



February 2014

Dear Parents/Guardians,

In the coming weeks, thousands of students will participate in the annual administration of state tests. As you may be aware, we are in a transition year between the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) and new tests being developed by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC).

Beginning in March, most of our students in Grades 3–8 will take the MSA in reading and mathematics, which is being administered for the final time this year. However, a random sample of students in each school will participate in a trial run—called a “field test”—of the new PARCC assessments. Parents of these students will be notified by the school. Field testing is a very important part of developing a meaningful assessment, and the results will be used by the test developers to make changes to the exam before it is fully implemented next school year.

I do not believe it is in the interest of our students or schools for the state of Maryland to administer the MSA this year, and many parents, educators, and local and state leaders feel the same way. The MSA is aligned to our old state standards, which are being phased out as we transition to the internationally benchmarked Common Core State Standards. Many people in Montgomery County, and throughout the state, have expressed their concerns about losing valuable instructional time to administer a test that is not well aligned to current standards and does not provide meaningful information about how our students and schools are truly performing. However, federal law requires the state to administer the MSA and, therefore, we will give this test for the final time. There are no accountability requirements or consequences associated with the test this year.

Please read the enclosed information about this transition year carefully. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to ask your child’s teacher or school principal. Thank you for being involved and engaged in your child’s education.

Sincerely,

Joshua P. Starr, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools



Montgomery County Public Schools
Spring 2014 Maryland State Testing
February 2014

The Maryland School Assessment (MSA) will be given in reading/English language arts and mathematics in Grades 3 through 8 in March 2014.

From March 3 to March 12, 2014, most of our students in Grades 3–8 will take the MSA in reading/English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. Students in Grades 5 and 8 also will take the MSA in science in late March or early April of this year. This is the last year that the MSA in reading/ELA and mathematics will be given. It will be replaced next year by the new Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments in those subject areas.

A small number of students in nearly every school (at least one class in one subject) will take the field test of Maryland’s new PARCC assessments.

Next year, Maryland will implement new statewide assessments that are aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), also known as the Maryland College and Career-Ready Standards. To prepare for these new tests, at least one class in nearly every school will be randomly selected to take the field test of the PARCC assessments in either reading/ELA or mathematics. Your child’s school will notify you if your child’s classroom has been randomly selected to participate in the PARCC field test. The PARCC assessment will be field tested using both online and paper-and-pencil formats. Students who receive special education or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services will be included in this field test. These students will have access to accommodations that adhere to PARCC’s testing policy. If a special education student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) calls for accommodations that are not permissible according to PARCC policy, the parents will be invited to an IEP meeting to discuss the accommodations. For ESOL students, accommodations may include extended time to complete the test, access to a bilingual dictionary and, for the mathematics test only, the assistance of a scribe.

Students who take the PARCC field test in one subject area (either reading/ELA or mathematics) will take the MSA in the other tested area.

All students in Grades 3–8 must be tested every year in reading and mathematics under federal law. For example, children who take the PARCC field test in mathematics are not required by the state to take the MSA in mathematics. However, they will still be required to take the MSA in reading/ELA.

Parents will continue to receive individual student reports on their child’s MSA scores.

You will receive your child’s MSA scores from the district, most likely over the summer. The score reports show each student’s performance on the MSA, as well as overall test results for the school, the local school system, and the state.

Parents will not receive individual scores on their child’s performance on the PARCC field test.

Field tests are not formal tests. Students’ responses will be used to evaluate the quality of the test questions and will not be scored or reported. However, parents will continue to receive reports on the MSA subject(s) their child takes.

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Next year (school year 2014–15), all Maryland students in Grades 3–8 will take the PARCC assessments in reading/ELA and math.

The PARCC assessments are aligned to the CCSS and will measure the essential critical thinking and problem-solving skills that students need to be successful in college and careers. The computer-based tests will provide timely information about what individual students are learning.

Information from the PARCC field test will be used to refine and improve the assessments before they are given to all students next year.

The field test is an opportunity to “test the test”—to see how well the test works, determine the quality of test questions, and make any necessary adjustments before it is given to all students in school year 2014–15. Test-makers will specifically look at whether test questions actually measure the knowledge and skills that they were designed to measure and if the questions are valid, reliable, and fair. The field test also will provide an opportunity for students, schools, and local school systems to become familiar with the new assessments before they are fully implemented in school year 2014–15.

The PARCC field test will be given in two parts.

The Performance-Based Assessment (PBA) will be administered March 24 to April 11, 2014. The reading/ELA PBA will focus on writing effectively when analyzing text. The mathematics PBA will focus on applying skills, concepts, and understandings to solve multistep problems requiring abstract reasoning, precision, perseverance, and strategic use of tools. The End-of-Year Assessment (EOY) will be administered May 5 to June 6, 2014. The reading/ELA EOY will focus on reading comprehension. The mathematics EOY will call on students to demonstrate further conceptual understanding of mathematics topics to demonstrate mathematical fluency. Most students in the field test will participate in both the PBA and EOY components.

High school students also will participate in the PARCC field test.

Randomly selected high school students will participate in the PARCC field tests in English 9, English 11, Geometry, and Algebra II. Beginning in 2014–2015, the PARCC assessments also will be administered in Algebra 1 and English 10.

If you have additional questions about testing, ask your child’s teacher or principal.

They will have the most accurate information about what is happening in your child’s classroom and school. They also can share ideas on what you can do at home to help your child succeed.

For additional information about the PARCC assessments, please visit:

Information about the PARCC field test: www.parcconline.org/field-test

PARCC website: www.parcconline.org

PARCC sample test questions: www.parcconline.org/samples/item-task-prototypes