



PARENTS' GUIDE TO ASSESSMENTS IN MARYLAND

In spring 2015, students in Maryland took new assessments aligned to state standards. The new assessments gauge how well students are mastering the standards—and ultimately how ready they are for the next grade and for college and careers after graduation. This document highlights the end-of-year summative assessments for English language arts (ELA) and mathematics, which were developed by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC).

WHY NEW ASSESSMENTS?

Teachers and principals talk a lot about assessments, which are used to measure students' academic achievement. This document highlights the end-of-year summative assessments, which judge (1) student progress toward mastering state standards, and (2) program and school effectiveness. For other assessments used, see box at right.

The new state tests reflect the higher academic standards adopted by Maryland. They focus on the critical-thinking, problem-solving, and reasoning skills students need to be successful in today's world. The tests will not only evaluate student progress toward college and career readiness, but also show teachers and families where a student needs help or is excelling, so they are able to personalize instruction and meet individual student needs. These tests provide important information to help us ensure all students, regardless of income or family background, have access to a world-class education that will prepare them for success in the next grade and beyond.

The new state assessments replaced the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) and the Maryland High School Assessment (HSA) in reading, writing and math in the 2014-15 school year.

Types of assessments

Classroom-based: Individual tests given by teachers as needed throughout the year to assess knowledge and skills in specific areas

Interim: The same test repeated at set intervals to measure student growth over time

Summative: End-of-year assessments administered by the state to measure student performance against a common set of standards

This document addresses summative assessments.

THIS GUIDE INCLUDES:

- Overview of new assessments, which measure student proficiency against more rigorous standards
- Overview of accountability for students, teachers and schools
- Additional resources for parents



WHO HELPED CREATE THE TEST?

Hundreds of classroom teachers, higher-education faculty, subject experts and school administrators from participating states have dedicated thousands of hours to the development of the tests, and will continue to be involved at every step. More than 30 educators and other experts, including parents and community members, reviewed each test question. Higher-education professors and instructors have also collaborated with classroom teachers since the beginning to ensure the assessments track student progress toward college and career readiness.

What is different about the new assessments?

English language arts assessments demonstrate:

- Whether students can read and comprehend texts of varying complexities
- How well students can integrate information across sources to make a persuasive argument
- The degree to which students can use context to determine the meaning of academic vocabulary

Math assessments demonstrate:

- Whether students understand and can use important math ideas, including number sense, algebraic thinking, geometry, and analyzing data
- The extent to which students can use math facts and reasoning skills to solve real-world problems
- How well students can make math arguments

Benefits of New Assessments:

- Computer-based assessments will replace pencil and paper tests (exceptions will be made for schools that do not yet have the technology). Computer-based assessments are more efficient, innovative, and engaging—and they enable teachers and parents to better monitor student progress at multiple points.
- The assessments allow students to show their work and explain their reasoning so teachers can better understand what they know, and where there are gaps in learning that need to be addressed.
- Rather than focusing on what a child has memorized through multiple-choice questions, the new assessment asks students to apply skills like thinking, reasoning and justifying answers—showing what they know and what they can do.
- The tests do not lend themselves to “teaching to the test.” Since they focus on applying skills, it is the daily practice of these skills in the classroom that will serve as the best preparation for the tests.
- The new assessments are designed to provide accurate measures of achievement and growth for students with disabilities and English language learners—allowing these students to perform to their potential. Accommodations are available with the goal of making the assessments more accessible, and to produce results that are valid for these students. For students with disabilities, the online assessments will address visual, auditory and physical access barriers. These students will be able to take a test individualized to meet their needs at the same time as other students in their class. Tools have also been developed to help English language learners demonstrate their knowledge in the various content areas (e.g., math, science and social science), regardless of their level of proficiency in English.

College and career readiness defined:

The level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit-bearing course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree, or in a high-quality certificate program that enables students to enter a career pathway with potential future advancement.

Sample Questions

The following questions are representative of those found on the new assessments. For more examples, visit parcconline.org/assessments/practice-tests.

