



Maryland School Assessment

Questions & Answers

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Testing & Curriculum

<i>Test Construction and Rollout</i>	1
<i>Alignment and Curriculum</i>	3
<i>LEP</i>	4
<i>Miscellaneous</i>	4

Accountability

<i>Measuring Progress</i>	5
<i>Reporting Results</i>	6
<i>Miscellaneous</i>	7

Professional Development.....	8
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Maryland School Assessment

Questions and Answers

Note: *NCLB* refers to the federal No Child Left Behind Act; *Department* refers to the Maryland State Department of Education.

Testing & Curriculum

Test Construction and Rollout

1. Which companies are developing the tests?

Two vendors have been selected to build and deliver the Maryland School Assessment. CTB/McGraw-Hill will develop the grade 10 reading and grades 3-8 mathematics test. Harcourt Educational Measurement will provide the reading test for grades 3-8. For schools participating in the Reading First program, Harcourt will provide the reading test for grades 1 and 2.

2. What kinds of test items will be used?

The tests will include selected response (multiple-choice) items and constructed-response items. Mathematics tests in grades 6, 7, and 8 will include items requiring a student-produced response. Such items require students to shade in circles on a response grid. The Maryland High School Assessments include test items requiring a student-produced response.

3. When will the Department develop a science test for grades 3, 5, and 8?

The Department expects to begin work on the science portion of the Maryland School Assessment as early as the 2003-2004 school year, and to administer a science field test in spring 2005. Unlike the reading and mathematics tests, there will be no norm-referenced portion of the science test.

4. Will a science test be developed for grades 4, 6, and 7?

No. NCLB requires testing once in each of the elementary (3-5), middle (6-8), and high school (10-12) grade bands. To be consistent with past testing, the Department will administer the science test in grades 3, 5, and 8. The Maryland High School Assessment in biology will fulfill the requirement for a high school science test.

5. What reading level is the 10th-grade reading test?

The test represents the appropriate reading content that will be included in state content standards for reading. The norm-referenced portion is specifically designated as a grade 10 test generated by the vendor. The federal requirements are for the high school reading test to represent content at the appropriate level of rigor for grade 10 or higher. The Department will augment the norm-referenced

portion to create a criterion-referenced portion that will match the standards and ultimately align with the voluntary state curriculum.

6. Why must the Maryland School Assessment be administered in March?

The test must be administered in March 2003 to allow the Department time to analyze, prepare, and report data by late summer 2003. In future years the test also must be administered in March to allow the Department time to analyze, prepare, and report data before the school year ends. It is not possible for the Department to administer the test later than March and still meet the NCLB requirement to report results before the school year ends. NCLB requires progress to be measured annually from the same point. Measuring point to point each year is a fair arrangement. Progress on the Maryland School Assessment will be measured from March to March of each year.

7. If a 10th-grade student is not enrolled in an English course during the spring semester, must he or she still take the reading test? (This is possible in the case of schools following a four-period day schedule.)

Yes. All 10th-grade students must take the reading assessment in accordance with the same rules that apply for participation in the assessments for grades 3 through 8. The new grade 10 reading assessment is designed to assess reading comprehension skills. Please note that the reading assessment will not become one of the High School Assessments.

8. The Maryland High School Assessment in geometry will fulfill the NCLB requirement to test mathematics at the high school level. Must it be administered in grade 10?

NCLB requires that the test cover content of at least 10th -grade rigor in mathematics, though it may be administered to some students at grade levels other than 10. The Department is aware that some students take geometry in middle school, while others may take it as late as grade 12. Before the end of high school, students will have taken the geometry assessment, with the exception of students taking the Independence Mastery Assessment Program (IMAP).

9. Is CTBS still required for grades 2, 4, and 6? Will school systems receive a grant for it?

CTBS will be administered in spring 2003. After that, the state will no longer administer CTBS. Local school systems will receive the CTBS grant for the spring 2003 administration. After that, the grants will be discontinued. In spring 2004 we will begin the Maryland School Assessment in grades 4, 6, and 7. Individual student data will be produced for this and subsequent administrations for both the norm-referenced and criterion-referenced portions of the test.

