

TESTING IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

The vision statement of the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) asserts that a high-quality education is the fundamental right of every child. All children will receive the respect, encouragement and opportunities they need to build the knowledge, skills and attitudes to be successful, contributing members of a global society. Are the MCPS students being educated with the intent of the vision statement or are students being taught to take a variety of standardized tests? Focusing instruction on standardized tests may result in good scores and may also have the consequence of inhibiting discussion that engages student interest, curiosity, deeper understanding and creative thinking.

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) uses the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) in reading, mathematics and science to assess student progress toward meeting the requirements of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB). MSDE also uses the MSAs to provide information about the adequate yearly progress that schools, school districts and the state are making toward the NCLB goal of 100 percent student proficiency in reading and mathematics by the year 2014.

The 2011 *School Performance Report* for MCPS provides state, county and individual school performance data as well as information on student attendance, high school graduation rates and the professional qualifications of teachers. Montgomery County primary schools (schools that serve students in pre-kindergarten through Grade 2) are included in the report card even though they do not administer the MSA. These schools are held accountable for the Grade 3 MSA scores of former students.

MCPS continues to make progress in student performance as a school system, achieving some of the highest performance levels in the state and the nation. There is variance among and within schools and differences in student achievement by race and ethnicity, income, limited English proficiency and disability.

REASONS FOR TESTING

- To know what the student has learned and needs to learn
- To ascertain each student's capabilities
- To provide accountability to parents, school administrators, elected officials and the public
- To provide access to particular courses or special school programs
- To qualify the student for a certificate or diploma
- To qualify the student for college and/or specific employment
- To aid in teacher evaluation
- To indicate success or needed changes in the education system

KINDERGARTEN-GRADE 12 TESTING

Primarily, tests are related to the academic subjects necessary for progress from grade to grade and for high school graduation with a Maryland diploma. These tests, in addition to the standardized tests listed below, include formative and summative tests used by teachers in the course of instruction. However, for many subjects, standardized tests are not used or are not appropriate to indicate student progress. These areas include the arts and physical education. The use of portfolios is an effective evaluative tool to consider in these areas. Students collect artifacts, e.g. work samples, meeting notes, digital pictures, etc. that are arranged by evaluation standards. Three to five high-impact artifacts associated with each standard are selected. Student reflections on each artifact indicate growth and progress that is discussed in evaluation conferences.

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Testing acronyms appear at the end of this Fact Sheet.

Kindergarten – Grade 12 Tests (Table 1)

Elementary School	
MAP-R (Measures of Academic Progress in Reading)	3-5
MSA, Reading and Math; Alt-MSA	3-5
MSA, Science; Alt-MSA	5
ACCESS for ELLs (ELPT)	K-5
MCPSAP-PR	K-2
Middle School	
MSA, Reading and Math; Alt MSA	6-8
MSA, Science; Alt MSA	8
MMSTL (Maryland Measure of Student Technology)	7
ACCESS for ELLs (ELPT)	6-8
MAP-R, Reading	6-8
HSA, Algebra	6-8
High School	
MAP-R, Reading	
Final Exams	
HSA (High School Assessment); Mod-HSA	Usually 9 or 10
MSA (Maryland School Assessment); Mod-MSA, Alt-MSA	10
SAT Reasoning Test	11 or 12
PSAT (Preliminary SAT)	11
ACT	11 or 12; varies
ACCESS for ELLs (ELPT)	9-12
AP (Advanced Placement)	

The advanced placement (AP) tests have been criticized for requiring facts rather than analytical thinking. Recently, the College Board, a not-for-profit membership organization, has started to create curriculum frameworks, starting with biology, which includes hands-on experiments and demonstrations rather than memorization of facts. (NY Times 1/8/11)

Many non-academic skills are needed for success in school and in life (perseverance, dependability, teamwork, etc.). These attributes can and should be taught – but are not considered subjects for testing.

ISSUES RELATED TO TESTING

Students with Disabilities

As a result of the *Individual with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA), all students must be included in assessment programs with appropriate accommodations and modifications. For students with severe disabilities, who follow a fundamental life skills curriculum, Maryland instituted the Alternate Maryland State Assessment (Alt-MSA) and the Modified High School Assessment (Mod-HSA). These assessments measure achievement on grade level curriculum that is being adapted for students with severe disabilities. Eligible students take the test in grades 3-8 and once during high school.