SAMPLE QUESTION FOR FOURTH-GRADE MATH STUDENTS

Three classes at Lakeview School are going on a field trip. The table shows the number of people in each class, including the teacher.

They can choose to use buses, vans, and cars.



Buses have 20 seats



Vans have 16 seats



Cars have 5 seats

	Total number of people
Mrs. Ruiz's Class	23
Mr. Yang's Class	25
Mrs. Evans' Class	24

Which three combinations can be used to take all three classes on a field trip?

- 1 bus and 4 vans 1 bus and 8 cars
 3 vans and 11 cars 2 buses and 3 vans and 4 cars
 1 bus and 1 van and 6 cars

Submit Answer

SAMPLE QUESTION FOR SIXTH-GRADE ENGLISH STUDENTS

Students are asked to read a passage from the fictional text "Julie of the Wolves" by Jean C. George and answer the following:

SAMPLE ITEM

In the passage, the author developed a strong character named Miyax. Think about Miyax and the details the author used to create the character. The passage ends with Miyax waiting for the black wolf to look at her.

Write an original story to continue where the passage ended. In your story, be sure to use what you have learned about the character Miyax as you tell what happens to her next.

Answer:

SAMPLE QUESTION FOR TENTH-GRADE ENGLISH STUDENTS

SAMPLE ITEM

Use what you have learned from reading "Daedalus and Icarus" by Ovid and "To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Triumph" by Anne Sexton to write an essay that provides an analysis of how Sexton transforms Daedalus and Icarus.

As a starting point, you may want to consider what is emphasized, absent, or different in the two texts, but feel free to develop your own focus for analysis.

Develop your essay by providing textual evidence from both texts. Be sure to follow the conventions of standard English.

Answer:

What Parents Can Expect

The PARCC assessments are designed to measure the new, more rigorous expectations of the state standards. Because the tests measure complex skills, which are different from the skills measured by previous state tests, scores on the PARCC test will look lower. But students aren't doing worse—it's just that the bar is higher.

As students and teachers gain the skills and knowledge needed to meet the new higher standards, performance will also improve. In other states where more rigorous tests have been implemented, students improved their performance after the first year.

SCORE REPORTS

The score report gives you a snapshot of how your child is progressing, and shows where he or she excels or needs more support. This information, along with grades, teacher feedback and scores on other tests, will help give a more complete picture of how well your child is performing academically.

The new score reports describing students' results on the new tests will be very different from what we've seen in the past. Scores will be different because the English language arts and math tests are based on a different set of academic standards.

While no single test tells us everything we need to know about how a student is performing in school, these test scores, along with information about students' work in the classroom, give you the information you need to know about how your child is progressing.

Here is what you can expect to learn from the report:

- Your child's overall score in the subject area
- What this overall score means
- Your child's strengths and areas for improvement in certain topics in each subject area
- How well your child performed compared to other students in the school, district, state and other states

Understanding PARCC Assessment Score Card

Overall Student Performance: Your child's overall score (out of a possible 850) and performance level (1-5) gives a quick glimpse of whether he or she is on track with grade-level expectations. Level 1 indicates the greatest need for improvement, and Level 5 indicates the strongest performance.

Performance Levels: The second page of the report provides information on the different performance levels. They describe how well students met grade-level expectations.

Score Graph: The multi-colored graph shows the score ranges for each performance level, and where your child's score falls within that range. This gives you an indication of how close your child is to achieving the next level.

Score Comparisons: Unlike many previous state test score reports, PARCC score reports show how your child is performing compared to students in the same grade at the same school, across the school district, around the state, and across the states administering the PARCC test.

State score reports may differ depending on the type of assessment a state utilizes, and also whether or not it chooses to customize the report. States will report scores in several ways, which can serve different purposes for their stakeholders.



How will schools support students during the transition?

Schools have created a variety of models to assist students who are struggling with the standards. Remediation and summer courses, in-class adjustments based on ongoing in-class assessment results, and pull-out tutoring are just a few support strategies.

How are school districts and schools held accountable?

