

## Maryland School Assessment (MSA) and What You Need to Know!

### Background

According to the Maryland State Department of Education, the MSA is a test of reading and math achievement that meets the testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The test is administered yearly, in early March, to students in grades 3 through 8. By March of 2008, Science will be added to the test for students in grades 3, 5, and 8. The MSA test measures student proficiency and advanced proficiency on the state's content standards (Reading and Math) that are embedded into the Voluntary State Curriculum (VSC). The VSC was developed as a result of the differences, among the school systems (24), in what was taught and when it was taught.

It is a detailed curriculum that provides a uniform structure and helps teachers understand what should be taught for each grade. Local school systems have a choice of either adopting the VSC or ensuring that its content is included within the local school systems' curriculum. As a result of the VSC, all children attending Maryland public schools are held to high expectations and learn the same skills as other students in the state. When a student understands and masters the skills needed for success, they are equipped and able to apply them to any content area whether in class or on a standardized test.

### Frontline

**Recently, AES had the opportunity to interview the Principal Mr. Carrington Smith and Assistant Principal – Dr. Trevine Jelks, of Melwood Elementary School (Upper Marlboro), regarding their insights on the MSA. Here are a few highlights:**

- The MSA clearly aligns with the curriculum and as a result it clears up the misconceptions of teaching to the test. Teachers are accountable for teaching the curriculum.
- The MSA allows students to be challenged at a higher level because it is not a minimal skills test.
- Students are rising to the challenge of the test through writing and reading more.
- Teachers receive training for the MSA throughout the year.
- Teachers are more accountable to students, parents, and administration, for implementing lessons and following the curriculum.



## Both interviewees encourage parents to:

- Examine homework daily.
- Communicate with the teacher regularly (on-going).
- Create a home atmosphere conducive to learning.
- Remember that grade 3 is critical in that students receive letter grades from that point forward.
- Familiarize yourself with the language of the test (see below); resources include the classroom teacher and the school's Reading Specialist.
- Utilize the website for the Maryland Department of Education ([www.marylandpublicschools.org](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org))
- Continue to celebrate your child, academically, well beyond third grade.

## Language of the MSA

### Benchmarks:

Intermediate measures to see how much progress is made.

### Selected Response Items:

Items on the test that offer four answer choices (commonly known as Multiple Choice)

### Brief Constructed Response Items (BCR):

These require students to write an answer consisting of a few sentences.

### Extended Constructed Response Items (ECR):

These items require students to write an answer consisting of more information than required for a BCR. These items are for Grades 5-8 Math.

### Student Produced Response Items (SPR):

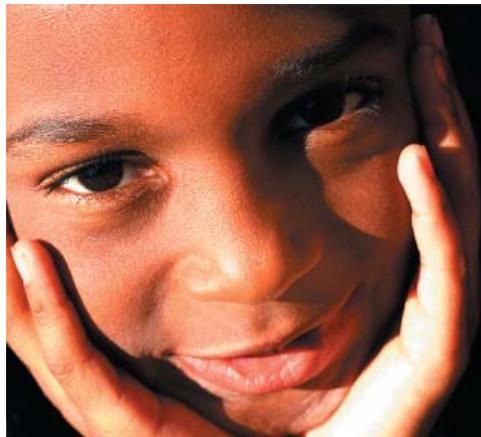
Responses require students to record their answers on a grid by shading in circles corresponding to the numbers in their answer. These items are for Grades 7 & 8 Math.

### Proficiency Levels:

Basic, Proficient, and Advanced.

### Performance Standards:

Determines where the cut score is for students considered to be performing at the proficient and advanced levels (example: Reading, Grade 3: Proficient Cut Score – 388; Advanced Cut Score – 456)



12138 Central Avenue  
Suite 873  
Mitchellville MD 20721  
Phone: 301-322-2418  
Fax: 301-322-6410