Alignment and Curriculum

10. Are the Maryland Content Standards aligned with the Maryland School Assessment?

Federal law requires that state tests align with the state content standards. The Department worked very carefully with Achieve, Inc. in summer 2002 to understand how to construct a new test to provide a strong alignment as defined by the U.S. Department of Education. Consequently, the Maryland School Assessment will align with the Maryland Content Standards when it is administered in spring 2003. This means that if schools teach to the standards, their students should be prepared for the 2003 Maryland School Assessment administration.

The new voluntary state curriculum will help schools understand the standards more clearly and will include more specificity with indicators and objectives. We plan to have a working draft of the curriculum to school systems by late spring 2003.

11. What percentage of state standards will be tested each year on the augmented assessment?

Specifically, 100% of the *standards* will be tested each year. However, every *indicator* will not necessarily be tested each year. The voluntary state curriculum will specify the curricular indicators and objectives that contribute directly to measuring content standards, aligned to the Maryland School Assessment and reported as criterion-referenced test scores.

12. Why is the statewide curriculum voluntary?

The state has authority to and does mandate standards but does not have the statutory authority to mandate a curriculum. But a voluntary state curriculum can serve as a model to assist at the district and school levels. The Visionary Panel for Better Schools specifically recommended a state-endorsed curriculum, not a mandated one. In addition, the voluntary state curriculum is voluntary because some local school systems may want to go beyond what is in the state document.

NCLB requires state standards. The voluntary state curriculum will detail those standards and make them useful for teachers, parents, and students. The format of the voluntary state curriculum will specify standards statements, indicators, and objectives. Standards are broad, measurable statements of what students should know and be able to do. Indicators and objectives will provide more specific content knowledge and skills that will be unique at each grade level.

13. Testing companies periodically “re-norm” norm-referenced tests. Will this make it difficult for schools to show progress under NCLB?

No. Only the criterion-referenced portion of the Maryland School Assessment will be used for accountability purposes, such as measuring adequate yearly progress under NCLB. The norm-referenced portion will not be used for accountability purposes. Although the norm- and criterion-referenced portions

share some test items, the criterion-referenced score will not be affected by a re-norming. A re-norming does not affect individual test items, only the way in which student performance on the items is reported. Performance on the criterion-referenced portion of the Maryland School Assessment will be reported consistently in the form of proficiency levels.

LEP

14. What are the guidelines for assessing limited English proficient (LEP) students?

- LEP students will participate in the Maryland School Assessment after having been enrolled in a school system for one academic year, which for LEP students is 180 school days from the date of enrollment.
- If an LEP student withdraws from school and re-enrolls, then a new school year count begins on the date of re-enrollment.
- Implementation of accommodations requires a recommendation from the LEP committee and the signature of the committee chair, parent, and principal.
- Adequate yearly progress for LEP students will be measured by two assessments. The Maryland School Assessment will measure reading and math achievement and the Idea Proficiency Test (IPT) will measure English proficiency.
- State assessment results will continue to be disaggregated by LEP. Results also will be disaggregated for a second category of students—those who have exited LEP services within the past 2 years.
- A federal “three-year limit” requires that LEP students take statewide assessments in the English language after three years—meaning they could take the assessments in a language other than English prior to that time. The intent of this rule is to ease the transition for students *in states that have maintained bilingual programs* for LEP students. Maryland, however, has always maintained English as a Second Language programs, not bilingual programs. *Since the instruction of LEP students in Maryland is in the English language, it is not appropriate to assess these students in languages other than English.*

Miscellaneous

15. It seems the federal government is requiring Maryland to do more than other states in less time. Why is this?

Maryland was one of about 17 states to receive approval for their assessments under the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. In the past, some states received waivers for certain federal requirements, such as providing individual results. The U.S. Department of Education (USDE) gave Maryland full approval for MSPAP, knowing that it did not produce individual

scores. However, to establish consistency among states, NCLB is more restrictive. Hence, there are no waivers for any state, including Maryland. We must build a new test and meet the testing deadline for the 2002-2003 school year.

USDE Secretary Rod Paige and his staff have taken an active part in advising Maryland on the obstacles and questions it has encountered. While the technical aspects of creating a new assessment are daunting, the changes do comport with the Visionary Panel's recommendations and with Maryland's history of education reform.

