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. The science test is given in April or early May. Your child's school system will choose the exact testing dates within the testing window designated by the State.

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, projects, and other assessments), 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, algebra/data analysis, biology, and government) in high school.

What does the MSA test cover?
The MSA covers content that your child should be learning in reading, math, and science classes. The content is from Maryland's State Curriculum (SC). All public schools use either the SC or a curriculum that includes it. You can see the SC—along with tools and resources that help teachers teach it—on http://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.

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. The Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, which includes the parent, determines the appropriate accommodation for your child. Additional information is available in the Maryland Accommodations Manual at www.MarylandPublicSchools.org/MSDE/testing/.

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/.
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. Your child’s teacher will be able to provide the testing make-up dates for each tested content area.

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. Short and long answer questions for science are scored by one trained scorer plus computerized scoring.

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 and is considered a realistic and rigorous level of achievement. Advanced indicates that a student is performing above standards and is considered a highly challenging and exemplary level of achievement.

Each year, schools and school systems must make a certain amount of progress toward their proficiency goals.

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
http://mdk12.org/
Specific curricular skills and content tested by the MSA.

Sample Test Items
http://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
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 Alt-MSA Handbook.

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