



# PARENTS GUIDE TO NEW Assessments in Maryland

In 2010, Maryland adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The CCSS provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics as they progress through grades K–12.

In 2014–15, Maryland will begin rolling out new assessments aligned to the CCSS. The new assessments are being used to gauge how well students are mastering the standards—and, ultimately, how ready they are to succeed in college and careers.

### WHAT ARE THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS?

The Common Core State Standards are designed to enhance and improve student learning. The CCSS have greater clarity and rigor than previous standards and are relevant to the real world, giving young people the knowledge and skills they need for college and career success. They are also robust, ensuring a future U.S. workforce that can compete in the global economy.

The new standards emphasize fewer topics and stress not only rote skills, but also conceptual and critical thinking. The CCSS build knowledge from grade to grade, enabling students to master important concepts before moving on to others.

**The standards are not a curriculum.** Decisions about curriculum, tools, materials, and textbooks are left to local school systems and schools that know their students best.

The CCSS were developed through a state-led initiative, spearheaded by governors and state school superintendents, in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, college faculty, parents, and education

experts. They build on the excellent foundation laid across all states to date, and have been internationally benchmarked to ensure rigor on par with top performing nations.

To date, 45 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the CCSS.

This fall, Maryland fully implemented CCSS changes in each district, school system, and school. To prepare, Maryland has held professional development programs over the past three summers involving teams of educators from all 1,400 schools in the state.

### THIS GUIDE INCLUDES:

- Overview of new assessments, which measure student proficiency against more rigorous standards
- Sample test items
- Overview of accountability for students, teachers, and schools
- Additional resources for parents

# CCSS-Aligned Assessments

## WHY NEW ASSESSMENTS?

Teachers and principals talk a lot about assessments, which are used to measure students' academic achievement. This document highlights the end-of-year summative assessments, which measure program and school effectiveness and student progress toward mastering state standards. For other assessments used, see box at right.

New summative assessments will address longstanding concerns that parents, educators, and employers have had about current state assessments—namely that they measure the ability to memorize facts, rather than the skills to think critically and apply knowledge.

Local school systems use the data in a variety of ways to inform instruction and better target it to student needs.

## WHAT IS DIFFERENT ABOUT THE NEW ASSESSMENTS?

The new assessments enable educators to deepen their understanding of student progress from grade to grade—and just as importantly, identify any gaps in progress so they can address them **well before students enter college or the workforce.**

## Types of assessments

**Classroom-based:** Individual tests given by teachers as needed throughout the year to assess knowledge and skills in specific areas.

**Interim:** The same test repeated at set intervals to measure student growth over time.

**Summative:** End-of-year assessments administered by the state to measure student performance against a common set of standards.

*This document addresses summative assessments.*

## English language arts assessments demonstrate:

- Whether students can read and comprehend texts of varying complexities
- How well students can integrate information across sources to make a persuasive argument
- The degree to which students can use context to determine the meaning of academic vocabulary

## Mathematics assessments will demonstrate:

- Whether students understand and can use important math ideas, including number sense, algebraic thinking, geometry, and data analysis
- The extent to which students can use math facts and reasoning skills to solve real-world problems
- How well students can make math arguments

## Benefits of new assessments

- During the next few years, assessments will provide results more quickly and in an increasingly readable and easy-to-understand format, most likely online. Parents can use this information to better communicate with teachers and school administrators about their child's progress, and teachers can use it to better tailor instruction to the child's needs.
- Computer-based assessments will replace pencil-and-paper tests (exceptions will be made for schools that do not yet have the technology). Computer-based assessments are more efficient, innovative, and engaging—and they enable teachers and parents to better monitor student progress at multiple points.
- New assessments will allow Maryland to compare student performance not only across schools and districts state-wide, but also with other states that have adopted the CCSS.
- School districts will not only release scores to parents, but also a selection of the test questions and answers at the end of each year, to help parents and educators understand what areas students are mastering and where they need help.
- The new assessments are designed to provide accurate measures of achievement and growth for all students, including those with disabilities and English language learners. Online assessments can address visual, auditory, and physical-access barriers for students with disabilities, while also enabling them to take tests at the same time as others in their class. English language learners will be able to demonstrate knowledge in the various content areas (e.g., math, science, and social science), regardless of their level of proficiency in English. The intention is not to give these students an advantage, but to provide the accessibility needed for accurate results.

## Who is developing the new assessments?

Because the CCSS is a state-led initiative, most states across the country chose to join one of two consortia of states working together to develop new assessments based on the Common Core State Standards. These are the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC).

Maryland is a member of the PARCC along with 18 other states and territories. However, all customization and final decisions about assessments remain at the state level, in partnership with local educators.

Read more about the PARCC at [www.parcconline.org](http://www.parcconline.org).

## College and Career Readiness Defined:

The level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit-bearing course at a postsecondary institution that offers a degree or in a high-quality certificate program that enables students to enter a career pathway with potential future advancement.

# Sample assessment questions

The following questions are representative of those found on the new assessments. For more examples, visit [www.parconline.org/samples/item-task-prototypes](http://www.parconline.org/samples/item-task-prototypes).

## EXAMPLE OF A 4TH GRADE MATH QUESTION

Three classes at Lakeview School are going on a field trip. The Table shows the number of people in each class, including the teacher.

