

A BIG WIN FOR MARYLAND STUDENTS



Maryland's College and Career-Ready Standards

In 2013, Maryland's on-time high school graduation rate was 85%. That same year, more than 80% of students in 4th grade and the majority of those in 8th grade demonstrated proficiency in reading and math on the Maryland School Assessment (MSA). Unfortunately, there was another story to be told. On the 2013 Nation's Report Card (also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP), less than half of all 4th and 8th grade students demonstrated proficiency in those same subjects. This disconnect was evident as students transitioned from high school to college as well. In 2012, 34% of students who enrolled in Maryland public universities had to take a remedial class because they lacked the skills for college-level work.

Maryland's Proficiency Rates on the 2013 Nation's Report Card and MSA

Assessment	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
2013 NAEP	47%	45%	47%	42%
2013 MSA	89%	86%	67%	81%

The state's bar was set too low—although students were passing the state assessments and graduating high school, they were not equipped with the skills they needed to success after graduation. To address this concern, in 2010 the State Board of Education adopted a set of college and career-ready standards in English language arts (ELA) and math to ensure that students were learning the skills most essential for success in college and careers.

Maryland's previous state standards did not provide students with the skills they needed for success after high school. According to a 2010 report by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, both the ELA and math standards did not effectively prioritize the most important skills, and the math standards were among the worst in the nation. On the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's 2007 *Leaders and Laggards* report, the standards received a C in rigor and the state received a C in truth in advertising about student proficiency. This is evident in the table above, which shows the significant discrepancy between student performance on the Nation's Report Card and the MSA.

With the adoption of higher standards, Maryland is one step closer to ensuring that students have the opportunity to reach their full potential. By 2020, 67% of jobs in Maryland will require a postsecondary credential. However, only 45% of adults in the state currently have such a credential, resulting in a 22% skills gap. Higher standards are essential to helping close this gap.



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Better Standards Need Better Assessments

Teachers across Maryland have been hard at work putting these higher academic goals in place. It has been a significant undertaking involving countless hours of professional development, curricula alignment, and learning strategies to engage students more deeply than ever before.

The next phase of this work is to implement an improved assessment that is more meaningful to students, teachers, and parents in determining which skills a student has or has not yet mastered. The state needs a test that can measure the critical thinking and problem solving skills that our students need to succeed—and existing state tests cannot evaluate this level of learning. Improved assessments present an opportunity to move beyond tests that simply measure rote memorization skills to ones that mirror the higher standards and provide teachers with valuable information on how effectively they are teaching and students are learning.

Putting better assessments in place needs to be part of a larger system of accountability that supports student achievement and holds schools accountable for successfully teaching the content outlined in the standards. At the heart of accountability is the need to ensure that all students across Maryland receive a high-quality education. Meaningful tests serve as school-wide academic checkups that can identify struggling students and schools in need of extra support and interventions. In addition, improved assessments can identify high-achieving students who require support to maintain their academic engagement and provide them with the resources necessary to continue to excel.

For the past four years, teams of academics, testing experts, and teachers have been working tirelessly to create two new testing options aligned to these standards: PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of

Readiness for College and Careers) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. These two tests were field tested in spring 2014 in 35 states. In Maryland, 65,000 students participated in the PARCC field test.

The tests aim to do the following:

- Accurately measure student progress toward college and career readiness.
- Assess a wide range of real-world skills, including critical thinking and writing.
- Provide real-time information on student progress to help guide teacher instruction and improve learning.

Maryland has been a governing member of PARCC since 2010. The high-quality PARCC assessments consist of a range of question formats including multiple choice and more complex essay questions that measure higher-level thinking skills. The PARCC tests will be administered in spring 2015 to students in grades 3–8 in English language arts and math and to high school students in English 10 and Algebra/Data Analysis. Results from these assessments will inform teachers and parents as to whether students are on track to graduate ready for college and careers.

