

Bernard J. Sadusky, Ed.D.
Interim State Superintendent of Schools

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October 1, 2011

The Honorable Joan Carter Conway, Chairman
Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21402

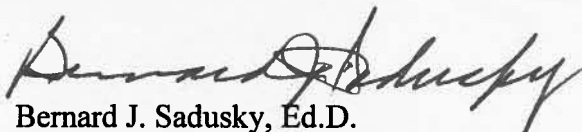
RE: Alternative MSA Report (MSAR #8075)

Dear Sen. Conway:

This correspondence is submitted in response to reporting requirements for the Maryland State Department of Education. Senate Bill 557/Ch. 321(2), 2010 required that on or before October 1, 2011, the State Department of Education shall report to the Governor and, in accordance with § 2-1246 of the State Government Article, the House Committee on Ways and Means and the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee regarding the review [and revise of the Alternate Maryland School Assessment (ALT-MSA)] conducted under Section 1 of this Act.

The report was prepared jointly by the Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services (DSE/EIS) and the Division of Assessment, Accountability and Data Systems (DAAD). Should you have questions or need additional information, you may contact Trinell Bowman, Program Manager in the Division of Accountability, Assessment and Data Systems at (410) 767-2498 or Karen Andrews, Section Chief in the Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services at (410).767.0792.

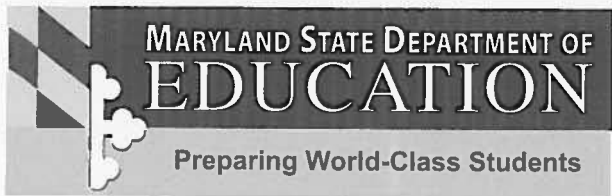
Sincerely,



Bernard J. Sadusky, Ed.D.
Interim State Superintendent of Schools

C: Marcella Franczkowski
Leslie Wilson
Sharon West
Janet Bagsby
Karen Andrews
Trinell Bowman





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Interim State Superintendent of Schools

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October 1, 2011

The Honorable Sheila Hixson, Chairman
House Ways & Means Committee
131 House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis Maryland 21401

RE: Alternative MSA Report (MSAR #8075)

Dear Del. Hixson:

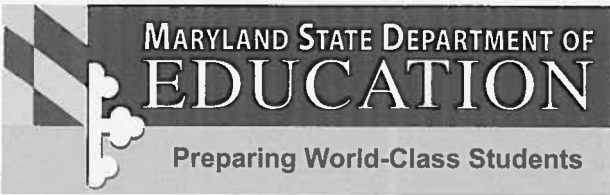
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The Honorable Martin O'Malley
Governor of Maryland
Executive Department
State House
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

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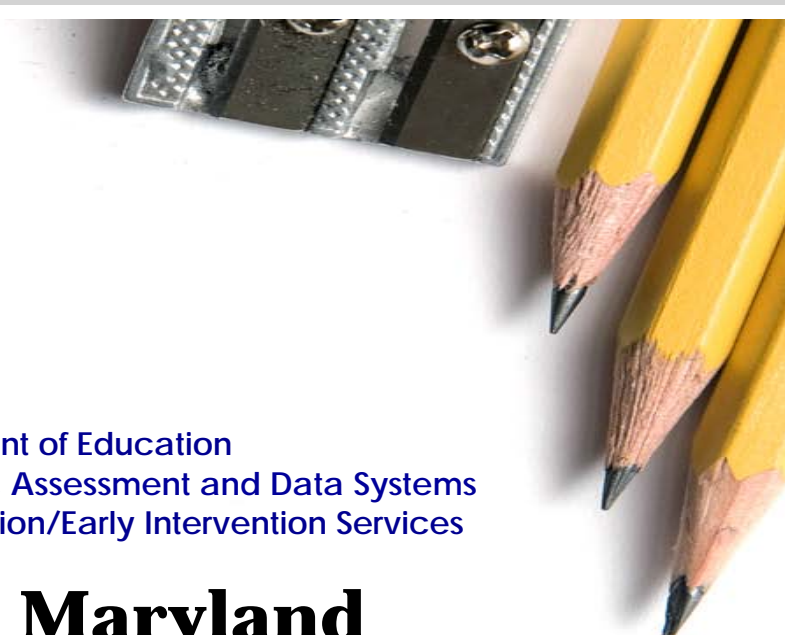
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Maryland State Department of Education
Division of Accountability, Assessment and Data Systems
Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services

Alternative Maryland State Assessment (Alt-MSA) Senate Bill 557 Alt-MSA Review



**Alternative Maryland
State Assessment (Alt-MSA)
Senate Bill 557
Alt-MSA Review**

Maryland State Department of Education
Division of Accountability, Assessment and Data Systems
Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services

October 2011

This document was prepared for the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services using funds from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, IDEA, Part B, Grant #_____. The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Education or any other federal agency and should not be regarded as such. In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), this document will be made available in alternative formats upon request. To request an alternative format or to use/share information contained in this document, contact the MSDE, Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services, Student Achievement and Professional Development Branch, 410-767-07548.

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Martin O'Malley
Governor

This document was prepared for the Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Special Education Services by **Precise Research and Evaluation, LLC, Rosemarie Downer, Ph.D.**

Maryland State Department of Education
Division of Accountability, Assessment and Data Systems
Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services

Alternative Maryland State Assessment (Alt-MSA) Senate Bill 557 Alt-MSA Review



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Executive Summary

Alternate Assessments (AA) were first mandated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 1997 as a large-scale assessment option for students with the most significant disabilities (i.e., those who could not participate in general education assessments even with accommodations). Prior to that time, this population of students had historically been excluded from large-scale assessments and the associated standards-based reforms. Just four years after AAs were mandated, the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 required that states assess student performance related to grade-level content standards in reading, math, and science. Students were to receive an individual score in reading and mathematics in grades 3-8 and a high school grade. Maryland selected grade ten (10) to fulfill this requirement. The IDEA of 2004 also required that states provide an “alternate assessment” for students with significant cognitive disabilities who are unable to participate in a regular assessment, even when accommodations are provided.

AAs became known as Alternate Assessments based on Alternate Achievement Standards (AA-AAS) to reflect the fact that student performance would be assessed against achievement standards that reflect a narrower range of the content and a different set of expectations (34 C.F.R. § 200.1(d)). The content of AA was required to be “clearly related to grade-level content, although it may be restricted in scope or complexity or take the form of introductory or pre-requisite skills” (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). This means that the alternate assessment is related to grade-level content, but students do not have to access the content at grade level.

In Maryland, students with disabilities participate in either the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) in reading, mathematics and science (with or without accommodations, as appropriate), Modified Maryland School Assessment (Mod-MSA) or in the Alternate Maryland School Assessment (Alt-MSA), as determined by the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team. The Alt-MSA is a portfolio assessment administered to students in grades 3-8 and 10 and tests students' attainment of grade level objectives in reading and mathematics. In addition, the Alt-MSA measures students' attainment of science Mastery Objectives in grades 5, 8 and 10. In 2011, there were 4,513 students who participated in the Alt-MSA and approximately 1200 teachers who served on Alt-MSA Test Examiner Teams to develop and organize student portfolios.

In April 2010, Senate Bill 557, Appendix A, was passed requiring the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to review the Alternate Maryland School Assessment (Alt-MSA) on or before July 1, 2011. The review requires the MSDE to survey teachers of Alt-MSA students regarding the Alt-MSA and to solicit certain recommendations to be considered by the MSDE. In response to Senate Bill 557, the MSDE developed a plan of activities in order to solicit recommendations for consideration. The MSDE contracted an independent evaluator, Precise Research & Evaluation, LLC to manage the external process of this review. The plan incorporated a number of activities including survey, public forum-listening sessions, and focus groups.

The first activity in the Senate Bill 557 Plan was a survey containing twenty-five (25) items designed by the MSDE and vetted through the Alt-MSA Advisory Committee and the Alt-MSA Facilitators. The survey was administered through Survey Monkey™ to approximately 3000 teachers, school administrators, paraprofessionals and related service providers. A total of 804 respondents completed the survey. The survey solicited input on topic areas to include the role the respondents play in the Alt-MSA process, the usefulness of the Alt-MSA Handbook, time required to prepare for the implementation of the Alt-MSA, the validity of the Alt-MSA in assessing reading, mathematics and science skills, Mastery Objectives, and the availability and usefulness of resources to teachers. The results of the survey can be found in Appendix A of this report.

The next activity in the Plan included five public forum listening sessions convened throughout the State of Maryland. The sessions provided Alt-MSA Test Examiners and Stakeholders a forum to express their views about Alt-MSA with an opportunity to share recommendations for consideration by MSDE. A total of forty-three (43) individuals gave verbal testimonies. Thirty-nine (39) testimonies were submitted in written format. Participants in attendance and those not able to attend were invited to submit their testimony by email or U. S. Mail. The most common issues addressed by those who spoke or submitted written testimony were:

- The appropriateness of the Alt-MSA for severely disabled students,
- The amount of time required for teachers to prepare the test for administration,
- The number of Mastery Objectives,
- Scoring of the Alt-MSA, and
- A medical exemption for children with severe disabilities from being assessed by the Alt-MSA (referred to mostly in written testimonials).

The final Senate Bill 557 activity consisted of seven (7) focus groups: one with advocates, two with teachers, three with principals, and one with parents. The groups were led by the facilitator and tasked to discuss the Alt-MSA and make recommendations for consideration by the MSDE regarding changes to the Alt-MSA. To make certain that information on the same issues were collected from each subgroup; the Focus Group sessions for each subgroup were guided by a standard set of questions.

A total of forty-two (42) individuals participated in the Focus Groups: nine (9) advocates, eleven (11) teachers, nine (9) parents, and thirteen (13) principals. The eight (8) most salient themes from all seven (7) Focus Groups are listed below.

1. Teach and assess students with severe cognitive disabilities on functional skills that align with their stage of development, not academic grade level content materials. Align the Alt-MSA to the IEP and the developmental stage of the students, rather than grade level content.
2. Provide teachers with an artifact bank that includes artifacts appropriate for students whose cognitive level is that of an infant. The artifacts should be written on multiple levels for every Mastery Objective in the system.

3. Expand the medical waiver to allow students who are severely disabled to be exempted from being assessed.
4. Base the outcome of the assessment on the students' performances, not the teachers' performances and not the teachers' abilities to create artifacts. Do not penalize the children for clerical errors made by teachers.
5. Allow the assessment to be flexible and specific to each child's developmental stage, ensuring the validity of the assessment.
6. Create a mandatory checklist across the board that clearly states that Alt-MSA is not diploma bound and require parent signature.
7. Provide more specific/more detailed feedback to teachers on artifacts that cannot be scored. Provide explanations to the codes that are attributed to each artifact.
8. Reduce the number of Mastery Objectives.

