Maryland
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Maryland System of Testing Academic Readiness (MSTAR) Transition

MSTAR Transition FAQ

Q: What is the purpose of statewide testing in Maryland?
A: Maryland's statewide assessments measure how students are progressing toward mastery of the state academic standards and provide information that helps families, educators, schools, districts, and the state understand student learning over time. Assessment results are one important measure among many—such as classroom work, grades, teacher input, and local assessments—that help inform instruction, student supports, staffing, and continuous improvement.

Q: Why is Maryland transitioning to a new state assessment?
A: This transition reflects Maryland's continued commitment to providing high-quality assessments that measure student readiness for college, career, and life success while supporting meaningful instructional decision-making. Informed by the recommendations of our Assessment and Accountability Task Force, the new system will place greater emphasis on instructional usefulness.

Q: What is the timeline for the transition to MSTAR?
A: The 2026-2027 school year will mark the first phase of the transition from the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) to MSTAR. The phased-in approach occurs as follows:

- 2026-27: Beginning with the Spring 2027 administration window (March 29–May 28, 2027), Maryland will transition to MSTAR assessments for English Language Arts & Literacy (ELA/L) and Mathematics in grades 3-8.
- 2027-28: The MCAP ELA/L high school assessments, Science assessments, and Social Studies assessments will transition to MSTAR.
- 2028-29: The MCAP high school Mathematics assessments will transition to MSTAR.

Q: What are the benefits of MSTAR for students and families?
A: MSTAR, like the assessments before it, is aligned to grade-level standards and curriculum and is designed to accommodate the diverse learners that Maryland schools serve. The transition to MSTAR provides multiple enhancements to Maryland's test design and reporting, including:

- **Shorter test length and more precise measurement**: MSTAR is approximately 25% shorter than the previous Maryland assessment and can more accurately pinpoint what students know and can do compared to a traditional test of the same length.
- **More tailored testing experience**: MSTAR routes students to groups of questions based on their performance as they move through the test. This

can reduce the frustration students may feel when facing questions well above or below their level and can increase their engagement on the test.
- **New online family portal**: Families will receive free, on-demand, mobile-friendly access to student score reports and sample grade-level questions following the first administration of MSTAR, with historical testing data added over time.

Q: How will students and families be supported through the transition to MSTAR?

A: The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is gathering feedback from educators and families about this transition and developing tools and resources to help families navigate MSTAR, the student score reports, and the family portal. This began with statewide virtual focus groups with teachers and families in Summer 2026 to discuss the move to a new state test and identify challenges and opportunities. Based on their feedback, MSDE is creating materials to support educator and family understanding of MSTAR: what it is, why it is given, and how the results can offer one helpful piece of information about student learning. MSDE will also work with its Advisory Council to hear feedback on the materials and respond to any needs. More focus groups will be held in 2027 to gather additional input.