Maryland Assessment Transition Overview for Families

MCAP
Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program

MSTAR
Maryland System of Testing
Academic Readiness

Back to School 2026

The Purpose of This Resource

- This deck provides slides that can be used to **convey information to families** at the beginning of the 2026-27 school year. The notes section under each slide provides context.

- The purpose is to **help school leaders share information with families** about the transition from MCAP to MSTAR, with a focus on what is changing this school year.

- **Additional tools and resources to support communication with families are being developed** and will be provided ahead of the first administration window for the new MSTAR tests (Grades 3-8 ELA and math).

The Path to MSTAR

Blueprint for Maryland's Future

- Enacted in **2021** to transform public education in Maryland.
- Built upon **5 pillars** of a world-class public education system.
- Ensures all PreK-12 curriculum, standards, and assessments are aligned to Maryland's College and Career-Ready Standards.

Assessment & Accountability Task Force

- Convened by the Maryland State Department of Education in **2024,** led by a group of nearly **30 educators** alongside key state and national experts.
- Examined Maryland's assessment and accountability structures.
- Recommended **faster, more transparent reporting**, **expanded adaptive** testing formats, and increased **instructional usefulness**.

Maryland System of Testing Academic Readiness

- **Phasing in systematically** over a 3-year period starting in the 2026-27 school year.
- Directly **responds to Blueprint goals and Task Force recommendations** and **measures the newest College and Career-Ready Standards**.
- Features a **shorter overall test length,** more **accessible adaptive testing**, and **enhanced reporting** timeline and modernized features (score reports, platforms).

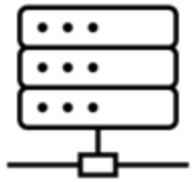
Assessment Changes Timeline

The only change for the 2026-27 school year:

MSTAR given in Grades 3-8 ELA/L and Math, March 29–May 28, 2027

Grades Bands/ Assessments	SY 26-27 (Year 1)	SY 27-28 (Year 2)	SY 28-29 (Year 3+)
Grades 3–8 ELA/L & Math	MSTAR	MSTAR	MSTAR
Grades 5 & 8 Science	MCAP	MSTAR	MSTAR
Grade 8 Social Studies	MCAP	MSTAR	MSTAR
HS ELA/L (Grade 10)	MCAP	MSTAR	MSTAR
HS Science (Life Science)	MCAP	MSTAR	MSTAR
HS Social Studies (Government)	MCAP	MSTAR	MSTAR
HS Math (Alg I & II, Geometry)	MCAP	MCAP	Sunsetting courses and tests, replaced with MSTAR Integrated Math Assessments

MSTAR Enhancements

Shorter Test Length	MSTAR is approximately 25% shorter than the previous Maryland assessments while maintaining full alignment to updated state standards.
 **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, with historical testing data added over time.
Tools & Resources	MSDE will provide tools and resources to help families navigate the MSTAR, the student score reports, and the family portal.

MSDE is Listening to Educators and Families

Summer 2026 Focus Groups

Statewide virtual sessions with educators and families explored the transition to MSTAR and identified challenges and opportunities.

Development of Tools and Resources

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.

Ongoing Feedback and Improvements

MSDE will work with its Advisory Councils to **hear feedback on materials and needed supports** and **respond to identified needs**.

More focus groups will be held in 2027 to gather additional input.