The MSDE reviewed and analyzed all the results from the activities held in response to Senate Bill 557 regarding the Alt-MSA. During this review, the MSDE considered the NCLB, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and the IDEA Act 2004, awaiting reauthorization. Given that imminent changes in instruction and assessments aligning to the National Common Core Standards will come with the reauthorization in federal law, a redesign of the Alternate Assessment System, at this time, would create a burden to the State budget.

Therefore, the MSDE considered the most prevalent recommendations that were generated from this review, the impacted federal requirements, and the costs associated with each one. The recommendations reviewed can be found in the chart titled "Final Report Senate Bill 557-Alt-MSA Recommendations for Consideration" on pages 33 to 39 of this report.

The final recommendations to be implemented by the MSDE in the 2011-2012 school year, with minimal cost implications, are listed below.

1. Develop a Bank of Mastery Objective Artifacts

A total of eighty-four (84) new artifacts were developed by the Alt-MSA vendor in collaboration with the MSDE content staff for the 2011-2012 school year; twenty-one (21)-reading, twenty-seven (27)-mathematics, and thirty-six (36)-science. Maryland teachers recommended Mastery Objectives for artifact creation. The artifacts were vetted through an item review committee consisting of content specialists and Alt-MSA teachers from across the State. In addition, the MSDE Online Professional Development Modules developed in 2010 include an additional thirty-four (34) artifacts pre-approved by the MSDE; twelve (12)-reading, eleven (11)-math, and eleven (11)-science.

2. Exemption/Excusal for the most significantly cognitive Student (1% of the 1%)

The MSDE will expand the current excusal option allowed for participation in the Alt-MSA to include medically fragile students who require full physical supports and are unable to demonstrate what they know and are able to do in the State academic curriculum. Since 2001, the United States Department of Education has required that States, school districts and schools maintain a 95% participation rate for all assessments.

3. Link the Mastery Objectives of the Alt-MSA to functional life skills of the student's IEP

The Alt-MSA provides the opportunity for functional living skills to be instructed and assessed within its current assessment. The MSDE proposes developing guidance documents and training to highlight the Mastery Objectives that directly align to functional skills and how to implement those Mastery Objectives to meet the functional instructional needs of individual students. Each local school system (LSS) appoints an Alt-MSA Facilitator to serve as a liaison between the MSDE and the local school system. The MSDE will work with the Alt-MSA Facilitators and teachers from across the State to develop Mastery Objectives for reading and mathematics that can be aligned within the context of health and career content. The development of new Mastery Objectives for 2012-2013, as found in the current year's scope of work, will focus on this activity.

4. Elimination of Grade Band Requirements for Science

Currently, the Alt-MSA is designed with reading and mathematics embedded into science Mastery Objectives in non-assessed grades (grades 3, 4, 6 and 7). The accompanying artifacts must contain accurate science as found in the science state curriculum (SC). Grade band requirements do not apply to non-assessed science grades, which allow the embedded science content to extend back to lower grades. The assessed grades (5, 8 and 10) must be from the specified grade bands (5, 8) and biology (10). Changing this requirement would have a cost implication. Understanding the flexibility at the non-assessed grade level may be an implementation issue requiring further training at the local level. The MSDE will address this in the upcoming year with the Alt-MSA Facilitators.

Additional Mastery Objectives were added to the Mastery Objective item bank in September 2010. Some of these Mastery Objectives make a functional life skills connection such as making a simple scientific observation or what the weather is like outside. In grades 5 and 8, the Mastery Objectives added in the skills and processes area can back map to any grade level and are not bound to highlighted assessment limits outlined in the SC. This significant change allows students to access the science content area for the skills and processes standard at the pre-kindergarten level. However, in 10th grade, the MSDE assesses Biology at the high school level, therefore, the skills and processes 10th grade science Mastery Objectives must still align to Biology.

As the MSDE considers the redesign of the Alt-MSA to comply with new federal legislation when it is passed, the State will also be involved in the additional activities listed below. Participation in these activities will further assist Maryland in determining the next steps of the alternate assessment redesign.

1. Longitudinal Examination of Alternate Assessment Progressions (LEAAP)

Maryland has received grant funding from the U.S. Department of Education. This Enhancement Assessment Grant (EAG) titled, "Longitudinal Examination of Alternate

Assessment Progressions (LEAAP)” will provide Maryland with additional data in preparation for redesigning the Alt-MSA to align with the National Common Core State Standards and the Race to the Top initiatives. Western Carolina University and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte are serving as the lead researchers and project coordinators. The five goals associated with this grant are listed below.

- *Goal 1:* Conduct a retrospective study of content and performance expectations in states’ Alternate Assessments.
- *Goal 2:* Investigate and define dimensions of growth in achievement for this population.
- *Goal 3:* Examine teacher and student variables in relation to alternate assessment content selection, administration, and progressions.
- *Goal 4:* Provide technical assistance to states on interpreting and using their findings in order to improve assessment systems.
- *Goal 5:* Disseminate project products and findings.

2. Joining a 1% Assessment Consortium

Maryland is currently considering joining one of two national state assessment consortia for alternate assessments. The National Center and State Collaborative Partnership (NCSC) is a collaborative network of national centers and nineteen (19) states. NCSC is developing a full system intended to support educators that includes formative assessment tools and strategies, professional development on appropriate interim uses for progress monitoring, and management systems to ease the burdens of administration and documentation. The Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment System Consortium is a consortium of eleven (11) states led by the University of Kansas. The Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment System Consortium will develop alternate academic achievement standards aligned with the Common Core State Standards for college and career readiness and developing high-quality, valid, and reliable alternate assessments, using universal design principles and current research based on evidence-centered design and learning maps, that form a coherent system with assessments developed by Race to the Top (RTTT) assessment competition grantees.

3. Active State Member of the Assessing Special Education Students (ASES) State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards (SCASS)

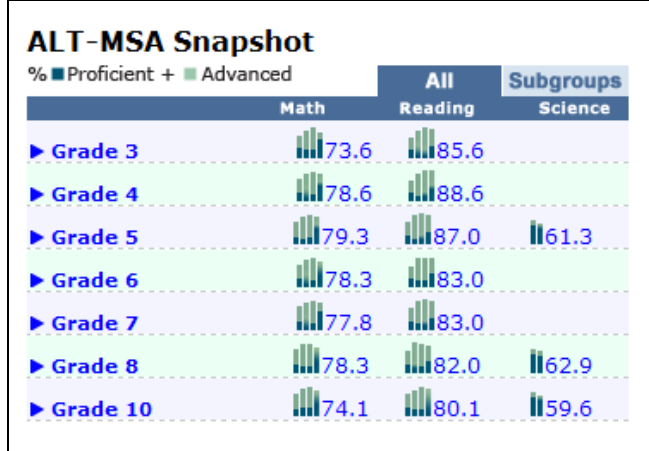
Maryland is one of thirty-three (33) states that is a member of the Assessing Special Education Students (ASES) State Collaboratives on Assessment and Student Standards (SCASS). ASES SCASS supports states in their efforts to develop assessment and accountability systems that provide full equity for students with disabilities. As the only national consortium of assessment and special education professionals, ASES SCASS addresses the inclusion of students with disabilities in standards, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and accountability systems, as well as the effects of these systems on education reform efforts.

While the MSDE recognizes that there are issues in the design of the assessment that the MSDE will address in this upcoming year and in future redesigns, there are implementation issues that need to be addressed at the local level. To address the implementation issues, the MSDE will continue to meet monthly with Alt-MSA Facilitators during the school year to provide guidance and professional development related to best practices for implementing the Alt-MSA. In addition, the MSDE continues to recognize the need to provide professional development guidance to staff that administer the Alt-MSA.

The MSDE is reviewing its current professional development opportunities and will continue to provide guidance to LSSs and nonpublic schools to make certain they have the necessary information for successful implementation of the Alt-MSA. The MSDE also recommends that the LSSs and nonpublic schools analyze student and school Alt-MSA data to identify topics for professional development.

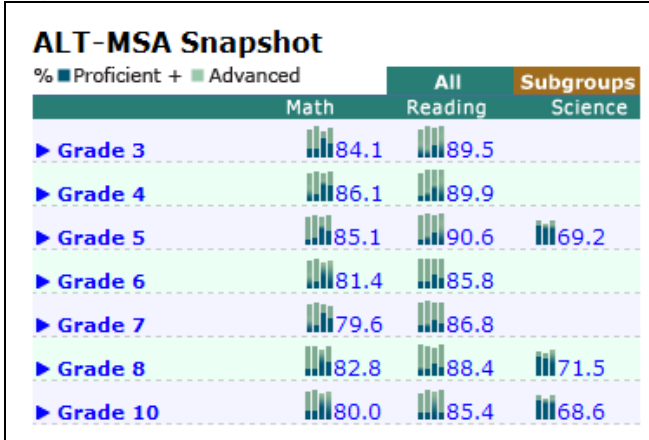
It is also important to note, that the State performance for Alt-MSA results reflect high rates of proficient and advanced performance scores in all grades. The scores for 2009, 2010 and 2011 can be found in the Figures below.

