/vocational.
Scoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dichotomous scoring of each task as displaying mastery or non-mastery. • Calculation of mastery percentages in reading and mathematics that reflect the proportion of mastery objectives mastered. • Mastery scores used to assign students to performance levels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A growth score was assigned based on student achievement and use of supports. • Students assigned to performance levels based on their demonstrated growth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing and communication/ decision making/ interpersonal were scored based on growth model. • Performance tasks score based on number of steps in each task the student performed.

Purpose of the Assessment

The ALT-MSA is designed to

- ensure that all students have an opportunity to reap the instructional and informational benefits afforded by an assessment program;
- ensure that all students are included in the statewide accountability system;
- allow for all students to participate in a standards-based curriculum;
- provide a means for charting student performance from year to year relative to the state content standards;
- provide teacher/schools/districts with information to inform instruction and support program evaluation;
- support inferences regarding the extent to which a student has mastered a specific objective; and
- hold schools and districts accountable for improved instruction and student learning.

Participation in the ALT-MSA

Alternate assessments like the ALT-MSA are designed to measure the performance of students with significant cognitive disabilities who are unable to participate in the general education assessment used by districts and states (even with accommodations) as determined by the individual student's IEP team. Participants in the ALT-MSA comprise approximately 1% of the total tested student population. It is mandatory that students with disabilities participate in either the MSA or ALT-MSA. Each student's IEP team decides which assessment is appropriate for an individual student.

Students with disabilities must participate in the MSA if they

- participate in the grade-level general education curriculum with accommodations, supplemental aids and services, or assistive technologies, as determined by the IEP team;
- meet the graduation requirements for a Maryland High School Diploma with accommodations, supplemental aids and services, or assistive technologies, as determined by the IEP team.

Students with disabilities participate in the ALT-MSA if they

- learn extended Maryland Content Standards in reading and mathematics, or the observable, measurable student responses outlined in the Reading and Mathematics access skills;
- participate in a Fundamental Life Skills curriculum that includes instruction in functional academics, personal management, community, recreation/leisure, career/vocational, and communication/decision making/interpersonal skills.

In 2003-2004, eligible students participated in the ALT-MSA in Grades 3-8, 10, and 11. In subsequent years, students will participate in grades 3-8 and 10. To determine the grade level of a student in an un-graded program for the purpose of accountability in the state assessment program, the following MSDE procedure is used:

Grade equals the number of years the student has been in school after kindergarten (including the current year) adjusted by subtracting the number of times he/she was not promoted and/or adding the number of times he/she was accelerated.

The number of students that participated in the current administration of the ALT-MSA is provided in Appendix A, Table 1 by gender, ethnicity, grade, and socioeconomic status.

Organizations and Groups Involved

A number of groups and organizations are involved with the ALT-MSA. Each of the major contributors listed below serves a specific function, and their collaborative efforts contribute significantly to the program's success.

Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE)

The Division of Accountability and Assessment and the Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services of MSDE have the joint responsibility of implementing the requirements in Maryland for statewide testing of students with disabilities. Together they oversee the development of test administration manuals, accountability and interpretive reports, and instructional videotapes, planning, scheduling, implementation, scoring, and reporting of all ALT-MSA activities and supervise MSDE's current contract with Pearson Educational Measurement. In addition, MSDE staff conducts quality-control activities for every aspect of the development and administration of the assessment program and monitors the security provisions of the scoring process.

Pearson Educational Measurement (PEM)

PEM has been the MSDE's primary contractor for the ALT-MSA assessment program since November 2003. Each school year, approximately 5,600 ALT-MSA student tests are administered. PEM distributes test materials to approximately 1,000 schools in Maryland and is responsible for the security of all student materials. In addition, PEM produces ancillary testing materials including test administration manuals, interpretive guides, online ordering and pretest file uploading instructions, packing lists, return shipping materials and instructions, freight bills and pre-identification labels, student and summary reports. PEM also conducts the handscoring of all student assessment tasks for the ALT-MSA and distributes a set of standard reports for various audiences within the state.

