



Understanding the Maryland School Assessment (MSA)

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Students in Maryland take the Maryland School Assessments (MSAs) in reading and mathematics in grades 3 – 8. The Maryland School Assessment in Science is given to students in grades 5-8.

For high school students, the Maryland High School Assessments (HSAs) are given in English, Biology and Algebra/data analysis; passing these assessments is a part of graduation requirements.

These assessments were developed by the Maryland Department of Education to test that students are meeting levels of proficiency with the content laid out by the State Curriculum. These tests are also used to measure the progress of Maryland schools on a whole. All students in the state are required to take the MSA; students with disabilities will receive appropriate accommodations. These tests show what students know and can do, and sets a standard for instruction of Maryland students.

Format of the Maryland School Assessment

The Maryland School Assessment in English and Mathematics for students in grades 3-8 requires students to answer questions in a multiple-choice and constructed-response format. The MSA in English covers grade-level content in the areas of reading comprehension, composition, language usage and the ability to evaluate/interpret texts. The MSA in Mathematics tests students on grade-level material covering numbers/number relationships, algebra, geometry, measurement, and statistics/probability.

The Science Assessment for students in grades 5-8 use multiple-choice and constructed-response formats as well. The Science Assessments ask grade-level appropriate questions in the areas of scientific skills/processes and scientific concepts.

For the High School Assessments, a similar structure of information is looked for. The HSA in English covers reading comprehension, interpretation and evaluation and writing composition and language usage. The HSA in Biology covers scientific processes, structure/function of biological molecules/organisms, inheritance/evolutionary change and interdependence of organisms. The HSA in Mathematics covers patterns, real-world applications, data analysis (statistics, probability). The High School Assessments are multiple-choice exams.

Taking the Maryland School Assessment

The Maryland School Assessment (MSA) for grades 3-8 is given over four days; two days for reading and two for mathematics. The tests are administered in March; however consult with your district for actual test dates. Students take the test for 90 minutes each of the four days.

The High School Assessments are given in October and January, though districts should be consulted for actual test dates. The tests are each about an hour in length. Students who do not pass the HSA are able to retake the test.

The scores on the MSA for grades 3-8 determine whether students are performing at one of the following levels: Basic, Proficient, or Advanced. These scores are designed to measure the level of proficiency of what students should know and be able to do at their grade-level. Scores are used in a variety of ways, one of which is determining areas where additional instruction or instructional support is necessary.

High school students need to score a minimum of 396 on the English, 412 on the Mathematics and 400 on Biology. If students are unable to pass one of these assessments, there is a combined score approach requiring 1208 points. Schools have developed intervention strategies for students in danger of not passing the HSAs.

Get Your Child Ready for the MSA

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