Figure 1: State of Maryland 2009 Alt-MSA Results



Source: www.mdreportcard.org

Figure 2: State of Maryland 2010 Alt-MSA Results



Source: www.mdreportcard.org

Figure 3: State of Maryland 2011 Alt-MSA Results

Alt-MSA Snapshot
 % Proficient + Advanced

	Math	Reading	Science
Grade 3	88.0	92.5	
Grade 4	87.6	89.7	
Grade 5	89.7	92.1	86.5
Grade 6	89.3	94.0	
Grade 7	91.3	94.4	
Grade 8	86.8	91.9	83.0
Grade 10	88.3	90.9	76.3

Source: Maryland State Department of Education

Background

In 1989, the MSDE established a statewide accountability system, the Maryland School Performance Program (MSPP) in order to support a high quality education system for all Maryland students. Most Maryland students participated in the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) for accountability purposes. However, for a small percentage of students with disabilities, this assessment was not appropriate because students were learning different outcomes. From 1994-1997, Maryland developed the Independence Mastery Assessment Program (IMAP) as a program evaluation for students with severe disabilities. In 1997, the IDEA mandated alternate assessments for the first time as a large-scale assessment option for students with the most significant disabilities (i.e., those who could not participate in general education assessments even with accommodations). The IDEA 1997 required full implementation of statewide alternate assessments by July 2000. IMAP was phased in as a pilot project between the years of 1997 through 1999. By 2000, students were assessed at age 8, 10, 13 and 17 and it was mandatory that all Maryland students participate in MSPAP or IMAP. The IEP Team determined which assessment a student would participate in for accountability purposes. The IMAP consisted of videotaped performance tasks and a portfolio. Domains and indicators developed the core of the assessment. The performance tasks were developed by teachers in the State of Maryland and matched the IMAP indicators. The IMAP domain areas included:

- Functional Academics: Reading, Writing and Mathematics;
- Communication/Decision Making/Interpersonal;
- Community;
- Career/Vocational;
- Recreation/Leisure; and
- Personal Management

In 2001, the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) required that states assess student performance related to grade-level content standards in reading, math, and science. Students were to receive an individual score in reading and mathematics in grades 3-8 and a high school grade. For the 2002-2003 school year the IMAP assessments in reading and mathematics became part of the State's Accountability Program in compliance with the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. IMAP also continued to assess other domains including communication/decision making/interpersonal, writing, career/vocational, recreation/leisure, community, and personal management, which were scored separately and were not part of the accountability program. For 2002-2003, students in grades 3, 5, 8 and 11 participated in the IMAP portfolio assessment in reading and math. The IDEA of 2004 required that states provide an "alternate assessment" for students with significant cognitive disabilities who are unable to participate in a regular assessment, even when accommodations are provided. The New federal mandates in NCLB 2001 and IDEA 2004 prompted a revision of IMAP.

The alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS), as required by NCLB, dictate that this population of students is assessed in academic subjects. Students who take AA

(approximately 1% of the total population of assessed students) have diverse communication modes; sensory, physical, and medical challenges; and significant cognitive disabilities. With many AA formats (e.g., performance tasks and portfolios), teachers make decisions about what accommodations and modifications/adaptations to make and when/how to use options for flexibility in AA administration based on unique student needs. In portfolio formats, teachers typically exercise choice in how the content is presented, how the student will demonstrate mastery, and how evidence is presented to substantiate student performance. While the content expectations for typically developing students are represented by grade-level content standards, students who participate in the AA access those content standards with reduced coverage (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). That reduction may be defined by the state in the form of extended standards, or, in the case of portfolios, on an individual basis by the students' IEP teams.

Since 2004, students with disabilities participate in either the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) in reading, mathematics and science (with or without accommodations, as appropriate), Modified Maryland School Assessment (Mod-MSA) or in the Alternate Maryland School Assessment (Alt-MSA), as determined by the students' Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team. Students with significant cognitive disabilities who cannot participate in the MSA and the Mod-MSA, even with accommodations participate in Alt-MSA. The Alt-MSA is a portfolio assessment administered to students in grades 3-8 and 10 and tests students' attainment of grade level objectives in reading and mathematics. In addition, the Alt-MSA measures students' attainment of science Mastery Objectives in grades 5, 8 and 10. The Alt-MSA assesses student attainment of their instructional level reading, mathematics and science Mastery Objectives that are aligned with grade level Maryland Content Standards.

The Alt-MSA is not a traditional standardized test that is given one time during the year. Instead, the Alt-MSA is designed to combine instruction consistent with the students' IEP and assessment assuring that ongoing reading, mathematics, and science instruction is integrated into each student's daily program. Since each student participating in Alt-MSA has unique learning needs, the Alt-MSA test design allows decisions about reading, mathematics and science instruction and assessment related to the Maryland Content Standards to be made directly by the team that teaches the student, instead of by the State.

The alternate assessment in Maryland allows students to access academic content at a lower grade level than their actual enrolled grade. For example, a teacher who wants to select a Mathematics Mastery Objective for a student in grade 8 who is functioning at a six to nine-month ability level in the content standard area of Algebra, Patterns and Functions should not select a Mastery Objective that would require the student to write equations and inequalities to represent relationships.

Although this skill is grade level, it would be considerably beyond the student's ability level. In order to make instruction purposeful for this student, the teacher would need to consider "back mapping" to a prerequisite skill. A more appropriate Mastery Objective may be found at the prekindergarten grade level, which uses manipulatives to teach the concept of more or less, which would be a prerequisite skill for equations and inequalities at the upper grades. A more appropriate Mastery Objective may be found at the kindergarten grade level, which uses

manipulatives to teach the prerequisite skill of equations and inequalities. The USDE along with peer reviewers from other states have reviewed the Alt-MSA and determined that the Alt-MSA is a valid and reliable assessment, which meets the professional assessment development standards.

In April 2010, Senate Bill 557 was passed requiring the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to review the Alt-MSA on or before July 1, 2011. The review requires the MSDE to survey teachers of Alt-MSA students regarding the Alt-MSA and to solicit certain recommendations to be considered by the MSDE. In response to Senate Bill 557, the MSDE developed a plan of activities in order to solicit recommendations for consideration by the MSDE. The MSDE contracted an independent evaluator, Precise Research & Evaluation, LLC to facilitate the implementation of the plan. The plan included a number of activities that include public listening sessions, focus groups with teachers, principals, parents, and advocates, and in addition, the MSDE administered a survey to solicit feedback about the Alt-MSA from teachers and school administrators.

Methodology

The review of the Alt-MSA included a survey, public forum-listening sessions and focus groups. Following is a description of the approach taken to employ each mode of data collection.

I. **Activity #1: Survey**

A survey containing twenty-five (25) items was designed by the MSDE and vetted through the Alt-MSA Advisory committee and the Alt-MSA Facilitators. The survey was administered by Survey Monkey™ to approximately 3000 teachers, school administrators, paraprofessionals and related service providers. A total of 804 respondents completed the survey. All counties, except two were represented among the survey respondents. The jurisdictions with the highest representation were Montgomery County (24%), Baltimore County (12%), Prince George’s County (10%), and Howard County (9%). The respondents were grouped by six distinct roles: special education teachers, principals and school administrators, related service providers, paraprofessionals, general education teachers, and central office administrators. The majority of the respondents represented public comprehensive schools (67.3%). The remaining school representatives were public special schools (26.4%) and nonpublic schools (6.3%). Respondents from three school types completed the survey.

The survey solicited input on topic areas that included the role the respondents play in the Alt-MSA process, the usefulness of the Alt-MSA Handbook, time required to prepare for the implementation of the Alt-MSA, the validity of the Alt-MSA in assessing reading, mathematics and science skills, Mastery Objectives, and the availability and usefulness of resources to teachers.

Key findings of the survey are described below and are depicted in Appendix B.

- a) **The Handbook**—There’s no difference in the usefulness of the Alt-MSA Handbook to special educators and all respondents (including special educators). Sixty-two per cent (62%) of all the respondents and 63% of special education teachers find the handbook useful. One fifth was neutral and 18% do not find it useful.
- b) **Time to Prepare to Implement the Alt-MSA**—Almost 90% (89.3%) of special education teachers report that it takes four (4) hours or more to prepare to implement the Alt-MSA. Of that 89%, 45% reported that it takes them eight (8) or more hours per week to plan for the implementation of the Alt-MSA. It should be noted that the teachers shared in the focus group that the question was not clear, if the question was about one student or the entire class; however, they responded to the question for one student. The teachers also shared that the response options for this question is evidence that the state underestimates how long it takes them to prepare the Alt-MSA for one student. They shared that they often spend well over eight (8) hours per student, but the options in the question did not capture that.

- c) **Accuracy in Assessing Reading, Math and Science Skills**—Significantly more (54.5%) central office administrators than any other subgroup believe the assessment accurately assesses reading, math and science. Approximately one-quarter (27.3%) of central office administrators and almost 40% of principal/school administrators disagree that the Alt-MSA accurately assesses reading, mathematics and science skills. 62.0% (more than twice as many central office administrators) of special education teachers disagree that the Alt-MSA accurately assesses reading, mathematics and science skills. This percentage is exceeded by related service providers, of which 81% disagree that the Alt-MSA accurately assesses reading, mathematics and science skills.
- d) **Mastery Objectives**—The respondents expressed an interest in seeing more science Mastery Objectives in the Alt-MSA Mastery Objective bank. Of the existing objectives in the Mastery bank, 61% of the respondents find the reading objectives adequate and 57% find the math objectives adequate. Fewer (44%) respondents find the science objectives adequate. 56% of special education teachers report that the Mastery Objectives bank is adequate and 44% think it's not adequate. For all respondents, Science Mastery Objectives are reported as least adequate. However, over 40% of the respondents reported that they are adequate.

Significantly more respondents disagree that the Mastery Objectives can be linked to functional skills than those who agree (65% disagree and 27% agree). The responses concerning whether or not the Mastery Objectives can be linked to functional skills do not differ greatly for all respondents and the various subgroups. Those in both groups who agree that the Mastery Objectives can be linked differ by 1% (27.5% vs. 26.4%) and those who disagree differ by 2% (55% vs. 57%). When compared with those who believe that Mastery Objectives can be linked to functional skills, twice as many respondents in the all-respondent and the special education group believe that the Alt-MSA Mastery Objectives cannot be linked to functional skills.

- e) **Redesign of Alt-MSA**—Most respondents (74%) would like to see (1) the requirement for alignment to science in two reading and two mathematic Mastery Objectives for non-assessed science grades (Grades 3, 4, 6, and 7) be eliminated and (2) more respondents (45% vs. 32%) would like to see the elimination of the 5 alignment Mastery Objectives to reading and mathematics for the assessed science grades (Grades 5, 8 and 10), replacing them with 5 science Mastery Objectives for a total of 10 science Mastery Objectives.
- f) **Available Resources**—Slightly more respondents (36% vs. 33%) reported that they do not have adequate resources and supports to assist them in successfully implementing the Alt-MSA. Exemplar Artifacts (70%) are found most useful, followed by the MSDE Alt-MSA Content Guidance Documents (36%), Mdk12.org website (34%), Alt-MSA Online Professional Development Modules (29%), and Condition Code Packet (25%).

