
Section 3: Maryland Assessment Summary

Overview

Maryland currently operates the following State testing programs:

- Maryland School Assessment in Reading and Mathematics (MSA).
- Maryland School Assessment in Science (MSA Science).
- Alternate Maryland School Assessment (Alt-MSA) in Reading, Mathematics and Science for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.
- High School Assessments (HSA) in Algebra/Data Analysis, Biology, English and Government.
- The Modified High School Assessments based on End-of-Course Academic Content Standards and Modified Academic Achievement Standards (Mod-HSAs) for students with disabilities who meet specific eligibility criteria and who are identified by their IEP Teams as takers of the Mod-HSA. The Mod-HSAs consist of modified assessments in Algebra/Data Analysis (Mod-Algebra/Data Analysis), Biology (Mod-Biology), English (Mod-English) and Government (Mod-Government).
- The State-approved English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA) for English learners: Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners (*ACCESS for ELLs*®).

The following pages provide brief summaries of Maryland's State testing programs and outline specific policies with regard to the accommodating, exempting, and excusing of students who participate in the programs.

MSA

Maryland School Assessment in Reading and Mathematics

The Maryland School Assessment Program in reading and mathematics (MSA) measures higher order thinking processes in (1) Reading (grades 3 through 8) and (2) Mathematics (grades 3 through 8). The MSA is a tool for school improvement and an overall measure of students' knowledge accumulated over several years of schooling. The MSA provides student, school, school system, and State results and assesses students' performance against State standards in reading and mathematics. The MSA tests are typically administered in March of each year.

Maryland School Assessment in Science

The Maryland School Assessment Program in Science (MSA Science) measures higher order thinking processes in science in grades 5 and 8. Science achievement at the high school level is measured by the end-of-course assessment in Biology (also a part of the High School Assessment Program [HSA]; see page 3-9). The MSA Science is a tool for school improvement and an overall measure of students' knowledge accumulated over several years of schooling. The MSA Science test provides student, school, school system, and State results and assesses the student's performance against State science standards. The grade 5 assessment measures content covered in grades 4 and 5, and the grade 8 assessment measures content covered in grades 6, 7, and 8. The MSA Science test is administered in April/May of each year. Students in grades 5 and 8 take the assessment either online or on a paper and pencil test form. The MSA Science tests and the end-of-course test in Biology are part of Maryland's Education Accountability Program as required by NCLB, but these tests are not included as measures of Maryland's Accountability Program, in accordance with NCLB requirements.

Alt-MSA

Alternate Maryland School Assessment

The Alternate Maryland School Assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards (Alt-MSA) is the assessment in which students with the most significant cognitive disabilities participate instead of the MSA. Such students participate in the Alt-MSA if, through the IEP process, it has been determined that they meet the specific participation criteria on the following page. The Alt-MSA assesses and reports student attainment of individually selected indicators and objectives from the reading, mathematics, and science State content standards. A portfolio for the Alt-MSA is constructed of artifacts (such as student work samples) that document individual student mastery of the assessed reading, mathematics, and science objectives. Students participate in the Alt-MSA in grades 3 through 8, and grade 10. The term “Alternate Academic Achievement Standards” has a specific meaning in the content of Maryland’s State Assessment System as approved by the United States Department of Education. “Alternate Academic Achievement Standards” are performance standards which are based on a very limited sample of content that is linked to grade-level content standards. This content, however, may not fully represent grade-level content and may include content which is substantially simplified.

Alt-MSA results are reported in three proficiency levels (Basic, Proficient, and Advanced) as part of the State accountability program. Results from the Alt-MSA for reading and mathematics are aggregated with those from the MSA for accountability purposes and for measurement of Maryland’s Accountability Program. Results from the Science portion of the Alt-MSA are not currently part of Maryland’s Accountability Program under NCLB.

The criteria on the following page MUST be used for identifying students with disabilities for participation in the Alt-MSA in reading, mathematics, and/or science.

Criteria for Identifying Students with Disabilities for Participation in Alt-MSA

As noted previously, students with disabilities in grades 3–8 and 10 must participate in either MSA or Alt-MSA. The decision for which assessment is appropriate for an individual student is made by each student's IEP Team. A student with the most significant cognitive disability will participate in Alt-MSA if he or she meets **each** of the following criteria:

- The student is learning at emerging, readiness, or functional literacy levels Maryland reading, Maryland mathematics and Maryland science content standards objectives.

AND

- The student requires explicit and ongoing instruction in functional skills.

AND

- The student requires extensive and substantial modification (e.g., reduced complexity of objectives and learning materials, and more time to learn) of the general education curriculum. The curriculum differs significantly from that of their non-disabled peers. They learn different objectives, may use different materials, and may participate in different learning activities.

AND

- The student requires intensive instruction and may require extensive supports, including physical prompts, to learn, apply, and transfer or generalize knowledge and skills to multiple settings.