Students in the Class of 2009 were the first to be required to pass all four High School Assessments in order to earn a Maryland diploma. The Bridge Plan for Academic Validation (Bridge Plan) was approved by the Maryland State Board of Education in October 2007 and implemented in MCPS in 2009. This program was designed as an option for students who failed one or more HSAs multiple times as well as those students who did not have the opportunity to complete the courses. As of May 4, 2009, approximately 296 students in the Class of 2009 had met their High School Assessment requirements by completing Bridge Plan projects.

ESOL Issues

Despite the fact that over 50% of elementary school ESOL students were born in the United States, English Language Learners (ELL) might also be considered as students who may have cultural differences. Maryland requires that ELL students be entitled to accommodations. The School Facilities Test 2nd Interim Report of the 2007 Growth Policy by the Montgomery Planning Board reports that the student population continues to be much more culturally diverse than in the past. A study of the *Outcome Evaluation of the ESOL Programs* in elementary schools dated September 2010 reports that each spring MCPS administers the standardized Language Assessment System (LAS). This is done to demonstrate progress and attainment of English language proficiency. Data report that students are making progress yearly. However, children who lack English proficiency, receive Free and Reduced Meals (FARM) and are non-white, tend to lag behind academically.

There is a Bi-lingual Assessment Team (BAT) within the Special Education Department designed to collaborate with the IEP teams by assessing ESOL students who are suspected of having a learning disability. It may be possible that because of language, cultural and socio-economic issues, many of these children are not being identified and screened.

Socio-Economic and Cultural Issues

Studies indicate that the expectations of teachers and parents are important in providing supports and curriculum to address the needs of lower socio-economic students. Often parents of these students are uneducated, unemployed or may work long hours or two jobs. For many reasons these parents may be unable to provide not only education stimulation in the home, but also adequate educational pre-school programs, appropriate after-school care and supervision, assistance with homework, stimulation from community experiences, as well as basic safety, nutrition and medical needs. There is also a discrepancy in socio-economic status and monies or insurance available for private therapies, tutoring and the cost of courses such as Kaplan, Princeton Review, etc. All of these issues can affect student performance.

What must be considered is that the 2010 census indicates that during the past 10 years, the percentage of Hispanic/Latino population in Montgomery County increased by 64%, Asian/Pacific Islanders increased by 38 % and Black/African American population increased by 25%. According to the 1990 census the majority of the residents in Montgomery County were white. Now this population is 51%. The change in demographics has a great impact on the public school population. Currently, the MCPS students are 37.2% white, 23.4% African American, 23.4% Hispanic, 15.7% Asian American and 0.3% American Indian.

The 2010 census data speak not only to ethnic issues, but also to major cultural differences. In many homes students interact with family members who, even if they speak English, use their native language at home. Televisions may be turned to foreign language channels; literature, if readily available, is in another language

and perhaps even another script. Child-raising practices and behavioral and educational expectations may be culturally different.

Given the change in population, should the county expect 100 percent proficiency in core subjects or would it be more productive to look at performance in other skills that might lead a student to a career other than one that requires a college degree? The need to pass mandated courses may reduce access to electives that can be especially important for non-college bound students who have special interests or who need to prepare for employment while still in school or immediately upon graduation. Even without this change, should students also be assessed in areas that predict future life achievement?

The Cost of Testing

Montgomery County Public Schools make up the 16th largest public school district in the United States with an increasingly diverse enrollment of 149,000 students, in 202 schools and supported by 22,000 employees. *The Leadership Profile Report* identifies, “excessive standardized testing and the emphasis on test scores” as an issue/challenge/concern to be addressed.

Direct testing costs represent a very small fraction of the total budget; however, indirect costs that include time spent by school personnel to prepare students for testing and to administer tests are not factored in the budget. According to MCPS, FY 2012 testing activities cost \$880,899, including 9.5 positions, which represents a direct cost increase of more than 12% and .5 staff position from FY 2011 (\$771,050).