- g) **Perceived Competence**—67% of the respondents reported that they feel competent in science, compared with 94% in reading and 91% in math. Respondents reported that they need training most in artifact selection and development (60%) and least in selecting/writing Mastery Objectives (18%).
- h) **How the Mastery Objectives of Alt-MSA are Linked to Functional Skills**—When asked how the teachers link Alt-MSA Mastery Objectives to the functional skills of their students, the three most prevalent responses were (1) they align the Mastery Objectives to IEP goals, (2) it is impossible, difficult, most difficult or very difficult to align the Mastery Objectives to IEP goals, and (3) they align the Mastery Objectives to functional skills. Of the three responses, most of the respondents thought it was not possible or very difficult to do, followed by those who linked them to IEP goals, and then by those who linked them to functional skills. If the frequency for those who link the Mastery Objectives with IEP goals is combined with the frequency of those who link them with functional skills, this option will be the most prevalent option, followed closely by those who believe it is not possible or very difficult to do so.
- i) **Most Helpful Resources and Supports**—A number of resources were identified as most/very helpful. Other teachers, Alt-MSA resources and weekly/monthly collaborative meetings were listed as the top three most helpful resources. These were followed by content teacher/specialists, working with special education teachers, colleagues with previous Alt-MSA experience, and school test coordinators.
- j) **Recommend Changes to the Design of the Alt-MSA**—Four recommendations for a redesign of the Alt-MSA were most salient: reduce/limit the number of objectives and artifacts (reading and math) required for testing, provide an online bank of sample State approved artifacts that can be modified or are on 3 instructional levels, provide a standardized test like the MSA that can be modified to students' needs, and eliminate the Alt-MSA procedure for students.

Survey Recommendations:

1. *Teachers report that an excessive amount of time is required to prepare for the Alt-MSA. Redesign the Alt-MSA so that it does not require as much time or provide substitute staff to free up teachers to work on Alt-MSA.*
2. *The majority disagrees that the Alt-MSA accurately assesses reading, math and science skills. Base the assessment on the student's developmental age and not their chronological age.*
3. *On average, 54% of the respondents find the Mastery Objectives bank adequate. Create a Mastery Objective bank that teachers can choose from to meet various students' academic and cognitive levels.*
4. *Most respondents support a redesign of the Alt-MSA. Align science in two (2) reading and mathematics Mastery Objectives for non-assessed grades and eliminate the five (5) alignment Mastery Objectives to reading and mathematics. Reduce the number of objectives from twenty (20) to ten (10).*

5. *More respondents reported that they do not have adequate resources and supports to assist them. Provide a website with all teaching resources and printable materials. Provide teacher support forums. Convene annual teacher training at the beginning of each school year. Assign a MSDE staff person whose sole duty is to respond to Alt-MSA related queries. Provide school and county level teacher collaboration meetings.*

II. Activity #2: Regional Public Forum-Listening Sessions

Five (5) public forums were convened throughout the state of Maryland. The public forums were held in Frederick, Talbot, Charles, Prince George’s and Montgomery counties. To recruit participants for the public forums, a public release notice was sent from the MSDE to each school district’s communication department. The staff at the MSDE also sent the notice to the Department of Special Education Offices and the Testing Offices for each school district. The staff also recruited non-public schools by working with their non-public school’s Local Accountability Coordinator. The public release notice was sent out to all local school systems on December 1, 2011.

All listening sessions were held during the week in the evening; from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Participants were allowed five minutes to provide verbal testimony and were invited to leave their written testimonies with the facilitator. Individuals who wanted to share their comments with the MSDE, but could not or did not wish to testify, were also invited to submit their written testimony by mail or electronic mail. Refer to Appendices C.1 to C.3 for session materials.

Table 1: Public Forum-Listening Sessions by Location and Date

Location	Date	Number of Verbal Testimonies
Urbana High School, 3471 Campus Drive, Ijamsville, MD 21754	12/8/2010	6
Easton High School, 723 Mecklenburg Avenue, Easton, MD 21601	12/9/2010	2
Thomas Stone High School, 3785 Leonardtown, Waldorf, MD 20601	12/15/2010	3
Laurel High School, 8000 Cherry Hill Road, Laurel, Maryland 20707	12/20/2010	10
Montgomery County Education Association, 12 Taft Court Rockville, Maryland 20850	2/3/2011	12
Total Verbal Testimonies		43

Forty-three (43) individuals provided verbal testimonies—mostly parents and teachers, along with two principals. Thirty-nine (39) written testimonies were submitted. The five most common issues addressed by individuals providing testimony are:

1. The appropriateness of the Alt-MSA for severely disabled students,
2. The amount of time required for teachers to prepare the test for administration,
3. The number of Mastery Objectives,
4. Scoring of the Alt-MSA, and
5. Medical exemption of children with severe disabilities from being assessed by the Alt-MSA (referred to mostly in written testimonials)

Concerns Expressed By Parents

The main concerns expressed by parents were the appropriateness of the test and the amount of time teachers spend preparing the test for administration. Few parents addressed the issue concerning medical exemption, and fewer parents addressed the issue of scoring. All of the parents used their disabled children as a reference point in their testimony. Some parents also used their children's disabled classmates to make their point. In doing so, they often shared details about the children's disabilities, their chronological age and their age of development.

- **Appropriateness of the Test**

In talking about the appropriateness of the test, many parents shared that there is a huge disparity between their children's chronological age and their children's age of development. For example, several parents shared that their children were at a chronological age of 15 years (10th grader) but were at the developmental stage of a child less than a year or less than two years of age. Some reported that their children were functioning at the age of a child as young as three months old.

A salient theme throughout the parents' testimonies was that the Alt-MSA tests the children on information they cannot learn due to their disabilities, and information that they do not need to know and will never use. For example, several parents shared they would be happy if their children learn basic functional skills such as hanging up their coat, toileting, hygiene, awareness of their surroundings, and a means of communication.

A strong and pervasive dissatisfaction with the Alt-MSA among parents is that the test assesses their children on subject matters that their children do not know and will never learn; therefore, the test is not a true reflection of their children's knowledge. For example, parents shared that the test results of their children whose developmental stage is that of an infant showed that their children can accurately solve word problems at the 10th grade-level. Other examples in the area of science are children who are asked to indicate the meaning of condensation. Their discontent is, this is a concept that their low functioning children will never need to know and in fact, do not know, yet test results often indicate that they successfully define the word.

Parents argue that their children should be taught and tested on content materials that are relevant to their children's developmental stage, not their chronological age. As one parent puts it, *"None of the children in my daughter's class can read or count without much help so how could a typo in one word that is being read by the teacher to the student make a bit of difference for her. This is simply a waste of every one's time. My child still doesn't know her ABC's fully much less reading a word like Ordinary."*

Parents further argue that their children's IEPs should guide the instruction they receive and should be the content of the test questions. A point that the parents made repeatedly is that they want their children to learn functional skills that will equip them to survive in life. One parent puts it this way... *"It is tragic to make a child do trial after trial*

until they can point to the quadrilateral or table of contents on a book when what they really need to master is their speech device and how to say they need help or hello.”

Other evidence that parents presented to support their point that the test is inappropriate is that the test is harmful to their children. One parent calls the process abusive. Another parent shared that her child uses these words in reference to the test -- "stop, get help, feel bad, go home". The same parent shared her opinion that the testing procedures have interfered with her child's access to a free and appropriate education as stipulated in her IEP. Another parent reports that her daughter demonstrates extreme frustration, disrupts other students, becomes emotionally upset, bites herself, cries and screams, and totally shuts down in her efforts to escape the emotional stress of the Alt-MSA. This parent argues that forcing her daughter to continue testing under such stressful conditions is disruptive to her health conditions and may generalize negative behaviors to all learning environments, undermining her progress and denying her full access to an appropriate education.

One parent wrote: *“My most angry objection is the falsification of data which misrepresents my child’s mastery of tasks when she has just endured and been coached to touch this item, point to that picture, do whatever they say so the process will end. I am extremely skeptical that valid and meaningful learning is occurring here. I worry that we are subjecting our children to learning stupid pet tricks. My child can do better and deserves better. I mean no disrespect to our teachers; they are amazing in their effort to pull this off. I just value them so much, that I want to ensure that they are allowed to REALLY give my child the education they were trained to give, not the one NCLB defines.”*

One parent shared that she believes her child's rights are being violated under IDEA. She further stated that she does not trust nor believe that the implementation of her child's federally protected IDEA can possibly be fully implemented in concert with the extensive goals proposed in the Alt-MSAs constructed for her. She stated that she believes this testing is a direct impediment to her access to a free and appropriate public education.

- **Amount of Time Teachers Spending Preparing the Test for Administration**
Parents reported that their main concern is that the vast amount of time that teachers spend preparing the test for administration takes away from the time the teachers should be instructing their children on life skills they need in order to become more functional in society. For example, one parent shared that she has learned from her daughter's teacher that it takes hours to prepare the test for each child in her class. According to the parent, *“This takes hours of evaluation on her part. Hours of class time that my daughter misses out on while the teacher makes up a test for each student. Then she must administer the test with the other students and find a good day to do that for each of them. Today she has informed me that she was instructed to redo two important and time consuming parts of the test because there was a typo on one of the counting exercisers and she included a ruler on another counting test.”*

One parent says, “*My most critical objection is to the time and resources taken away from the implementation of my child’s IEP and devoted to the Alt-MSA. Why sacrifice the IEP for the Alt-MSA? Teachers can’t do both and the fact is they are not doing both. These kids get access to their IEP’s in September and what’s left of the year after March.*” Another parent contended that the teachers are required to spend valuable teaching time completing mandated documentation of the Alt-MSA to the detriment of the potential progress on the students’ IEP goals.

- **Medical Exemption for Children with Severe Disabilities**

Parents have reported that due to the severity of their children’s disability, their children should receive medical exemption from being assessed by the Alt-MSA. The parents spoke specifically about children on home hospital teaching. They argue that if the children are too sick to be in school they are too sick to take the test. They further argue that the test has proven to be stressful and emotionally upsetting to the children; therefore, they should be exempted.

Concerns Expressed By Teachers

Teachers expressed much concern about all four issues: the appropriateness of the test, the time it takes to prepare the test for administration, the number of Mastery Objectives, and scoring.

- **Appropriateness of the Test**

All of the teachers that gave written or verbal testimonies shared that the Alt-MSA is not appropriate for students with severe disabilities. In general, they agree that the Alt-MSA does not represent the students’ cognitive levels; instead it demonstrates an activity/assessment that is not aligned with the students’ cognitive learning needs or learning style. The teachers shared that the test does not assess the true abilities or knowledge of the students. For example, testing students with severe cognitive disabilities who function at the level of an infant or toddler on multi-syllable words and biology is irrelevant. The teachers argue that they would rather spend their time doing what they were trained as an educator to do – equip students to maximize their potential in life and by doing so, teach students what is relevant to their life and build upon the students’ strengths. They propose that, because of the severity of these students’ disabilities, it will never matter if they can identify or define multi-syllable words they cannot pronounce or know about photosynthesis.