16. Will there be opportunities for school systems to purchase and administer other assessments from the two vendors?

Both vendors offer an array of products in which school systems may be interested. However, the commercial products will support only the norm-referenced portion of the Maryland School Assessment. While the norm-referenced score will provide valuable information, the "accountability target" for schools is the Maryland Content Standards, which are assessed through the customized criterion-referenced portion of the test, although some test items overlap. The state will use only criterion-referenced scores to calculate Adequate Yearly Progress targets (AYP) and make accountability decisions. The Department simply requests school systems to consider this in the purchasing and use of commercial products.

17. Is the state creating formative assessments?

The Visionary Panel for Better Schools recommended a formative assessment system, and the Department is very interested in the idea. However, the first priority is to design a high-quality assessment that both supports student achievement and complies with the requirements of NCLB. After the Maryland School Assessment is up and running, the Department will study its options for formative assessments.

Accountability

Measuring Progress

18. Is this year's MSPAP the baseline?

While the Department is still investigating the possibility of linking MSPAP to the first Maryland School Assessment administration, it appears that linkage may be technically impossible to make. Consequently, the Department anticipates the 2003 Maryland School Assessment data will serve as the baseline.

19. When will the Department set school, system, and state performance targets?

Beyond the Maryland Content Standards, an additional performance target for schools and districts will be the Adequate Yearly Progress target (AYP). Using baseline data, the Department will set an AYP *for all schools*. Each school will

have the same AYP and be expected to achieve at a minimum the same AYP each year in progress toward the NCLB goal of having all students proficient in reading and math by 2013-2014. Because schools are starting from different points, some schools will reach the NCLB goal sooner than others.

Schools will have an AYP for each subject at each grade tested. Schools will be accountable for meeting the AYP among student subgroups: economically disadvantaged (FARM) students, racial or ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and limited English proficient students. The Department is studying how AYP should be set for Maryland and will have more information over the coming months.

20. On what will proficiency be based?

Student performance likely will be designated *basic*, *proficient*, or *advanced*. This designation will be based on students' performance against the Maryland Content Standards as measured by the criterion-referenced portion of the Maryland School Assessment. There is some overlap between items on the norm-referenced and criterion-referenced portions of the test, but all accountability decisions will be based solely on the criterion-referenced portion, all of which is aligned with the standards.

Reporting Results

21. What is the format of the report?

The Department believes that parents and teachers will want to see the norm-referenced and criterion-referenced scores together in one report, so it is examining ways to do this. The reading and math scores likely will be expressed as one of three proficiency levels (basic, proficient, and advanced). However, each of the tests will include approximately three to five subtest areas. Those results will be reported as "meeting" or "not meeting" the standard. The Department will work with school systems and other stakeholders to understand how to make reports meaningful for parents and others.

22. For NCLB Accountability purposes, how will results on state tests be reported?

a. Subjects for statewide test reporting

Scores will be reported for reading and math. For each subject there will be a criterion-referenced and a norm-referenced score. Only the criterion-referenced score will be used to calculate progress toward the adequate yearly progress target (AYP).

b. Subgroups

AYP goals must be set, achievement data collected and disaggregated, and progress tracked for students by each of these subgroups:

- economically disadvantaged students, defined as those eligible for Free and Reduced-Price Meals (FARM)

- major racial or ethnic groups
- students with disabilities
- English language learners, also known as students with limited English proficiency

c. Will students be counted in multiple subgroups?

Students should be included in all subgroups to which they rightfully belong, e.g., an African American student eligible for free and reduced-price meals and receiving special education services should be counted in the African American, FARM, and special education categories. However, the Department will not break out data within subgroups. For example, the state will not report the performance of all African American students receiving special education services who are eligible for free and reduced-price meals.

Miscellaneous

23. Under NCLB, schools not making satisfactory progress will be required to offer public school choice. Can this requirement be waived?

There is no provision for a waiver regarding school choice. The statute requires that the local school system provide all students enrolled in a school identified for improvement the option to transfer to another public school, served by the local school system, that has not been identified for improvement. In providing students the option to transfer to another public school, the local school system shall give priority to the lowest achieving children from low-income families.

The statute does permit states, at the request of the local school system, to waive, in whole or in part, the requirement to provide supplemental educational services if certain conditions exist.

24. Will the Department address “choice” in its full context?

The Department will continue to share guidance and regulations as they become available. Correspondence dated June 14, July 24, and August 16, 2002 from Secretary Rod Paige was shared with local school system superintendents and Title I coordinators.