PEM collaborates with the MSDE on all facets of the ALT-MSA, including rangefinding, training scorers, daily and cumulative performance scoring reports, and the format of final student and state summary reports. In addition, PEM recruits and hires scoring personnel, trains group leaders, coordinates the shipping and handling of student papers, maintains security, and transmits scoring data to the PEM-Iowa City scoring center.

Because of the diverse nature of the services required, PEM employs a subcontractor to perform some of the tasks that require specialized expertise. Currently PEM's subcontractor in this regard is the Inclusive Large-Scale Standards and Assessment group (ILSSA) at the University of Kentucky.

Inclusive Large-Scale Standards and Assessment group (ILSSA)

ILSSA-group provides technical and content expertise in the design and implementation of alternate assessments. For the ALT-MSA Program, ILSSA develops training materials, conducts studies, reviews mastery objectives, and provides expertise in assessing students with significant cognitive disabilities.

ILSSA has been working in the area of alternate assessment since 1991 when the Commonwealth of Kentucky required all students to be counted in their assessment and accountability system. Since then, ILSSA staff has provided technical and consultative assistance on alternate assessment in some 24 states and other entities. In addition, ILSSA staff has authored a number of technical and research documents related to alternate assessment and published *Alternate Assessments: Measuring Outcomes and Supports* (Kleinert & Kearns, 2001). ILSSA staff members have extensive first hand knowledge in teaching students with disabilities and in assessing those same students.

Advisory Committee

The ALT-MSA advisory committee is comprised of MSDE staff, local school system central office staff, non-public special placement school staff, as well as representatives of institutes of higher education, teachers, parents, and important stakeholder groups. The advisory committee provides invaluable input by representing the teachers and students most influenced by the ALT-MSA. They consult and make recommendations on all aspects of the ALT-MSA test design and administration and annually review the Test Administration and Coordination Manual to ensure that it is clear, concise, and user-friendly.

1.2 Test Design and Blueprint

The ALT-MSA was developed in close collaboration with experts in reading and mathematics content, psychometrics, and portfolio assessment for students receiving special education; consultants with a national perspective; stakeholder advisory committee members; special educators; and parents of students who participate in the ALT-MSA.

Review of the Standards

Before making design recommendations for the ALT-MSA, the MSDE and the Advisory Committee reviewed the existing Maryland Content Standards. Committee members worked in small groups to examine the Maryland reading and mathematics standards that are typically the focus of instruction for students who participate in the ALT-MSA. They also reviewed several examples of extended standards, or access skills, used by other states in their alternate assessments. Access skills represent foundational skills for all learning and were incorporated into ALT-MSA in the context of reading and mathematics content standards and instruction.

Test Design

In consideration of the best design for the ALT-MSA, the Advisory Committee reviewed alternate assessments from a variety of different states to examine the following characteristics: test format (e.g., portfolio, checklist, and performance tasks), assessment components, scoring procedures employed, and perspectives regarding the alignment of

the alternate assessment to a student's IEP. Throughout this process contributors were reminded that their main goal was to develop an assessment instrument aligned with federal mandates and current best practice in instruction and assessment. A general overview of the current design of the ALT-MSA follows:

- The ALT-MSA assesses and reports student mastery of reading and mathematics objectives from the Maryland content standards (or appropriate access skills) that are selected by the student's test examiner team. The test examiner team constructs a portfolio of evidence that demonstrates that the individual student attained the target mastery objectives that were written to align with the selected reading and mathematics or access skills objectives. Scorers review the portfolios to determine if the submitted evidence substantiates that the mastery objectives have been attained.
- A cycle of assessment and instruction is intrinsic to ALT-MSA. Early in the school year the test examiner team conducts a pre-assessment to determine what skills the student currently possesses in reading and mathematics. A student's instructional and assessment program is based on the results of this pre-assessment. If it is determined that the reading and mathematics content standard objectives are not yet able to be attained by the student, the test examiner team conducts a second pre-assessment for access skills. Test examiners determine which (if any) of the observable, measurable student responses outlined in the access skills the student currently possesses.
- Based on (1) the pre-assessment and (2) the content standards, indicators, and objectives specified for ALT-MSA, the team selects the reading and mathematics content standard or access skills objectives that the student can be expected to attain with at least 80% accuracy by the beginning of March of the following year. The objectives selected by the team should include current reading and mathematics objectives in the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Test examiners then collaborate to develop one mastery objective, or assessment task, for each selected objective.
- Students must receive instruction in the selected reading and mathematics content standard or access skills objectives. A student is assessed when the test examiner determines that he or she can demonstrate the skill with at least 80% accuracy. Evidence of mastery is collected by the test examiner when the student has mastered an objective. Evidence of mastery may be collected at any time during the test window, which spans from the beginning of October to the beginning of March. The portfolio is a collection of student work and other documentation that demonstrates that the student has attained the mastery objectives. Thoughtful early planning, organization, and shared ownership of the ALT-MSA among the student's teachers and related service providers results in a portfolio that conveys student learning reflecting an integrated instructional program provided by a collaborative instructional team.