The teachers further shared that middle school grade level assessment limits in science are not appropriate for most students with significant cognitive impairments. The concepts are too difficult for them to understand and apply. The vocabulary is too hard for them to master. Abstract physics (Newton’s laws), chemistry (atomic theory), biology (genetics and cell biology), geology (rock cycle and plate tectonics) and astronomy make little or no sense to them and is not information they need to know or will ever use.

Teachers report that the Alt-MSA is unrelated to IEP goals and fundamental life skill needs. One teacher shared that she became frustrated when asked to add unrelated goals to the students' IEP so that they may align better with the Alt-MSA, when the students are already overwhelmed with essential goals on their IEP. This teacher states that writing these goals is against her better judgment of what is valuable information for the student to learn. A speech-language pathologist reports that many of her students with severe-profound special needs have IEP goals based on the Fundamental Life Skills Curriculum. Alt-MSA objectives are based neither on this curriculum nor on the goals that have been developed for each student by the special education team. Therefore, the Alt-MSA is not a valid measure of learning for these students.

One teacher wrote: *"I teach students with severe/profound disabilities and this assessment is really doing our students a disservice. It has changed the teacher's focus from teaching fundamental life skills (something they will need and use after they have graduated) to teaching an intensive grade level curriculum (something that they will never use after graduating). Last year I spent a month teaching my students how to graph trends in whitetail deer populations. It was a complete waste of my time and my student's time. It would have been so much more beneficial for me to spend more time teaching my student's how to feed or toilet them selves. We are not preparing our students for life after graduating by teaching them the objectives that are on the Alt-MSA."*

The teachers report that the Alt-MSA process has forced them to ignore the needs of their students. Because of the NCLB law, educators have been forced to operate under the notion that every child has the potential to learn at the same ability and level if the appropriate education guidelines and instruction are established. Because this is not the case, many children are left behind.

- **Amount of Time Teachers Spend Preparing the Test for Administration**

One teacher reported that, during Alt-MSA season, she works at least 60 hours per week, of which at least 25 hours are her personal time. She reports that, even though she works these long hours, she is *"never caught up with my IEP casework and there isn't time to address IEP objectives that don't fit into the Alt-MSA portfolio until the portfolios are finished. Almost everything in the portfolio is custom designed and modified several times each year for individual students. Each student needs 40 to 50 acceptable artifacts for his/her portfolio. With seven students, that amounts to 300 artifacts I need to obtain this year. I am assessing a total of 60 objectives for the Alt-MSA portfolios this season. That is a LOT of ground to cover with students who have intellectual disabilities. It takes at least two to three weeks for my students to learn concept or skill to "mastery" level, so I am trying to teach each student four to six objectives at a time."*

Another teacher said *"Alt-MSA DOES rob students of days and weeks of valuable instructional time. It uses up precious resources that could be put to better use"*

preparing meaningful instructional materials. It sets unrealistic and often unattainable goals that have little or no reflection on a student's learning needs.”

A number of the teachers shared that because they are not science teachers they are forced to spend many hours conducting research and educating themselves about the content materials for science.

- **Number of Mastery Objectives**

This was a fairly common concern among the teachers. In general, the teachers shared that there are too many Mastery Objectives. They contend that they are not able to accomplish the number of Mastery Objectives (20-25) in a six month time span. At best, they are most fortunate to accomplish half the objectives in six months. Also, the fact that few of the objectives offered for selection from the bank of Mastery Objectives are related to fundamental life skills further complicates the issue. There are some objectives with basic math (i.e. number line, counting, telling time); however, because they are required to be science imbedded, even the more functional skills become invaluable.

- **Scoring the Test**

Teachers reported that the scoring rules have made the test significantly burdensome for them. For example, the criteria for a portfolio to be acceptable are unclear. An artifact is sometimes denied for one student and accepted for another without explanation, therefore, the teachers cannot make the necessary adjustments to make the artifact acceptable. Condition codes have proven to be insufficient in explaining the weaknesses of a rejected artifact.

Also, a very common comment made by teachers in both written and verbal testimonies is the portfolio rules really test the teachers' ability to create Mastery Objectives or how well teachers follow State generated protocol for assembling student portfolios instead of the students' knowledge. Teachers validated this position by sharing in a number of testimonies that artifacts have been denied because of typographic errors that are made by teachers. Also, artifacts have also been denied because the means by which teachers have corrected their typographic errors – perhaps white out or crossing out and rewriting – are unacceptable. But no explanation is given regarding the acceptable way the corrections should be made or if corrections are acceptable.

The teachers in general agree that the Alt-MSA has become largely a measure of how well a teacher can make a “standardized” test instead of a measure of student performance (as compared to the MSA). In the absence of a standardized scoring system, portfolios are entirely rejected for clerical errors.

Concerns Expressed by Principals

Principals spoke mainly about the appropriateness of the test. They concurred with teachers and parents that the test is inappropriate for students with severe cognitive disabilities, and therefore suggested that the test be individualized according to each student's needs as

done with IEPs. One principal calls the Alt-MSA process a toxic asset that is dragging down the educational system of the state of Maryland. He describes the process as overwhelmingly complex with no obvious evidence that it improves the life of students with disabilities. He further stated that the test does not do what it is supposed to do – the Alt-MSA does not assess the students’ abilities, instead it assesses teachers’ ability to “jump through hoops.” Lastly, he argued that the Alt-MSA *“takes the State’s best educators away from their direct contact time with students. It wastes planning and training time.”* He recommends that the State *“find an assessment that will both comply with federal regulations and pay dividends for our students.”*

Recommendations:

- 1) Align the Alt-MSA to the students’ IEP goals instead of grade level standards by making them the primary focus for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Place more focus on functional skills, instead of the Alt-MSA, as students are not diploma bound.
- 2) Narrowly expand the medical exemption to Alt-MSA. This should be well defined as well as supported by a doctor’s note and approved by the IEP team. Allow flexibility for students who are distressed by the Alt-MSA to be exempt from taking it.
- 3) Create a large Mastery Objective artifact bank that teachers can choose from to meet various students’ academic and cognitive levels.
- 4) Condition codes are not enough to explain what is wrong with an artifact. A more explicit explanation should be given and not just a condition code so a teacher can understand why an artifact was considered non-scorable.
- 5) Do not include the disposition of Alt-MSA portfolios or artifacts in teacher performance ratings or reviews.
- 6) Disband the Alt-MSA and find an assessment that will both comply with federal regulations and benefit our students. Replace the Alt-MSA with an assessment that is individualized – one that will test the students at their cognitive level.
- 7) For the severely disabled students replace some of the academic based assessment with skills based assessments especially for middle and high school students who have transition goals in their IEPs.
- 8) Revise the assessments so that its objective not subjective.
- 9) Reconsider what value, if any, the mandated Alt-MSA actually brings to our State’s most challenged children.
- 10) Provide more guidance to teachers and take primary responsibility for the creation of the Alt-MSA while allowing special educators to make modifications as needed for their students. Provide a website with all teaching resources and printable materials.
- 11) Copies of the test or the scored portfolio should be kept at the school system location or at the very least, at a location in Maryland.

- 12) Reduce the number of Mastery Objectives required and devote fewer months to testing. Reduce the requirements of the Alt-MSA to allow more time to teach relevant life skills to the students.
- 13) Create a larger Mastery Objective bank that the teachers can choose from to meet each student's cognitive level. The bank of Mastery Objectives needs to be relevant to the needs and developmental levels of students with significant cognitive disabilities.
- 14) Make the rules to obtain approval of a portfolio less burdensome.
- 15) Design the Alt-MSA so that the students come first, not AYP, and not the budget.
- 16) Allow a 5-day minimum for a student to master an objective. If a student masters an objective before 5 days then we should accept it as it is.
- 17) Students should not be penalized for non-scored artifacts.
- 18) Standardize how the artifacts are scored. An artifact should be scored the same way at all times.
- 19) Standardize the science artifacts.
- 20) Do not test students at all three grade levels—6th, 7th and 8th grades.
- 21) Design the Alt-MSA to evaluate student learning and not how well the teachers can follow State generated protocols and assemble student portfolios.
- 22) Review other states' tests to restructure the Alt-MSA (i.e., Pennsylvania, Kentucky, California, and Michigan).
- 23) Provide personnel to each school in the State to directly support preparation of the portfolio.
- 24) Provide further opportunity for individuals to give feedback in compliance with SB 557.
- 25) A thorough redesign of the Alt-MSA assessment is needed as Maryland's narrow-minded, bureaucratic approach is not beneficial to our students, teachers, or our schools.

III. Activity #3: Focus Groups

A total of seven focus groups were scheduled: one with advocates, two with teachers, three with principals, and one with parents. Forty-two (42) individuals participated in seven focus groups: nine advocates, 11 teachers, nine parents, and 13 principals. All scheduled focus groups were convened, except one teacher session. Due to impending inclement weather, no one attended that focus group.

Each local school system (LSS) appoints an Alt-MSA Facilitator to serve as a liaison between the MSDE and the local school system. To recruit participants for the Focus Group sessions, each LSS Alt-MSA Facilitator was asked to recommend and contact one teacher and one principal to participate in the respective Focus Groups, with one of their recommendations representing the special schools population. The Facilitators were asked to share the purpose of the meeting, as well as the dates and times of the Focus Group

sessions. The names of interested persons were submitted to the MSDE by December 17, 2010. Representation by non-public schools was coordinated with the non-public school’s Local Accountability Coordinator. The majority of the school districts submitted names for each group except for four school systems. All official invitations to the Focus Group sessions for principals and teachers were sent by January 12, 2011.

The parent Focus Group was assembled by recommendations to the MSDE from Alt-MSA Facilitators, Special Education State Advisory Committee (SESAC), Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee (SECAC) and Partners for Success, or by a parent contacting the MSDE directly expressing an interest to participate. An email invitation was sent on January 3, 2011 to parents to participate in the parent Focus Group on January 31, 2011. Parents who attended represented the full spectrum of students who participate in the Alt-MSA based on meeting the eligibility requirements, not just one particular group of students who participate in the assessment. This allowed the MSDE to gather information from parents who represent all groups of students who participate in the Alt-MSA.

Each Focus Group session was held for two hours. All sessions were convened and facilitated by Dr. Rosemarie Downer. A note taker was present for each session and each session was recorded to ensure a full account of information shared. To make certain that information on the same issues were collected from each subgroup, the Focus Group sessions for each subgroup were guided by a standard set of questions. However, in order to obtain detailed information, the facilitator sometimes probed by asking follow-up questions. Refer to Appendices D.1 to D.4 for the Focus Group guiding questions.

