

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, math, and science test given to elementary and middle school students every spring. The reading and math tests are taken by students in grades 3–8, while the science test is taken by 5th- and 8th-graders only.

Students in each grade take each test over two days—that is, two days for reading, two for math, and two for science. The amount of time students spend in testing varies by subject and grade, but all testing sessions are broken into shorter time blocks for tests of specific skills.

When is the MSA given?

The reading and math tests are usually administered in March. However, in 2008, the tests will be given from April 1 through April 10, due to the dates of various religious holidays. The regular March testing schedule will resume in 2009. The science MSA will be given April 23 through May 13. *Your child's school system will choose the exact testing dates within these testing windows.*

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 (NCLB), every state must measure reading, math, and science 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 (English 2, algebra/data analysis, and biology) in high school. *While NCLB requires that reading and math results be factored into states' accountability programs, no such requirement currently exists for science.*

What does the MSA test?

The MSA covers content that your child should be learning in reading, math, and science 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.

The reading MSA tests three topic areas: general reading processes, informational text comprehension, and literary text comprehension. The math MSA tests algebra/patterns, geometry/measurement, statistics/probability, number concepts/computation, and processes of mathematics. The science MSA tests skills and processes, earth/space science, life science, chemistry, physics, and environmental science.

What does the MSA look like?

The tests include multiple-choice and written-response questions. Unfold this publication to see sample MSA test questions. For more sample questions, go to MdK12.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 for the reading and math MSAs are April 11–16. Schools will schedule make-up days for science within the April 23–May 13 testing window.



The Maryland School Assessment...

- **Is a reading and math test given statewide to students in grades 3–8 and a science test given to students in grades 5 and 8.** This year, the reading and math tests will be given April 1–10. The science test will be given April 23–May 13.
- **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.
- **Measures how well students have learned the curriculum.** Parents can see Maryland's Voluntary State Curriculum on MdK12.org.
- **Produces scores for students, schools, districts, and the state.** Parents will receive their child's reading and math score reports in the summer, and the science report in September. All school, school system, and state scores are posted on www.MdReportCard.org.

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, based on criteria set by Maryland educators.

MSA scores are reported in terms of basic, proficient, and advanced performance.¹ **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.

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 reading and math tests in six 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. (The federal law requires states to annually test and report students' science achievement; however, there is currently no mandate that all students reach science proficiency.)

When will I see my child's results?

You'll receive your child's reading and math scores from your local school system, most likely over the summer. Science scores will be received by the following September. The score reports contain 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.

¹ In 2003, Maryland teachers, principals, and school system officials set performance-level cut-off scores for the reading and math MSAs. Cut-off scores for the science MSA will be set in fall 2007. Cut-off scores vary by subject and grade.

Look Inside
to see sample MSA test questions and answers

SAMPLE MSA

READING, GRADE 3

Reading Grade 3 Public Release Item ~ Instruction ~ School Improvement in Mar...

http://mdk12.org/

Getting Started Latest Headlines

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 text
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 the 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 text to support your answer.
Write your answer on your answer document.

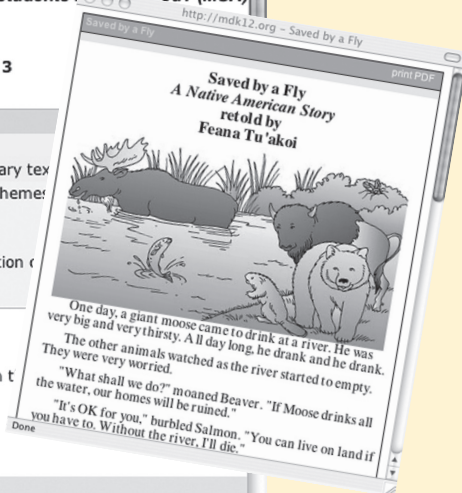
Sample Student Response #1

A lesson you could learn from this story is never give up. For example, when Fly kept on biting and buzzing at Moose and then 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."

Done



MATH, GRADE 3

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

http://www.mdk12.org

Getting Started Latest Headlines

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN MARYLAND

Instruction

Assessments

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

Done

READING, GRADE 8

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

http://www.mdk12.org

Getting Started Latest Headlines

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 text
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 the text

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 with details from the text.
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 expresses the message that it is foolish to compete with those 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."

Done



MATH, GRADE 6

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

http://www.mdk12.org

Getting Started Latest Headlines

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

Correct Answer

C

Done

A QUESTIONS

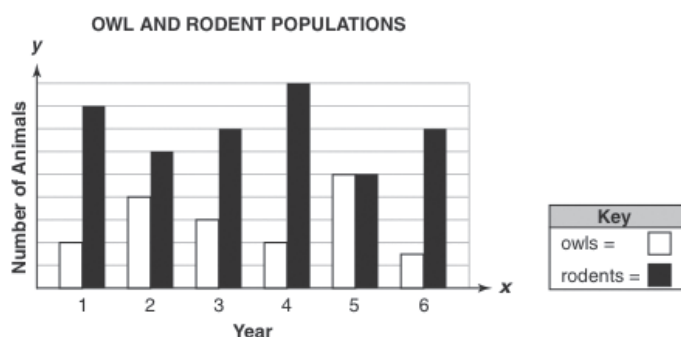
SCIENCE, GRADE 5

Session 1A

Directions

Use the information and graph below to answer Numbers 1 and 2.