During this transition, it is important to advocate for key criteria that will make the state assessments a strong measuring stick of how Maryland students are doing on the path to college and careers at the state and national levels. Leaders continue to be enthusiastic about the PARCC tests because they meet so many of the criteria that make up a high-quality aligned test. As advocates, we need to ensure that our state tests accurately measure college and career readiness and have these characteristics to serve as a useful tool to benefit students.

A High-Quality Assessment:

- Is developed with input from academic and testing experts, as well as teachers.
- Is field tested and reviewed before full implementation.
- Assesses a wide range of real-world skills using a variety of question formats.
- Includes formative or interim assessments that act as academic checkups to ensure students are keeping pace.
- Provides detailed and timely feedback that sends an early warning signal to teachers if students are not on track so interventions can be put in place.
- Is comparable across states.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the difference between standards and curriculum?

- Standards are a set of guidelines for what students are expected to know and be able to do at specific points in their education. Standards provide the foundation for key components of the education system, including curricula, instructional materials, teacher training, and assessments.
- A curriculum is the course of study covering the standards. It is set by local school districts and includes the lesson plans, programs, and textbooks that teachers use to teach the content and skills outlined in the standards.

2. If students are learning with different curricula, how can they take the same test?

- Although teachers use different materials and curricula, students still learn the same skills outlined in the standards. Teachers can be creative in their instruction, designing lessons to best reach their students and establishing a classroom where all students can achieve.

3. Will the new test replace the old state test?

- The PARCC assessments will replace the MSA in ELA and math in grades 3–8 and the high school assessments (HSA) in English 10 and Algebra/Data Analysis.



The Maryland College and Career-Ready Standards:

- Provide consistent learning goals for all students, regardless of where they live.
- Are relevant to the real world.
- Are anchored in college and career readiness.
- Reflect the knowledge and skills most valued by employers and institutions of higher education.
- Are internationally benchmarked against standards from the highest-performing countries.

Better assessments:

- Give an honest, objective report of how our students are doing.
- Ensure all students are held to the same expectations.
- Identify struggling students so they can get the help they need.
- Identify high-achieving students to provide them with the resources necessary to continue to excel.

PARCC:

- A group of states working together to develop high-quality, computer-based assessments that measure college and career readiness in both math and English language arts.

4. Will test scores impact schools and districts?

- School-wide test results will be used as one measure for school accountability. Just as teachers use tests as academic checkups for individual students, they are also checkups for our schools. Districts need to identify schools in need of extra support so that interventions can be put in place to ensure that all students across a district and in the state will receive a high-quality education.

5. How will test scores impact teachers?

- Student learning objectives, which include state test results for teachers of tested courses, are used in the state teacher evaluation model. A student learning objective is a measurable instructional goal established for a specific group of students over a set period of time and can comprise 25%–30% of the total evaluation.

6. What kind of data will be collected? Will it be released?

- Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Maryland is required to collect data on school performance. Aggregate data collected includes student test scores and information such as attendance, support services, and academic growth. *The state will not release any personally identifiable student information.* Only individuals who interact with students on a daily basis, such as teachers and parents, are allowed to see student-specific information.
- Federal law protects the privacy of student information and education records through

the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The only information that will be publicly available will contain aggregate data for schools, districts, and subgroups.

7. How were teachers involved in the test development process?

- Maryland teachers reviewed and provided feedback on PARCC test items. Additionally, some teachers are playing an important role in providing information about PARCC to their fellow educators and the public through the Educator Leader Cadre, a group of teachers who share best practices and are active leaders in state and local implementation.

8. Do students need to be computer literate?

- Students need to be computer literate, but paper and pencil versions will be available during the first three years of testing for schools that do not yet meet the technology requirement or prefer that method.
- Although it may take time to ensure that every school has the hardware necessary and meets the technology requirements, this is a smart investment. Technology is not going away. Ensuring that all students have equal access to technology is critical to preparing students for a 21st century workforce.

9. Where can I go for more information?

- www.parcconline.org
- www.mdk12.org/assessments/parcc/index.html
- www.BusinessForCore.org