Table 2: Focus Groups by Participant Subgroup and Date

Participants	Date	Number
Teachers	January 19, 2011	11
Principals	January 20, 2011	9
Principals	January 25, 2011	4
Parents	January 31, 2011	9
Advocates	February 1, 2011	9
Teachers	February 10, 2011	0
Special School Principals	March 21, 2011	14
Total Participants		56

The key topics on which feedback was sought in the focus groups included:

- The relation of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 to Alt-MSA,
- The relation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 to Alt-MSA,
- Preparation of teachers to administer the Alt-MSA,
- Preparation of the Alt-MSA for administration,
- Perception of the Alt-MSA,
- Administration of the Alt-MSA, and
- Use of the results of the Alt-MSA.

The eight most salient themes from all seven focus groups are listed below.

1. Teach and assess students with severe cognitive disabilities on functional skills that align with their stage of development, not academic grade level content materials. Align the Alt-MSA to the IEP and the developmental stage of the students, rather than grade level content.
2. Provide teachers with an artifact bank that includes artifacts appropriate for students whose cognitive level is that of an infant. The artifacts should be written on multiple levels for every Mastery Objective in the system.
3. Expand the medical waiver to allow students who are severely disabled to be exempted from being assessed.
4. Base the outcome of the assessment on the students' performance, not the teachers' performance and not the teachers' ability to create artifacts. Do not penalize the children for clerical errors made by teachers.
5. Allow the assessment to be flexible and specific to each child's developmental stage, ensuring the validity of the assessment.
6. Create a mandatory checklist across the board that clearly states that Alt-MSA is not diploma bound and make it mandatory that parents sign off on this.
7. Provide more specific/more detailed feedback to teachers on artifacts that cannot be scored. Provide explanations to the codes that are attributed to each artifact.
8. Reduce the number of Mastery Objectives.

Common themes in the responses of the participants to each key topic by subgroup are as follows:

A. The relation of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 to Alt-MSA

- **Advocates:** While the majority of the advocates agree that the requirements of the NCLB are fine, but the steps taken to meet them are not beneficial to all students, a few felt that the NCLB law is a complete farce and it bears no relationship to children with disabilities. First, there is no evidence that the results of the Alt-MSA are used to improve the quality of the test. Second, the State is struggling with how to test students with significant disabilities on academic content in a way that makes no sense. They also stated that before NCLB, data were not collected on the performance of students with disabilities. During that time, it appeared as if students with disabilities did not matter, but with NCLB, that is not the case. Because of poor application of the law; however, children who should not be in Alt-MSA are being placed in Alt-MSA status because schools are worried about their test scores and how they will affect their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

- **Teachers:** The teachers shared that the NCLB law in general is a wonderful idea because it sets a standard in the educational arena. However, its application of academic content standards is not appropriate or realistic for students who are working on functional life skills. While adhering to this law, there should be a means by which it can be determined when and where the law applies to students at different levels of development. The teachers further added that because this law is applied for all students, it is not meeting the criteria for IDEA.
- **Principals:** The NCLB law has made a big difference in the educational arena because prior to its institution, there was no way to assess the progress of students with severe disabilities. With the NCLB law there are no hidden populations; everyone is held accountable. It is good that every child is now being tested because it allows teachers to see how students are performing, regardless of their level. Test results can guide us on what needs to be done to help the students. Also, because the students are being tested, it has raised the expectations of the students being tested. Principals also report that they like the fact that the modified MSA (Mod-MSA) is available to accommodate the students who may not be able to take the regular MSAs but are too advanced for the Alt-MSA.

The NCLB also requires teachers to delve into the content standards and make sure they clearly understand what those content standards are and then be able to break that information down into discreet points of content to test student with severe disabilities. Also, because the students with severe disabilities are being tested, it provides teachers with specific information about their children's performance that they can share with parents about their children.

- **Parents:** According to the parents, the NCLB law has benefitted students because of its focus on academic standards. However, assessing a child that is blind and deaf is a waste of teachers' time. They report that the law is good, it sets an expectation and it provides accountability, but the way in which MSDE applies it is damaging to severely disabled students. According to them, schools across the State are falling apart because of the erroneous application of the law.

B. The relation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 to Alt-MSA

- **Advocates:** All of the advocates agree that IDEA is poorly applied. They all concur that some students are treated like students with significant cognitive disabilities when that is not the case. This is done so that they can be moved into the Alt-MSA status. Autism is a disability that they highlighted as a case in which this often happens. They further added that decisions are being made at the third grade level and so students are often not taught the content areas.
- **Teachers:** The teachers shared that the current system does not adhere to the requirements of IDEA for students with severe disabilities. They added that in

order for the MSDE to come in compliance with IDEA; the school system must provide a State curriculum that aligns with the developmental needs of severely disabled students. In doing so, there could be a statewide assessment with appropriate subject and content.

- **Principals:** The IDEA levels the playing field for students with severe disabilities. It measures the same content standards but how the assessment is conducted is the concern. There is still a need to truly individualize the Alt-MSA.
- **Parents:** Interpretation and implementation of the regulations of IDEA are not clear. The school district and teachers are aware of the law; however, they are prohibited from complying with its regulations because of dictates they receive from school leadership and special education directors. These directives are often given in the interest of the budget.

C. Preparation of teachers to administer the Alt-MSA

- **Advocates:** None of the advocates felt that teachers are prepared to administer the Alt-MSA. They do not believe teachers receive sufficient preparation or support. They also stated that no specific training that is tailored to the Alt-MSA is made available to teachers. Furthermore, they added that teachers do not receive clear and informative feedback about their performance pertaining to Alt-MSA, so they are not learning from their mistakes. In addition, the State does not provide interactive training modules for teachers.
- **Teachers:** Most of the teachers reported that with repeated exposure to the Alt-MSA process, they have come to feel increasingly competent, but it was not due to training provided by the MSDE. The teachers did emphasize; however, that experience with the Alt-MSA often does not help because the policies and procedures frequently change. They reported that, besides the Alt-MSA Handbook, the MSDE provides little to no training. They shared that they attended a course that was offered by the MSDE that was designed by the experts, but it was not helpful. This training proved useless because the experts were not able to align the academic grade level content to the students' developmental stage.

Other teachers added that they meet once per month with other teachers to support one another. Others added that at least once per year they review the key points in the Handbook as a group along with the instructional assistants. Some teachers also shared that their county selects Mastery Objectives for each category during the summer and the resource team then creates the adaptive text for each Mastery Objective. Others added that instructional assistants come to their school to offer assistance periodically.

- **Principals:** Some principals reported that they developed an Alt-MSA testing team and brought in teachers/experts to work with the team once per month to review and develop artifacts. Others reported that they have countywide meetings and workshops with content specialists to help prepare the teachers.

Other principals have provided sub days to all teachers to allow time to prepare Alt-MSA artifacts. Some principals were able to get nine additional sub days, which help to release pressure on teachers to create artifacts and work with students both at school and in homes. Some principals reported that they have one administrator assigned to the Alt-MSA. These administrators offer technical assistance and support to the teachers to aid them in administering the test.

Some principals offer workshops to work on artifacts where subject areas are rotated and where general education teachers work together with the Alt-MSA teachers. The teachers participate in support groups, which are held twice yearly where general education specialists present at these groups.

- **Parents:** All of the parents shared that they are proud of the teachers. One parent of a student who attends a private school shared that she is particularly impressed by the efforts her daughter's teachers make to work with her, especially because her daughter has seven different major disabilities. The parents believe that, unlike teachers in private schools, teachers in public schools are not prepared to work with students with severe disabilities. All teachers are described as dedicated and committed.

The parents further shared that the teachers cannot do a good job because they have too many students and too many different IEPs. In addition, it's difficult for the teachers to effectively handle their caseload because of the many changes and directives they receive from the MSDE. Due to limited training, teachers are unaware of how to incorporate functional life skills into academic content. Furthermore, they are not fully knowledgeable of how to administer the Alt-MSA in the context of the classrooms when the students are included in the regular education setting. The parents claim that teachers are not adequately trained to administer the test when the students are in a regular education setting.

The parents also report that the complexity of the Alt-MSA requires a tremendous amount of preparation time, which takes away from instructional time for the students.

D. Preparation of the Alt-MSA for Administration

- **Advocates:** The advocates believe that teachers are not prepared to administer the Alt-MSA because very limited preparation or support is offered to the teachers and if any training is provided, it is not specifically tailored to the Alt-MSA. The advocates believe that teachers do not understand the Alt-MSA criteria. They

further shared that there is no mechanism in place to provide feedback to the teachers. Also, the pressure on the teachers to help ensure that their schools make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) forces them to “teach to test” and “test to the test”.

- **Teachers:** The teachers reported that they met several challenges in preparing the Alt-MSA for administration. One of their biggest challenges is time. They report that they spend a significant amount of their personal time – weekday evenings and weekends – preparing the test. According to them, it takes a tremendous amount of time to prepare for the test. Examples of descriptors the teachers use to describe the amount of time it takes to prepare to administer the Alt-MSA are: excessive, unreasonable, wasteful, time-consuming, monumental, depressing, and overwhelming.

The testing window is several months long and for those months the teachers are mainly focused on the Alt-MSA, which leaves them with very little time (if any) to address IEP goals (functional life skills goals). The teachers propose that these are the goals that their students really need to address, but because of the demands of the Alt-MSA they do not spend sufficient time teaching their students what they really need to know.

Some teachers reported that not having someone to proofread their portfolio before submission has been challenging for them. In summary, the teachers report their feelings as follows:

- “We are frustrated”.
 - “We feel like we have cheated”.
 - “We feel fraudulent”.
 - “We need more appropriate materials/resources and an artifact bank”.
 - “Find another means of testing the students that is not so painful”.
- **Principals:** The principals reported that high stress and fear of failure (preparing artifacts that are not accepted) inhibits teacher performance. The teachers are not content specialist. This makes it more difficult for them to create the artifacts needed to test the students. Creating artifacts for students with significant cognitive disabilities and aligning Mastery Objectives with IEP goals require specific skills that teacher education programs do not teach teachers.

In addition, the teachers were not prepared for the amount of time it takes to prepare the test. They describe the time it takes to prepare the Alt-MSA as enormous and challenging. They added that it takes away from the time teachers have to plan their lessons, teach, or perform their primary duties as a teacher. The principals further added that the lack of teacher support related to the Alt-MSA adds to the teachers’ stress level.

The principals reported that teachers have sufficient resources available to assist them but they are overwhelmed. Creating artifacts is a standing challenge for the teachers, but aligning the science material is the main challenge.