25. How does the new test affect home-schooled students or students attending nonpublic schools?

Home-schooled students are not required to take the Maryland School Assessment. However, public schools do place some students in nonpublic facilities, called “LEA 24 Schools,” through special education requirements. These students will be involved in state testing programs. Whether they participate in the Maryland School Assessment or in IMAP (an alternative assessment) depends on their individualized education program (IEP). Students enrolled in LEA 24 Schools will take either the Maryland School Assessment or the Independence Mastery Assessment Program (IMAP) in their LEA 24 School placement.

26. What are the Department's plans for creating an IT framework?

The Department's Office of Information Technology, in partnership with the Maryland local school system Chief Information Officers, will be developing the Maryland IT Framework for Education. The Framework will include: 1) an information model describing the information needed to meet the information requirements of NCLB and the Bridge to Excellence Act, 2) a functional requirements list to describe the technology capabilities suggested by the new legislation, 3) a reference architecture describing the types of, and relationships between, technology systems needed to meet the legislative requirements, including the technology integration needed to efficiently and securely exchange information between local school systems and the Department, and 4) procurement tools to enable rapid implementation of critical new technologies.

The Department has begun the process to define the information and functional requirements and hopes to have the first version of these products available by the end of calendar year 2002. The reference architecture and procurement tools should be available by spring 2003.

27. The Department has stated that it will not identify additional schools for improvement using 2002 MSPAP results. Will it use these results to determine whether previously identified schools must offer supplemental services, which are required in year two of school improvement?

The 2002 MSPAP results will be used to exit schools from school improvement but will not identify additional schools for school improvement for school year 2002-2003. There has been no determination made at this time for identification of schools for school year 2003-2004.

Professional Development

28. What is the method that will be used to track the training for teachers? Will the state develop it?

The Department believes the NCLB requirement to document professional development experiences is encouraging. Such a requirement shows understanding that high-quality professional development is critical to improving student achievement. The Department looks forward to working with local school systems in improving professional development opportunities.

Pending approval from the U. S. Department of Education (USDE), the Department plans to meet NCLB's reporting requirement by developing a data collection and reporting system that features (1) annual surveys of teacher participation in high-quality professional development, (2) reports and planning guidance to districts, and (3) a summary report for USDE. The Department anticipates that it will concentrate on about 7-15 schools in approximately 8 districts during the 2002-2003 school year to set baseline data. The districts and schools selected will be representative of the state.

In 2003-2004, the Department will expand the reporting system to include all districts and schools in Maryland. The deadline for the first annual report on teacher participation in high-quality professional development, including setting targets for increased participation (a requirement in NCLB), is August 22, 2003. Working backward from this deadline, the Department anticipates that surveys will be administered during the first two weeks of May 2003, and that data analysis and reporting to the districts will be completed by mid- to late-July.

29. What is the definition of the training/development that needs to be documented for each teacher?

For reporting purposes, professional development includes traditional activities such as workshops, training and graduate coursework, as well as participation in professional networks, peer coaching, mentoring and study groups. It also includes active participation in school improvement. There is growing consensus among practitioners, researchers and policymakers that high-quality professional learning opportunities (1) extend over a long term, possibly several days or even several months, (2) include appropriate follow-up and opportunities for practice and reflection, (3) derive their content and format from theory, research and best practice in adult learning, child and adolescent learning, and effective instruction and classroom management and (4) focus on improving student mastery of challenging content standards.

The Department is currently undertaking a review of professional development in the state to determine how it is organized and funded and how it aligns with other priorities. As a part of this work, we will develop professional development standards that define high-quality professional development and that will be consistent with the 10 indicators of high-quality professional development included in NCLB.

30. Who needs their training/development documented—all teachers or those who are not certified?

All teachers.

31. Who will develop the template for this documentation?

The Department plans to design and implement a teacher survey to collect the data. It also plans to prepare reports (with data reported at the school, district, and state levels) to provide each district with data on their teachers' participation in high-quality professional development. Local school systems are not required to develop any templates.

32. When will the survey be administered?

The first set of surveys will be administered during the first two weeks of May 2003 at regularly scheduled faculty meetings. The surveys will ask teachers to report on their participation in activities from the time period of July 1, 2002 through May 2003.