AND

- The student requires extensive support to perform and participate meaningfully and productively in daily activities in school, home, community, and work environments.

AND

- The student cannot participate in the MSA or HSA even with accommodations.

Refer to **Appendix C: Alt-MSA IEP Decision-Making Process Eligibility Tool**.

This is an IEP resource that can be used when identifying students with disabilities for participation in the Alt-MSA. This resource provides criteria descriptors that will assist IEP Teams in better understanding each of the criteria.

Alt-MSA Prompt Types

Students participating in the Alt-MSA may be provided with an appropriate level of prompt (i.e., gesture, verbal, model, physical) in order to demonstrate the mastery objective being assessed. The following prompt types are applicable to the Alt-MSA assessment as outlined in the current Alt-MSA handbook:

- **Gesture Prompt:** this level of prompt requires the teacher to move his/her finger, hand, arm, or make a facial expression that communicates to the student specific information (e.g., teacher taps scanner switch button).
- **Verbal Prompt:** this level of prompt requires the teacher to give a specific verbal direction in addition to the task direction. Given a task direction, the student is unable to perform correctly until another more specific verbal prompt is provided (e.g., after the teacher gives the task direction and latency period, the teacher then says, “push the button to turn on the scanner”).

NOTE: The task direction to the student is not considered a prompt; rather, it is simply the instruction describing what the teacher is asking the student to demonstrate.

- **Model Prompt:** this level of prompt requires the teacher to demonstrate the correct response for the student, and the student imitates the teacher’s model (e.g., the teacher demonstrates how to push the switch and then asks the student to repeat).
- **Partial Physical Prompt:** this level of prompt requires the teacher to touch the student to elicit a response (e.g., teacher touches the student’s hand closest to the scanner switch button).
- **Full Physical Prompt:** this level of prompt requires the teacher to place his/her hand over the student’s hand and move it toward the response (e.g., teacher places hand over student’s hand and places it on the scanner switch button).

Maryland High School Assessment

The Maryland High School Assessments (HSA) are a series of end-of-course tests that extend the expectations of the Maryland School Assessments into high school. The program currently consists of four core examinations: Algebra/Data Analysis, Biology, English and Government. All students taking a core learning goals course in one of these subject areas must take the relevant High School Assessment examination. Students must pass the HSA tests to obtain a high school diploma. See the MSDE web site <http://www.HSAexam.org> for more details on the HSA program. The end-of-course tests in Algebra/Data Analysis, Biology, and English are also part of the State's Education Accountability Program under NCLB. The HSAs for English, Algebra/Data Analysis, Biology and Government are administered in October, January, April (senior administration only), May, and summer each year.

Bridge Plan for Academic Validation

The Bridge Plan for Academic Validation (BPAV) grew out of the work of Task Force on Comparable Testing Methods for the Maryland High School Assessment (HSA) and the Task Force for Review of High School Assessment (HSA) Options. The BPAV is not an assessment; rather it is an academic intervention designed to provide qualifying students with an alternate route to attaining a high school diploma. The BPAV provides a path to graduation that is meaningful, rigorous, and clearly tied to State standards. Participation in the BPAV is available to students as they work toward their high school diploma. To participate, students must: (1) be firmly on the path to completing other graduation requirements; and (2) have been unsuccessful in other attempts to meet the HSA requirement through the current testing system and intervention options. Qualifying students may then take part in the Bridge Plan, which includes the assignment of appropriate components of the student's Academic Validation Project, an opportunity for the student to complete the requirements assigned, and a careful review of the Project based on detailed State guidelines and scoring rubrics. Students requiring accommodations in conjunction with an IEP, 504 Plan, or EL Plan would receive any accommodations normally permitted for instruction while completing the BPAV projects. In addition, if a SWD qualifies to participate in one or more project areas under the BPAV and if the student's IEP addresses goals in those areas, those particular goals on the IEP must be considered when structuring the student's BPAV projects.

Mod-HSA

Modified High School Assessment

The Mod-HSA is an alternate assessment to the HSA for students with disabilities who, based on their IEP process, meet the specific eligibility criteria outlined on the following page. The Mod-HSA assesses and report student attainment in Algebra/Data Analysis (Mod-Algebra/Data Analysis), Biology (Mod-Biology), English (Mod-English) and Government (Mod-Government). The modified tests in Algebra/Data Analysis and English are part of the State's Education Accountability program under NCLB and contribute towards measurement of Maryland's Accountability Program. The modified Biology assessment also meets the requirements of NCLB but is not a part of Maryland's Accountability Program determination.

The criteria on the following page MUST be used for identifying SWD for participation in the Mod-HSA in Algebra/Data Analysis, Biology and English.

Refer to **Appendix B: Mod-HSA IEP Decision-Making Process Eligibility Tool**. This is an IEP resource that can be used when identifying students with disabilities for participation in the Mod-HSA. This resource provides criteria descriptors that will assist IEP Teams in better understanding each of the criteria.