- Since the ALT-MSA is a record of a student’s work, portfolio development involves the student as much as possible. Students work with test examiners to complete the student information letter, chart their learning, and select artifacts that demonstrate mastery.
- Active parent/guardian involvement supports the student in learning the selected reading and mathematics objectives. Students’ opportunities to learn are broadened when parents are full participants in their child’s education. Families provide additional opportunities to practice what is learned in school at home and in community settings. These opportunities increase the likelihood that skills learned in the school community will be generalized to activities in the home and other community settings.

Test Blueprint

Each submitted portfolio must contain the following:

- Table of Contents
- List of test examiners for the student
- Documentation of the student’s IEP goals and objectives and daily schedule
- A signed copy of a parental review form documenting the reading and mathematics content standards or access skills to be assessed with the ALT-MSA
- A signed copy of a parental review form that indicates review of the final ALT-MSA portfolio
- Two Pre-assessment Forms
 - Reading Pre-assessment--Outlines the selected grade-level content standard indicators and objectives included in the reading pre-assessment and whether they have been mastered (M) or are currently included in the student’s instructional program (i.e., in progress IP).
 - Mathematics Pre-assessment--Outlines the selected grade level content standard indicators and objectives included in the mathematics pre-assessment and whether they have been mastered (M) or are currently included in the student’s instructional program (i.e., in progress IP).
- Reading Artifact Entry Form and 12 artifacts
 - Test examiners select at least one indicator and two objectives from each of the content standards or areas listed below for assessment. One artifact is submitted for each objective selected.

1.0 General Reading Processes
▪ Phonemic Awareness or Phonics (select an indicator and two objectives)
▪ Vocabulary (select an indicator and two objectives)
▪ General reading comprehension (select an indicator and two objectives)

- 2.0 Comprehension of Informational Text (select an indicator and two objectives)
- 3.0 Comprehension of Literary Text (select an indicator and two objectives)

- One objective from content standard 2 and one objective from content standard 3 is selected for demonstration in one additional setting other than the classroom. Each of these objectives require the submission of two artifacts: one for each setting.
- Mathematics Artifact Entry Form and 12 artifacts
 - Test examiners select at least one indicator and two objectives from each of the content standards or areas listed below for assessment. One artifact is submitted for each objective selected.

- 1.0 Algebra, Patterns, And/Or Functions
 - Patterns and Functions--Select one indicator and two objectives from Patterns and Functions or Expression, Equations, and Inequalities.
- 2.0 Knowledge of Geometry
 - Plane Geometric Figures or Transformations--Select an indicator and two objectives from Plane Geometric Figures or Transformations.
- 3.0 Knowledge of Measurement
 - Measurement Scales or Measurement--Select an indicator and two objectives from Measurement Scales or Measurement.
- 4.0 Knowledge of Statistics
 - Data Analysis--Select an indicator and two objectives from Data Analysis.
- 6.0 Knowledge of Number Relationships or Computation
 - Select an indicator and two objectives from Number/Number and Place Value, Fraction, Money, or Number Computation.
- 7.0 Process of Mathematics
 - Communication
To show student mastery of this indicator, this must be integrated with the other indicators in each of the assessed content standards.

- One objective from content standard 3 and one objective from content standard 6 is selected for demonstration in one additional setting other than the classroom. Each of these objectives require the submission of two artifacts: one for each setting.