They can choose to use buses, vans, and cars.



Buses have 20 seats



Vans have 16 seats



Cars have 5 seats

	Total Number of People
Mrs. Ruiz's Class	23
Mr. Yang's Class	25
Mrs. Evan's Class	24

Which three combinations can be used to take all three classes on a field trip?

- 1 bus and 4 vans
- 1 bus and 8 cars
- 3 vans and 11 cars
- 2 buses and 3 vans and 4 cars
- 1 bus and 1 van and 6 cars

Submit Answer

## EXAMPLE OF A 6TH GRADE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS QUESTION

Students are asked to read a passage from the fiction text "Julie of the Wolves" by Jean C. George and answer the following:

### SAMPLE ITEM

In the passage, the author developed a strong character named Miyax. Think about Miyax and the details the author used to create the character. The passage ends with Miyax waiting for the black wolf to look at her.

Write an original story to continue where the passage ended. In your story, be sure to use what you have learned about the character Miyax as you tell what happens to her next.

Answer:

## EXAMPLE OF A 10TH GRADE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS QUESTION

### SAMPLE ITEM

Use what you have learned from reading "Daedalus and Icarus" by Ovid and "To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Triumph" by Anne Sexton to write an essay that provides an analysis of how Sexton transforms Daedalus and Icarus.

As a starting point, you may want to consider what is emphasized, absent, or different in the two texts, but feel free to develop your own focus for analysis.

Develop your essay by providing textual evidence from both texts. Be sure to follow the conventions of standard English.

Answer:

## What Parents Can Expect

**This is a new system with a new way of scoring. Therefore, it is not possible to directly compare new scores with old ones.**

The new assessments measure deeper knowledge and skills deemed particularly important to students' futures, including problem-solving, writing, and critical thinking. The scores provide students, parents, and teachers with the ability to address issues well before students are ready to graduate.

### **Because rigor is higher, student achievement scores may initially be lower.**

A dip should not necessarily be interpreted as a decline in student learning or in educator performance. Educators expect the short-term decline to improve as teachers and students become more familiar with the standards and better equipped to meet the challenges they present.

### **How will schools support students during the transition?**

Schools have created a variety of models to assist students who are struggling with the standards. Remediation and summer courses, in-class adjustments based on ongoing in-class assessment results, and pull-out tutoring are just a few support strategies used by local school systems to accelerate learning.



**TAKE ACTION:** Parents can work with school or district curriculum directors to learn about the new curriculum and understand how to support their children to minimize any dips in assessment scores.

### **How are students and teachers held accountable?**

Local districts determine policies on retention and remediation for students who do not meet proficiency levels on state assessments. Parents can work with the

school to develop an improvement plan tailored to their child's needs.

State assessment results are also included as one factor among many in Maryland's educator effectiveness plan. Student growth scores are used in both teacher and principal evaluation.

Maryland factors in students' year-to-year progress on state assessments as one of the criteria for determining school ratings and federal accountability.



#### **TAKE ACTION:**

Parents need to pay close attention to the new accountability system put in place so they can better advocate for their children. Parents' collective voice is critical to ensure that testing is implemented well and with enough resources to ensure success. Maryland should include parents and teachers in thoughtful conversations based on trust, collaboration, and respect. If you would like additional details about how students, teachers, and schools will be held accountable or more information on assessments in general, please call 410-767-0100. Here are some questions that you might want to ask:

- What will happen if my child does not meet proficiency on the new assessments?
- How will teacher evaluations be affected if students don't meet proficiency levels?
- How will school ratings change based on results of the new assessments?

# Preparing and supporting your child

- Discuss the new tests with your child. Make sure he or she is not scared or anxious going into the new tests.
- With an older child, explain that the new assessments were created to make sure he or she is on track to succeed after graduation and to identify any issues early enough to give them more support.
- Explain to your child that the tests will initially be more challenging. Tell your child you have high expectations and that you are there to help every step of the way.
- Review test results with your child, taking time to discuss areas of strength and areas where there is room for improvement. Bring the teacher into the discussion as needed.
- Provide a quiet, comfortable place for studying at home and make sure your child gets a good night's sleep before a test.

## Staying informed and involved

- Become familiar with the Common Core State Standards.
- To see samples of new test questions and how the assessments were developed, visit: <http://www.parcconline.org>.
- Read all comments written by the teacher on classroom lessons and tests. Ask teachers to explain anything that is unclear and discuss how you can best work together to address comments.
- Monitor your child's progress. If your child needs extra help or wants to learn more about a subject, work with his or her teacher to identify opportunities for tutoring, after-school clubs, or other resources.
- Understand that tests are not perfect measures of what a child can do. Scores can be affected by the way he or she is feeling on test day or the particular classroom setting. Assessments are useful but should not be the only factor in determining a child's growth.
- Meet with your child's teacher as often as possible to discuss his or her progress. Ask for activities to do at home to help prepare for tests and improve your child's proficiency.

## Additional Resources

- For a more detailed look at what CCSS mean at each grade level, visit: [www.pta.org/parentsguide](http://www.pta.org/parentsguide)
- For information on the PARCC consortium, of which Maryland is a member, visit: <http://www.parcconline.org>
- For information on Maryland public K–12 education, visit [www.MarylandPublicSchools.org](http://www.MarylandPublicSchools.org)