

## Transition Background

The 2026-2027 school year will mark the first phase of the transition from the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) to the Maryland System of Testing Academic Readiness (MSTAR). 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.

## Key Assessment Enhancements

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:

| Enhancement                                           | What This Means                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Shorter Test Length</b>                            | Redesigned assessment blueprints reduce overall testing time (approximately 25% shorter) while maintaining full alignment to updated state standards.                                                                      |
| <b>Expanded Item Bank</b>                             | A broader pool of released questions across varying complexity levels to measure the complete breadth and depth of state standards.                                                                                        |
| <b>Adaptive Testing &amp; Accessibility Updates</b>   | Use of multi-stage testing to provide a clear measure of academic achievement. Expansion of accommodation and accessibility features to ensure students with disabilities and multilingual learners can fully participate. |
| <b>Enhanced Test Administration Platform</b>          | Modernized tools featuring a secure student app and real-time active monitoring to give administrators a stable, reliable testing environment.                                                                             |
| <b>Improved Standard Setting</b>                      | Utilizing Maryland educator expertise to establish updated grade-level and course performance expectations.                                                                                                                |
| <b>Earlier Reporting for Educators</b>                | Official student performance results arrive in districts no later than June 30 (within 30 business days of administration post-standard setting) for faster feedback.                                                      |
| <b>New Online Family Portal</b>                       | Families receive free, on-demand, mobile-friendly access to student score reports, multi-year progress indicators, and assessment resources.                                                                               |
| <b>New Centralized Reporting System for Educators</b> | Direct educator access to centralized testing data, facilitating easier tracking of student progress to inform staffing and professional development decisions and classroom instruction.                                  |
| <b>Customizable Tools &amp; Resources</b>             | State providing customizable templates, talking points, and tools to help leaders and educators engage and inform families through the transition ( <i>see details below</i> ).                                            |

## MCAP to MSTAR Transition Timeline

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

## Transition Supports & Resources

To support local school systems, educators, students, and families throughout the transition, MSDE is providing tailored communication toolkits, technical user guides, and professional learning resources.

- Comprehensive MSTAR Portal and updated Maryland Assessment webpage.
- **For District & School Leaders:** Interactive LAC sessions, customizable back-to-school communications guidance, and presentation templates.
- **For Educators:** Transition FAQs, adaptive testing explainers, CRS dashboard navigation guides, practice items, parent-teacher conversation guides.
- **For Families:** "What Families Need to Know about MSTAR" one-pagers, Family Portal access resources, redesigned score reports.