Owls hunt mostly rodents. The graph below shows changes in the owl and rodent populations in a woodland area over several years.



- 1 According to this graph, which statement best describes the relationship between the owl and rodent populations?
- A As the owl population increases, the rodent population decreases.
 - B As the owl population increases, the rodent population also increases.
 - C As the rodent population increases, the owl population also increases.
 - D As the rodent population increases, the owl population decreases.

Session 1A

2 Use the graph to describe how the owl and rodent populations interact with one another. In your response be sure to

- explain how the owls in this woodland area interact with each other when the rodent population is very low
- identify the role of the owls and rodents within this woodland food chain

Write your answer in the space provided.

SCIENCE, GRADE 8

Session 1A

Directions

Use the diagram below to answer Numbers 10 and 11.



Ice Cube Melting

- 10 Which model best represents the motion of the water molecules as the ice cube becomes liquid water?
- A no motion → slow motion
 - B slow motion → no motion
 - C slow motion → fast motion
 - D fast motion → slow motion
- 11 What type of energy is transferred as the ice cube changes from a solid to a liquid?
- A chemical
 - B radiant
 - C mechanical
 - D heat

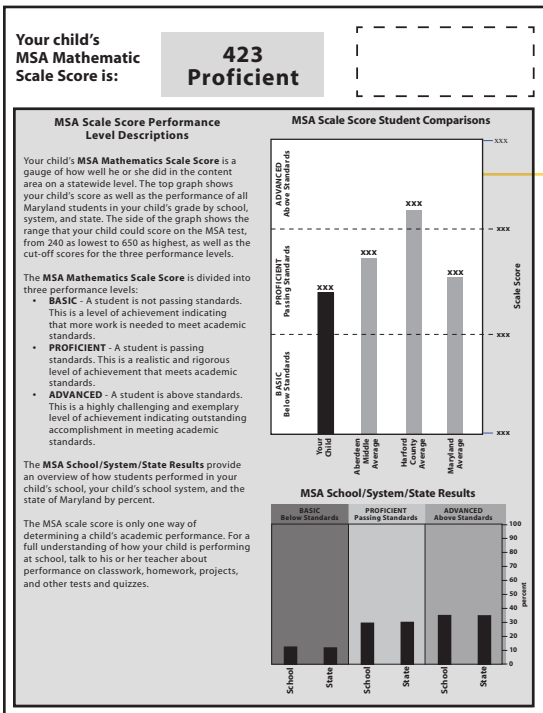


The Maryland School Assessment contains a mix of multiple-choice and written-response questions.

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.**

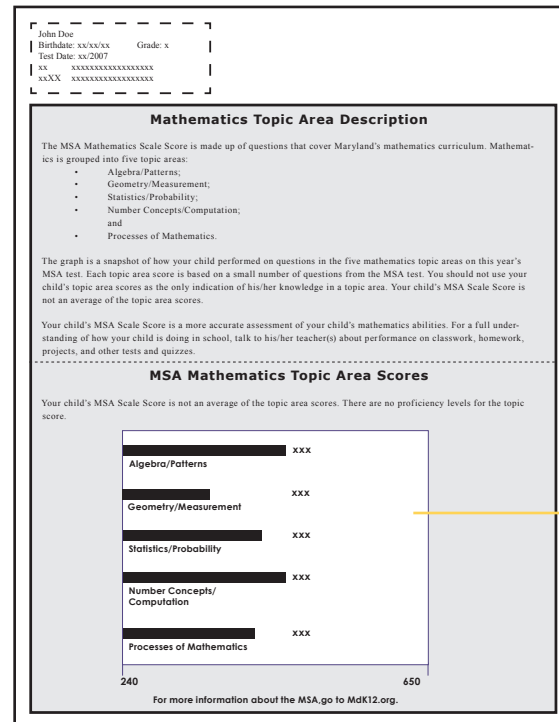
Sample Score Report: Math MSA



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



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 *2007-2008 Maryland Accommodations Manual* at www.MarylandPublicSchools.org/MSDE/testing/.

Mod-MSA

The U.S. Department of Education has given states permission to develop special tests for a small number of students with disabilities who may need the format of the test questions modified in order to meet grade-level standards. The federal government recently sent final test-design requirements to states, which means the Modified MSA (Mod-MSA) could be available by the 2008 or 2009 test administration.

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 curricular standards. For more information on the Alt-MSA, go to 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/
Basic facts and links to more in-depth information, such as sample test items, sample score reports, and technical reports.

MSA Content

MdK12.org
Specific curricular skills and content tested by the MSA.

Sample Test Items

MdK12.org
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
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/
Alt-MSA participation guidelines and links to resources like the *2007 Alt-MSA Handbook*.

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