To help prepare teachers, some principals designate a half-time teacher who double checks the accuracy of artifacts and how they are aligned with the students' IEP goals. School principals have also adjusted the caseload of the person on their staff who is responsible for the Alt-MSA so that they can focus on the Alt-MSA.

- **Parents:** In general, parents do not think teachers are well prepared to administer the Alt-MSA. One parent in the Focus Group, whose child attends a private school, spoke very highly of private school teachers. She applauded the teachers for working very hard with her daughter who has multiple disabilities. All of the parents whose children attend public school unanimously shared that teachers of public schools are not adequately prepared to administer the Alt-MSA.

E. Perception of the Alt-MSA

- **Advocates:** The advocates reported that the students' IEP goals do not align with the Mastery Objectives of the test. They also shared that the test is not valid because the test is not standardized and it is unclear what the students are being measured against. They further added that the test is not accurate and the pressure to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) makes teachers “teach and test to the test”, which lowers teaching standard expectations in order to meet AYP. They added that because of the complexity in creating a highly individualized test for students with significant cognitive disabilities, the State resorted to the Alt-MSA, thus lowering teaching standards. They think the Alt-MSA process is demoralizing to teachers and that teachers instead of students are being evaluated.

When asked what parents think about the Alt-MSA, the advocates report that even though there is no relation with the two, the structure of the Alt-MSA forces teachers to focus more on the Mastery Objectives of the test instead of the students' IEP goals. To support their point, they added that teachers complain that their time is being taken away from regular teaching.

- **Teachers:** The teachers strongly believe that because of the demands of the Alt-MSA process, it takes time and resources away from the instruction students with severe disabilities need. Therefore, their IEP goals are not being addressed. As a result, they are not learning what they need to learn for the future. According to them, this places the Alt-MSA out of alignment with IDEA. The teachers report that they administer the Alt-MSA in order to comply with the requirements of the MSDE, but they truly do not believe in it. They add that parents often complain that the teachers are spending too much time on academics and not on their children's IEP goals.

The teachers also questioned the validity of the test. They shared that they must create a different test for each student. There is no standardization to the test; therefore, there is no reported test validity. Also, there is no standard scoring system for the artifacts. For example, artifacts that were submitted for two separate students have been approved for one and not the other without explanation. Furthermore, artifacts are being rejected because of clerical errors (such as wrong date) made by the teachers. They report that the test shows how much teachers have taught to the test and how well teachers can make/create artifacts. Teachers are evaluated on how well they can follow instructions not how much the students know. The teachers strongly believe that the rating of the test depends more on teacher performance instead of student performance.

Teachers add that the process is demoralizing and very stressful – they feel as if they are lying about their students’ capabilities because the Alt-MSA is not a true indicator of what students understand but they are required to make it appear as if the students understand the materials. They feel as if they are being punished for something they are not well trained to do and they feel as if whether or not their school makes AYP depends heavily on their students passing the Alt-MSA. Therefore, despite all the challenges they face, the burden is on them to make sure their students pass the test. Some teachers added that although they are not directly penalized when a portfolio or an artifact fails, they feel responsible. They share that the entire process challenges their integrity and professional capabilities.

Teachers believe that parents do not understand the purpose of the test. Most parents want their children to learn the materials that are most useful and relevant to them, which is often in their IEP goals. Therefore, many of them question and challenge the value of teaching their children grade level academic content. The teachers unanimously and strongly state that the Alt-MSA does not accurately reflect or test the students’ skills, knowledge and performance.

Very few teachers see a link between Alt-MSA, the IEP and classroom instruction. Those who see a link also stated that making that link requires an inordinate amount of time and sometimes the resources they need to prepare the artifacts are not readily available. Very few teachers believe that students with significant cognitive disabilities can meet State academic content standards but that depends a lot on the sample of students and the grade level content.

- **Principals:** In the principals’ opinion, the Alt-MSA reduces the time teachers have to teach students so that they can meet their IEP goals. It reduces the amount of time given to students to learn the functional skills they need to make them independent. Instead teachers teach what they intend to test the students on in the Alt-MSA. Teachers are driven by the contents of the test and they have to be creative when making artifacts so the students can learn.

The principals agree that the requirements and results of the Alt-MSA influence their schools' priorities or initiatives but they were doubtful that they were having the influence they want them to have. The main influence is it drives their pursuit for AYP. They shared that making AYP is important to everyone. School principals and school districts will and have reallocated resources to help schools make AYP.

AYP is a priority for school principals. They report that if they do not make AYP, it is announced in the local newspaper and they must go through peer review with the MSDE. They shared that the pressure from the MSDE to make AYP is very intense. To add to the pressure, they must be able to provide justification if they do not make AYP. Making AYP influences staffing resources, for example the number of support personnel that goes out to the schools may increase if a school does not make AYP, and School Improvement Plans are based on obtaining AYP.

The principals further shared that the students' performance is linked to teachers' performance. Students fail because of clerical errors made by teachers. They believe that the Alt-MSA does not accurately reflect student skills, knowledge and performance neither does it accurately assess the reading, mathematics and science skills of the students. Functional goals are not aligned with the Alt-MSA.

The principals agree that the Alt-MSA raises expectations and it drives classroom instruction. It also gives students access to materials that they may not have had before. However, the principals question if they are adequately preparing students for life skills. When asked how the Alt-MSA impacts teachers, the principals shared that if a teacher consistently fails to design artifacts that are accepted by the MSDE, the results are used in their review/appraisal. Conversely, if the school makes AYP, they celebrate and openly recognize the Alt-MSA teachers.

- **Parents:** Parents in general reported that they do not see a link between Alt-MSA, their children's IEP and classroom instruction. One parent shared that her child was working on grade level content in the general education setting and the school felt that her child qualified for the Alt-MSA and placed her in an Alt-MSA setting where she was being taught below grade level content. All of the parents felt that because the emphasis is on the Alt-MSA, the provisions in the IEP goals prepare students more for the Alt-MSA than functional life skills. As a result, they are outraged. According to them, the schools should not allow the Alt-MSA questions/objectives to become a part of the students' IEP. They propose that the Alt-MSA and the IEP are to be different. One parent says "The Alt-MSA is the enemy of the IEP".

In general, the parents agreed that the Alt-MSA has a negative impact on both students and teachers. According to them, teachers spend too much time on the test, teachers are critiqued based on students' performance, and teachers are fearful that they may lose their jobs if students fail. They did add however, that in

some cases because of the Alt-MSA, students with disabilities have learned information that they would not have learned otherwise and have proven that they can do more than what was expected.

The parents shared that the aspect of the Alt-MSA that's most confusing to them is what qualifies a student to participate or not participate in the Alt-MSA. They added that the Alt-MSA does not accurately reflect their children's skills, knowledge and performance and that the Alt-MSA does not accurately assess the reading, mathematics and science skills of their children.

A salient comment throughout the Focus Group session was that their children are being taught and tested on information that they cannot comprehend and will never need. For example, children who function at fourteen (14) months are being taught and tested on the names of the planets and condensation. They also shared that the results of the test are false – they do not accurately reflect what their children know and can do. One parent shared that it is impossible for her daughter who doesn't even know the name of her school or even where she is at any given time to know the names of the planets.

Parents added that they are outraged because the entire process is obviously a disservice to their children, but the MSDE continues to implement it anyhow, mainly because of the pressure they place on the schools to make AYP. They added that they are aware that this is a mandate from the U.S. Department of Education but they are outraged that the MSDE does not find it worthwhile to advocate for their most at-risk students by seeking a waiver from the federal government.

Parents do not feel they are given enough information when they ask about the Alt-MSA. Whenever parents ask questions, teachers and principals direct them to the Alt-MSA Handbook. Several parents reported that they have had the opportunity to review their children's portfolio and ask questions before the portfolio is finalized. A few parents said they do not have the opportunity before or after the portfolio is completed. About half of the parents seem to understand their role; the other half does not.

F. Administration of the Alt-MSA

- **Teachers:** The teachers report that they spend a significant amount of time creating artifacts and choosing Mastery Objectives for students. They all reported that administering the test to home hospital students and to students on life support poses a real challenge to teachers, parents and the students. Another challenge is that parents question the appropriateness of the test and during the testing period, many parents keep their children at home to avoid exposing their children to the test.

The teachers also encounter challenges because of students' short attention span. The teachers report that they often lose the students' attention before they even begin testing. Because of the students' disabilities, they also find that the prompting can be confusing instead of helpful. Furthermore, they are allowed only one prompt per question and the definition for prompting changes every year, making it even more difficult to properly use prompts.

- **Principals:** The principals talked extensively about the challenges the teachers face in administering the tests to medically challenged students. They shared that it is very difficult to test students who are hospitalized. They equate this process to being abusive to the students and disrespectful to the parents. Several of them commented that if the students aren't well enough to be in school it is very unlikely that they are well enough to complete the test.

These medically fragile students are often absent from school; therefore they are sometimes not tested. The principals' frustration is, although there is good reason why these students are not tested, the MSDE forces them to test them and if they fail to do so, the school is penalized. They share that they have sought exemption for these students on many occasions but have been rejected repeatedly.

In addition, because of the number of days the severely ill students are absent from school, they sometimes are not tested and this reflects poorly on the teachers and schools. Furthermore, some parents try to protect their children from the test by keeping their children away from school. The students also have very short attention spans. This makes it very difficult to complete the test let alone initiate the test in many cases.

Additional challenges they talked about included getting parents to understand the appropriateness of the assessment. Parents question the validity of the assessment. They think it is a waste of time. Teachers are faced with the challenge of working with parents who perceive the assessment as such.

According to the principals, teachers have significant difficulties aligning the sciences. Many of the teachers do not have a science background, so understanding the materials, and even more so, teaching the information is very challenging. Teachers are terrified to get anything wrong as any error will result in the rejection of the entire portfolio. Teachers are fearful because making AYP relies heavily on these students passing the Alt-MSA. Furthermore, it is most frustrating to the teachers and unfair to the students because a single teacher error can fail a student.

Concerning the potential link between Alt-MSA, the IEP and classroom instruction, most principals believe there is a link. However, they state that it is very difficult to get teachers to understand the link. Furthermore, there is no available training that addresses this specific issue and colleges do not prepare

teachers to do this.

They added that it is difficult to administer the Alt-MSA in the general education setting and students who take the Alt-MSA are expected to pass, even though it is not administered at their cognitive level. They further added that while it is difficult to align the academic content of the Alt-MSA with the developmental stages of the students, it can be done, but it is difficult to change the mindset of teachers.