Testing Calendar 2012-2013 (Table 2)

September 8, 2012	ACT Testing
October 1-3, 2012	HSA and Mod-HSA Testing (Paper/Pencil)
October 6, 2012	SAT Testing
October 27, 2012	ACT Testing
October 17, 2012	PSAT Testing
November 3, 2012	SAT Testing
December 1, 2012	SAT Testing
December 8, 2012	ACT Testing
January 7-18, 2012	HSA and Mod-HSA Testing (Online)
January 7-10, 2012	HSA and Mod-HSA Testing (Paper/Pencil)
January 11, 2013	Exam Review Day
January 14-18, 2013	Final Exams
January 26, 2013	SAT Testing
February 9, 2013	ACT Testing
March 9, 2013	SAT Testing
March 4-7, 2013	MSA Testing (Reading)
March 8-13, 2013	MSA Testing (Math)
April 22-26, 2013	Science MSA Testing
April 13, 2013	ACT Testing
April 8-26, 2013	Science MSA Testing (Online)
May 1-3, 2013	AP Testing
May 4, 2013	SAT Testing
May 6-10, 2013	AP Testing
May 28-31, 2013	HSA Testing
June 1, 2013	SAT Testing
June 7, 2013	Exam Review Day
June 8, 2013	ACT Testing
June 10-14, 2013	Final Exams

THE COMMUNITY AND TESTING

The League of Women Voters' April 2002 Fact Sheet entitled *The State of Assessment (Testing) in Montgomery County Schools* states that the popular demand for using tests to compare students and schools reflected the focus of citizens to increase accountability of public education. Questions arose about the design of the tests and whether the tests actually tested the students on the curriculum being taught. Citizens asked whether the practice of teaching to the test and the amount of classroom time used in taking tests were beneficial to student learning. The controversy continues to this day.

In 2004, the League of Women Voters of Maryland issued a Fact Sheet entitled *High School Graduation Testing*. The report states that to prepare teachers for the tests, school systems increased staff development aimed at understanding the new curriculum and content emphasized on the tests, as well as aligning instruction to the state curriculum. These questions remain. Is it more important for students to follow a curriculum that helps them do well on tests or learn valuable skills? What impacts student performance on assessments? How do schools assess organizational and problem-solving skills, artistic and imagination skills, motor and visual motor skills and just plain hard work? Such skills may not be reflected on test scores but may be important to achievement in life.

The 2004 Fact Sheet states that according to the MSDE, the assumption is that the tests will raise academic standards and restore the value to the high school diploma and alert the public and school systems to educational problems. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* compelled Maryland to replace the Maryland State Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) with the Maryland School Assessment (MSA), which provides individual student test scores in addition to measuring school performance.

Impact on Teachers

Multiple measures of student performance are considered as primary data in the evaluation process. No single measure is a determinative factor, but all are considered when contemplating a teacher's performance.

According to MCPS, student performance data factor strongly into two of the six standards based on the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards core propositions:

- Standard II. Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach these subjects to students
- Standard IV. Teachers continually assess student progress, analyze the results and adapt instruction to improve student achievement

These two standards comprise one-third of a teacher's overall evaluation. It is important to note that if concern, which is serious enough to warrant a below standard rating, is found in any one of the six standards, a teacher may be considered for placement in the Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program with one year of Consulting Teacher support. A teacher included in the PAR program may be recommended for non-renewal or termination if the teacher fails to demonstrate improvement.

LWVMC: EXISTING POSITIONS ON TESTING CRITERIA

- The appropriate goal for testing in the schools is for the evaluation of student achievement.
- A broad range of tests is important: oral, essay, multiple choice and true/false.
- Statewide testing of all students prior to graduation.
- The right of a student to take tests as many times as necessary to pass the tests.
- The test scores should be reported to the student in time to take advantage of remediation.
- That remediation should be available at no cost to the student and should be funded by the government level that imposed the mandate for testing.
- There was no agreement in the Montgomery County LWV that the High School Assessment test should be required for a high school diploma.