If it is determined during pre-assessment that a student will be unable to attain the pre-K-8 reading and mathematics content standards and objectives, an additional pre-assessment is conducted for reading and mathematics access skills objectives. Based on this pre-assessment the test examiner team selects a set of access skills for the ALT-MSA to be assessed in the context of reading and mathematics. Access skills are prerequisite skills

for the content standard indicators and objectives. Therefore, performance on access skills provides insight on progress toward the content standards.

In addition to the components outlined in the first six bullets above, portfolios for students assessed on access skills objectives must contain:

- Reading Access Skills Artifact Entry Form and 12 artifacts
 - Test examiners select five access skills and ten objectives (two from each access skill) from those listed below for assessment in the context of reading.

<p>Access Skill 1: Demonstrate observable responses to a variety of relevant stimuli</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Objective a Keep eyes open for a designated period of time➤ Objective b Demonstrate alertness that is influenced by external events➤ Objective c Respond to kinesthetic, tactile, auditory, and visual stimuli➤ Objective d Demonstrate understanding of cause and effect (e.g., use a switch operated device, use graphics or signs)➤ Objective e Respond to environmental and social stimuli➤ Objective f Reach and grasp object <p>Access Skill 2: Demonstrate understanding that symbols are a representation of concrete objects or experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Objective a Match like objects➤ Objective b Match object to photograph or picture of like object➤ Objective c Match pictures of similar representations of same object➤ Objective d Match object to symbol or sign➤ Objective e Match object or picture to activity <p>Access Skill 3: Respond to basic vocabulary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Objective a Respond to spoken words or manual signs➤ Objective b Respond to symbols (e.g, graphics, symbols of family members/friends) <p>Access Skill 4: Recognize personal identifiers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Objective a Recognize own picture➤ Objective b Recognize pictures, graphics, or symbols of family members, friends, or pets➤ Objective c Recognize pictures, graphics, or symbols of professional personnel and service providers <p>Access Skill 5: Attend to stimulus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Objective a Focus eye gaze in direction of stimuli (speaker, person signing)➤ Objective b Attend to speaker for duration of activity➤ Objective c Listen to a story in a group➤ Objective d Listen to a story with a peer <p>Access Skill 6: Makes choices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Objective a Indicates choice of printed materials (magazine, book, newspaper)➤ Objective b Indicates choice of literature from different media (books on tape, videotape, DVD, computer, storyboards)➤ Objective c Indicates choice of type of literature (poems, finger stories, rap songs, short stories)

- Artifacts demonstrating evidence of use in multiple settings are required for two of the selected reading access skills.
- Mathematics Access Skills Artifact Entry Form and 12 artifacts
 - Test examiners select five access skills and ten objectives (two for each access skill) from those listed below for assessment in the context of mathematics.

<p>Access Skill 1: Demonstrate observable responses to a variety of relevant stimuli</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Objective a Keep eyes open for a designated period of time➤ Objective b Demonstrate alertness that is influenced by external events➤ Objective c Respond to kinesthetic, tactile, auditory, and visual stimuli➤ Objective d Demonstrate understanding of cause and effect (e.g., use a switch operated device, use graphics or signs)➤ Objective e Respond to environmental and social stimuli➤ Objective f Reach and grasp object <p>Access Skill 2: Demonstrate understanding that symbols are a representation of concrete objects or experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Objective a Match like objects➤ Objective b Match object to photograph or picture of like object➤ Objective c Match pictures of similar representations of same object➤ Objective d Match object to symbol or sign➤ Objective e Match object or picture to activity <p>Access Skill 3: Respond to basic vocabulary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Objective a Respond to spoken words or manual signs➤ Objective b Respond to symbols (e.g., graphics or symbol systems such as PCS, sign, or picture-exchange system) <p>Access Skill 4: Recognize personal identifiers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Objective a Recognize own picture➤ Objective b Recognize pictures, graphics, or symbols of family members, friends, or pets➤ Objective c Recognize pictures, graphics, or symbols of professional personnel and service providers <p>Access Skill 5: Attend to stimulus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Objective a Focus eye gaze in direction of stimuli (speaker, person signing)➤ Objective b Attend to speaker for duration of activity <p>Access Skill 6: Makes choices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Objective a Indicates choice

- Artifacts demonstrating evidence of use in multiple settings are required for two of the selected mathematics access skills.