The Maryland State Department of Education issues public report cards for all Maryland school districts and schools. On these report cards, schools are identified as one of three types:

1. Priority
2. Focus
3. Reward

The report cards are used to inform the public of school performance, and help schools and districts improve and better support students.

How are principals, teachers and students held accountable?

Beginning in the 2016-17 school year, successful completion of the PARCC tests will be required for graduation. Students who fail to meet this requirement will be offered other testing opportunities by grade 12.

Student academic growth, including performance on PARCC, is considered during annual educator evaluations. The scores account for less than half of the final teacher and principal evaluation rating.



Take Action

Parents are their child's best advocates. As a parent and your child's first teacher, you should be informed of the assessment and accountability system that is in place in your child's school. Parents and families must be at the table with school leaders and school districts to ensure that testing is implemented well, and with enough resources to ensure success.

Your child's school and district leaders should include parents and teachers in thoughtful conversations based on trust, collaboration and respect. For additional details about the assessment and accountability system, please call the Maryland State Department of Education: (888) 246-0016. Here are some questions you might want to ask:

- How many assessments will my child take this school year, and where can I access/view the assessment calendar?
- What will happen if my child does not meet proficiency on the new assessments?
- How will the results of tests be used to support my child's learning?
- What can I do, as a parent, to help my child do his or her best?
- How will school evaluations be affected based on results of the new assessments?

Also, be sure to speak with your local school administrators! Ask them to join your PTA to host a parent night in the spring to explain the tests, and in the fall to explain test results.

Below is the list of policies and practices that National PTA supports. Check with the Maryland Department of Education to determine if the state's policies and practices are aligned.

- National PTA believes that valid assessment does not consist of only a single test score, and that at no time should a single test be considered the sole determinant of a student's academic or work future.
- The National PTA supports nationally agreed-upon voluntary standards if they are derived by consensus at the state and local levels. Parents must be involved in this process.
- National PTA believes that assessments provide valuable information to parents, teachers and school leaders about the growth and achievement of their students. Furthermore, having annual data on the performance of students can help inform teaching and learning, as well as identify achievement gaps among groups of students within a school and among school districts. National PTA believes assessments are essential to ensure that all students receive a high-quality education.

Preparing and Supporting Your Child

- Review the testing calendar and work with your child's school to ensure there will be regular and clear communications from the school on the assessments, the results and how they are used.
- Discuss the new tests with your children. Make sure they feel comfortable and understand why they are taking a test.
- Make sure your child has a comfortable place for studying, and is prepared mentally and physically for a test.
- With older children, explain that the new assessments were created to make sure they are on track to succeed after graduation, and to identify any issues early enough to give them more support.
- Explain to your child that the tests will initially be more challenging. Tell your child you have high expectations, and that you and the teachers are there to help every step of the way.
- Review test results with your child and his or her teacher.

Staying informed and involved

- To become familiar with the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards, visit: marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/programs/ccss
- To see samples of new test questions and how the assessments were developed, visit: parconline.org/assessments/practice-tests
- Read all comments written by the teacher. Ask teachers to explain anything that is unclear, and discuss how you can best work together to address areas of improvement for your child.
- Monitor your child's progress and regularly communicate with your child's teachers. If your child needs extra help or wants to learn more about a subject, work with his or her teacher to identify opportunities for tutoring, after-school clubs or other resources.
- Remember that tests are not perfect measures of what a child can do—there are many other factors that might influence a test score. For example, a child can be affected by the way he or she is feeling on test day, or the particular classroom setting.
- Meet with your child's teacher as often as possible to discuss his or her progress. Ask for activities to do at home to help prepare for tests and improve your child's proficiency.

Additional resources

- For more information on assessments in Maryland, visit: marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/testing
- For more information on school and district performance in Maryland, visit: mdreportcard.org
- For information on the PARCC consortium, of which Maryland is a member, visit: parconline.org
- For information on the assessment score reports, and for tips on supporting your child's learning at home, visit: UnderstandtheScore.org
- For specific learning activities and supplemental homework aligned to the PARCC test, parents can use the Be A Learning Hero Skill Builder. Visit: bealearninghero.org/skill-builder