CONSENSUS QUESTIONS

1. The vision statement of the Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) asserts that a high-quality education is the fundamental right of every student. A variety of standardized tests is given to meet this vision. Should these tests continue to be used to measure students' performance and proficiency in core subjects? (Choose one)
 - a. use standardized tests as the only measure of student performance
 - b. use standardized tests and alternative measures, such as portfolios to measure student performance
 - c. further examine the use of standardized tests
 - d. standardized tests should not be used to measure student performance
2. Does emphasis on preparation for mandated testing give students the skills needed to function adequately in college, vocational programs or the general work force? (Choose one or more)
 - a. test-taking skills and strategies should take precedence over curricular content
 - b. testing preparation is an organizational skill set that is transferable
 - c. further examine the overall impact of standardized tests
3. Currently, the performance of students on quantifiable measures comprises a third of a teacher's overall evaluation. Is this fraction:
 - a. too much
 - b. just right
 - c. too little

SOURCES

Montgomery County Public Schools 2011 Performance Report

Board of Education minutes – May 12, 2009

Using Student Data in Teacher Evaluations, April 20, 2010

The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education, by Diane Ravitch (Basic Books, 2010)

Testing Grid and Testing Calendar extrapolated from
<http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/sharedaccountability/testing/>

International Immigration to Maryland, Department of Legislative Services, Office of Policy Analysis, January 2011

Acronyms and Definitions (Table 3)

Advanced Placement	AP	Examinations, which are the culmination of year-long college level courses.
Alternate Maryland School Assessment	Alt MSA	Maryland's assessment program for students with significant cognitive disabilities.
American College Testing Program	ACT	The ACT® test assesses high school students' general educational development and their ability to complete college-level work.

Bi-lingual Assessment Team	BAT	A multilingual unit designed to collaborate with schools' Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams by assessing and interpreting data about English Language Learners.
English for Speakers of Other Languages	ESOL	Used to identify the programs, staff and students served by the Division of ESOL/Bilingual Programs.
English Language Learners	ELL	A student who uses a language in addition to or other than English.
English Language Proficiency Test	ELPT	Test of English language proficiency administered to English language learners upon entry into the school system and annually during a testing window in the spring.
ESOL assessments		Assessments designed to measure the English language proficiency (ELP) of ESOL students at all proficiency levels in grades prek-12.
Free and Reduced Meal program	FARM	Program for free or reduced price meals based on household size and income.
High School Assessment	HSA	Four exams—one each in algebra/data analysis, biology, government, and English—that all high school students pass in order to graduate.
Individualized Education Plan	IEP	A written description of the special education and related services for a student with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised by the student's IEP team.
Maryland School Assessment	MSA	Tests that measure higher-order thinking processes in reading (grades 3 - 8) or English/language arts (the end-of-course High School Assessment [HSA] in English) and mathematics (grades 3 - 8) and the end-of-course HSA in algebra/data analysis).
Maryland State Department of Education	MSDE	The state education agency responsible for administration and supervision of local education.
Measures of Academic Progress in Reading	MAP-R	A computer-adaptive achievement test that provides an assessment of a student's skill level in the different reading achievement areas.
Modified High School Assessments	Mod-HSA	An alternative assessment for students with disabilities who are able to make progress toward grade-level standards.
Modified Maryland School Assessments	Mod-MSA	An alternate assessment based on grade level content standards and modified academic achievement standards designed for students receiving special education services who meet specific participation requirements.
Montgomery County Public Schools	MCPS	Public school system that serves Montgomery County, Maryland.
National Assessment of Educational Progress	NAEP	Largest nationally representative and continuing assessment American students know in various subject areas.
No Child Left Behind Act of 2001	NCLB	Act which expands the scope and frequency of student testing, revamps accountability systems and guarantees that every teacher is qualified in their subject area.

Peer Assistance and Review	PAR	A qualitative shift in how the school system supports and evaluates teachers, to reach the goal of high quality teaching and learning in every classroom.
Preliminary SAT	PSAT	A standardized test that provides firsthand practice for the SAT®.
SAT Reasoning Test, formerly called Scholastic Aptitude Test or Scholastic Assessment Test	SAT	A fee-based, standardized test for college admissions, administered by the College Board corporation and is developed, published and scored by the Educational Testing Service (ETS).
The Individual with Disabilities Education Act	IDEA	Law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation.

This Fact Sheet was prepared by the Education Committee: Yvonne Hudson, Chair, Joan Karasik, Louisa Magzanian, Alicia Jones-McLeod, Lois Stoner and Adrienne McBride.

Resulting Positions:

Standardized tests and alternative measures, such as portfolios should be used to assess student performance.

Testing preparation is worthwhile, as an organizational skill set that students need to function adequately in college, vocational programs and/or the general work force.

The overall impact of standardized tests should be further examined.