Criteria for Identifying Students with Disabilities for Participation in a Mod-HSA

A student eligible for the Mod-HSA is identified based on his or her individual evaluation information and the instructional and service information on his or her IEP. The student is identified as appropriate for instruction and assessment using modified academic achievement standards aligned with the student's academic Content Standards (the Maryland Core Learning Goals) in one or more of the following content areas: Algebra/Data Analysis, English, Biology and Government. Students pursuing the Mod-HSA are not precluded from completing the requirements for the regular high school diploma. The student would have been identified as meeting each of the following criteria:

- The student is learning based on the State's approved academic Content Standards/Core Learning Goals in the appropriate content area being considered: Algebra/Data Analysis, Biology, and/or English. There must be sufficient objective evidence demonstrating that the student is not likely to achieve course-level proficiency within the school year covered by his/her IEP.

AND

- The student requires and receives Modified Academic Achievement Standards aligned with the Maryland Academic Content Standards/Core Learning Goals in the relevant content area(s) for the student's course level during instruction and assessment. In addition, specific modifications implemented in these instructional and assessment settings may include: less complex test items, fewer and shorter reading passages, shorter or less complex questions, and test items with fewer answer choices.

AND

- The student has had consecutive years of individualized intensive instruction in the relevant content area(s) consistent with his/her IEP, and although progress toward course-level standards was made, he/she is not yet making progress at course level.

AND

- The student demonstrates that he/she cannot attain proficiency on the Algebra/Data Analysis, Biology, English and Government HSA, even with the provision of accommodations based on documented multiple valid and objective measures of the student's progress (or lack of progress). Examples include the end-of-course assessments, other State assessments, district-wide assessments, data gathered from classroom assessments, and other formative assessments that can validate documented academic achievement in response to appropriate instruction. There must be enough time to document the progress (or lack of progress) in response to appropriate instruction.

ELPA

English Language Proficiency Assessment

The English language proficiency assessment (ELPA) is administered to English learners in grades K through 12 upon their entry into the school system (*W-APT*) and annually during a testing window in the second semester (*ACCESS for ELLs*[®]). The assessment measures a student's English language proficiency in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, writing, comprehension, and literacy. ELPA results are reported in six proficiency levels: entering, emerging, developing, expanding, bridging, and reaching.

Assessment results are used by the local school systems to make decisions as to each student's participation in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs. The State uses ELPA results when reporting information related to the English language proficiency targets, referred to in Title III as Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs). AMAO 1 measures ELs' progress in learning English; AMAO 2 measures the number of students who attain English proficiency during the school year.

Some students with disabilities, such as those who participate in the Alt-MSA, may be unable to demonstrate their English language proficiency on the ELPA, even with accommodations. In such cases, the IEP Team and the EL committee must collaborate to jointly determine the student's English language proficiency test participation.

ACCESS for ELLs[®] is an English language proficiency test; as such, it is a tool used to assess the construct of ELs' receptive and productive skills in English. Because it focuses on language rather than content area knowledge and skills, some accommodations that might be appropriate for the classroom or content area tests should not be used with *ACCESS for ELLs*[®] as they will invalidate the construct. In other words, students would be taking a test that is no longer measuring just their English language proficiency, making any interpretation or inferences from the scores invalid. Refer to Appendix P: Maryland State Content Assessment and *ACCESS for ELLs*[®] Accommodations Crosswalk: English Learners with Disabilities ONLY for additional information.

The *Alternate ACCESS for ELLs*[™] is designed for ELs with significant cognitive disabilities. In order to receive the most descriptive information from the test, it is very important that only students who meet all three criteria below and who cannot participate in the *ACCESS for ELLs*[®]—even with the provision of accommodations—shall be considered for the *Alternate ACCESS for ELLs*[™].

Participation criteria:

1. The student has been classified as an EL.
2. The student has a significant cognitive disability and is eligible for special education services under IDEA.
3. The student is in an alternate curriculum aligned with his or her state's academic standards, and is participating in the state's alternate accountability assessment.

The *Alternate ACCESS for ELLs*[™] is available for the 1–2, 3–5, 6–8, and 9–12 grade clusters.

It is not recommended that English Learners who are braille readers participate in the *ACCESS for ELLs*® due to the visual nature of the test. The IEP Team and the EL committee must collaborate to jointly determine the student's English language proficiency.

Students who are deaf and hard of hearing, including those for whom American Sign Language (ASL) is their first language, can generally participate in the reading and writing sections of the test with few or no accommodations necessary. Lip-reading with spoken responses for those students who possess these abilities may be possible for the listening and speaking parts of the test. IEP teams should make such determinations on a case-by-case basis. Translating the listening and speaking prompts into sign language is equivalent to translating into another spoken language, such as Spanish or Arabic, and therefore is prohibited as it changes the construct (i.e., assesses proficiency in a language other than English) and invalidates the test.

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