G. Use of the Alt-MSA Results

Both teachers and principals felt that the results of the Alt-MSA have a significant impact on teacher performance reviews and ultimately teachers' feelings of competence, work morale and job satisfaction. Teachers whose artifacts are repeatedly rejected can begin to feel incompetent and become dissatisfied with their job. If this is the case, school principals often address it during performance reviews. The teachers report that this is a very frustrating experience for them, because despite their efforts they cannot seem to learn what makes a successful artifact because the MSDE does not provide them with sufficient feedback. The principals report that a meeting of this sort is uncomfortable for everyone, but they have to do it because of the pressure to make AYP.

The results of the Alt-MSA are also used to allocate resources to the schools. One principal shared that one year her school did not make AYP and she received additional resources from the school district to help her school make AYP the following year. Other principals shared that based on the success rate of their school, they have made administrative and staffing changes within their schools to increase resources to the Alt-MSA and to free up the Alt-MSA staff so that they can focus more on the assessment.

Recommendations by Respondent Groups

Teachers: The four most prevalent recommendations are listed first.

1. Provide resources for content areas and help teachers align them. Make resources more accessible. Provide a statewide bank of standardized approved Mastery Objectives and artifacts that teachers can use.
2. Provide more detailed feedback on artifacts that are not accepted.
3. Do not rate the quality or accuracy of a portfolio on the teachers' work. For example, do not reject a portfolio because of typographic errors made by teachers.
4. Provide more opportunity for collaboration among teachers. Allow collaboration at school and county levels.
5. Provide someone at the State level whose sole responsibility it to offer technical assistance to teachers about the Alt-MSA. Have an individual

whose job is to create artifacts for elementary, middle and high school students that can be modified.

6. Provide more Alt-MSA specific teacher training. Teach future educators the skills needed to align Mastery Objectives with functional skills. Offer an annual meeting/training at the beginning of the school year.
7. Replace the Alt-MSA with a standardized test like the MSA and HSA.
8. Allow more time for teachers to become familiar with the Alt-MSA Handbook. Do not make changes to the assessment during the school year testing period. If changes have to be made, make them effective the following testing period.
9. Give teachers their student caseload in August so that they can familiarize themselves with it before the school year begins.
10. Post Mastery Objectives during the summer so teachers can focus on creating artifacts instead of when the school year has already started.
11. Only select math and reading objectives for IEPs so that it's realistic for them to accomplish in one year.
12. Provide compensation for extra time teachers spend on Alt-MSA.
13. Decrease the number of Mastery Objectives to 5 for each content area.
14. Align the Mastery Objectives to a more functional curriculum. Teach and test the students at their level of cognitive development.
15. Allow teachers to make corrections to errors without rejecting the portfolio.
16. Notify teachers of changes across the board not individually.

Advocates: The five most prevalent recommendations are listed first.

1. Make the test an individualized test like the model that Kentucky uses where the students are tested at their level of development.
2. Allow for the measuring of infinitely small increments of progress.
3. Provide a mandatory checklist across the board that clearly states that Alt-MSA means a student is not going to earn a diploma and make it mandatory that parents sign off on it.
4. Address the issue of boxing parents into Alt-MSA placement at an early age.
5. Allow the assessment to be flexible making sure it's valid.
6. Disband the test entirely and start over.
7. Provide Alt-MSA specific staff development.
8. Allow functional life skills/goals to be included with academic content.
9. Provide a curriculum foundation with flexibility so that teachers don't have to create a curriculum themselves.
10. Provide a continuum of services across the entire learning spectrum to provide choices.
11. Include students in general education, and provide them with the differentiated instructions they need. Whereby teachers can take the curriculum and adapt it to avoid placing students in Alt-MSA status when that doesn't have to be the case.
12. Provide clarity on who calculates the 1%.

13. Discard the minimum IQ number of 70. Tester may question validity when there is a number.

Principals: The seven most prevalent recommendations are listed first.

1. Provide specific feedback when an artifact is not scored. Provide more clarity with conditional codes so that teachers can learn from their mistakes.
2. University education programs do not prepare teachers to align functional skills with academic content materials. Such a program should be offered by MSDE. Also, monthly support forums would be helpful to teachers.
3. Make funds available for substitute staff so that teachers can have time to create artifacts.
4. Do not punish the students for clerical errors/teacher mistakes.
5. Provide flexibility to exempt medically challenged students from the test.
6. Make the Alt-MSA about the students and not about schools making AYP.
7. Provide a bank of artifacts, suitable for all developmental levels, as a resource to teachers.
8. The MSDE should go to the schools instead of the county or have the information filtered down to the schools. Provide a contact at MSDE to provide technical assistance about the Alt-MSA.
9. Align science with math and reading language arts.
10. Provide clarification of what alignments are or what they look like. Provide examples of what the alignments should look like.
11. Support and understand that students with severe cognitive disabilities will have spotty attendance and may not be at school to be tested. Do not penalize schools for the absence of these severely disabled students during testing period.
12. Replace the Alt-MSA with an assessment that is sensitive to the students' cognitive abilities.
13. Use a modified curriculum.
14. Invest in software to aid teachers in their teaching.
15. Extend the test window. Allow more time to create the test and submit portfolios.
16. Use a consistent format when scoring artifacts.
17. Allow Alt-MSA teachers more exposure to the general education student body so that they won't be as isolated from non-Alt-MSA teaching staff.
18. Provide materials that have already been adopted, (i.e. unique curriculum and News-2-You).
19. Provide teachers with the Alt-MSA Handbook before school starts each year.
20. Allow eye gaze as a prompt.
21. Reduce the number of Mastery Objectives.
22. Shorten the testing window.
23. For medically challenged students, focus on the IEP goals, not academic content.

Parents: The five most prevalent recommendations are listed first.

1. Create an internal mechanism for data collection by general education teachers not only by special education teachers.
2. Look at the individual IEPs and see if the goals are being accomplished. If they are being accomplished, do not test on grade level content.
3. Do not base teacher performance on student performance.
4. Expand the medical waiver to exempt profoundly disabled students from taking the Alt-MSA.
5. Align the Alt-MSA to the IEP and according to the students' diverse needs, rather than grade level content.
6. Help teachers understand both functional life skills and academic content, so that students don't miss out on either one.
7. Help teachers understand Universal Design for Learning.
8. Create a bank of approved Mastery Objectives for use by teachers.
9. Use multiple-choice answers instead of open-ended questions.
10. It should be acceptable with the MSDE if students with severe cognitive disabilities learn to hang their coat and brush their hair but do not test on grade level content like regular students.
11. Test child on content level and not Functional Life Skills.
12. Limit the workload of teachers.
13. Allow parents to submit feedback based on teacher performance.
14. Do not let the Alt-MSA dictate the graduation track starting at the 3rd grade.
15. Change the Alt-MSA assessment for students that are profoundly disabled from academic content to functional life skills based.

Alt-MSA Advisory Group Recommendations

A presentation of the survey, public forum and Focus Group findings were made to the Alt-MSA Advisory Group on February 16, 2011. Below are the Advisory Group's recommendations. The six (6) most prevalent recommendations are listed first.

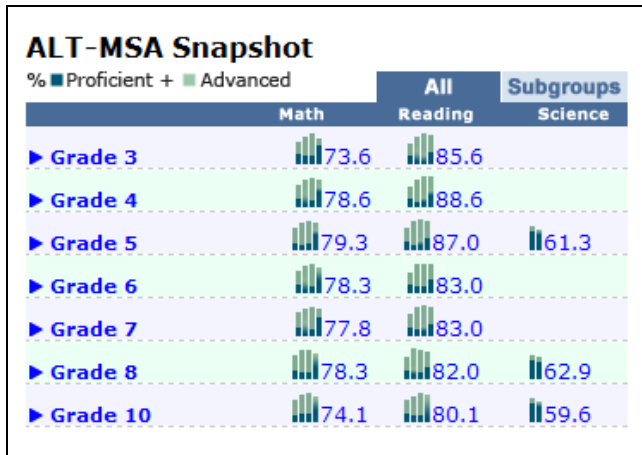
1. Develop a portfolio Bridge Plan for students who need to work on access skills (the 1% of the 1%).
2. Remove science alignment from grades 3, 4, 6 and 7.
3. Score the assessment for content only, not for compliance with clerical skills, presentation or format.
4. Increase professional development modules for teachers and administrators (i.e. rules) around adapting/modifying grade level curriculum and enhanced use of technology (i.e. Universal Design for Learning / UDL).
5. Clarify and make the use of the eligibility tool mandatory. Make tracking students - diploma or certificate bound - at an early age mandatory.
6. Create/enhance professional development modules on alignment of academic and functional skills and make them public.

7. Encourage observation of exemplary teachers/practices thru face-to-face or video.
8. Consult with national experts and consider an actual portfolio assessment, i.e. the Kentucky model.
9. Make training modules available to the public in all formats, i.e. PC and MAC compatible and add new training modules to existing one.
10. Changes that are made to the test during the test year should not affect scoring.
11. Student performance on the test should not be affected by clerical errors.
12. Include 10 (ten) accurate science, not 5 (five) embedded at grades 5, 8 and 10 but carefully weigh the impact on instruction at non-tested grades.
13. More emphasis should be placed on the relationship between testing and instruction.
14. Provide more financial support to schools.
15. Conduct monthly support forums for teachers.
16. Provide more information to parents about how Mastery Objectives are developed and selected from bank.

Alt-MSA State Results Data

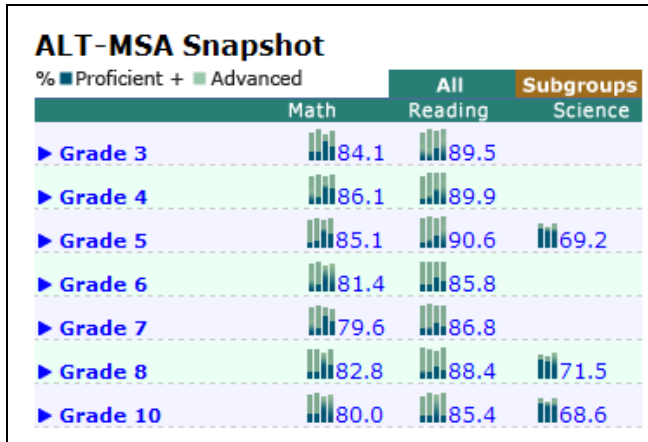
It is important to note the State performance for Alt-MSA results in 2009, 2010 and 2011 reflect high rates of proficient and advanced performance in all grades. Refer to Figures 3, 4 and 5 below.

Figure 1: State of Maryland 2009 Alt-MSA Results



Source: www.mdreportcard.org

Figure 2: State of Maryland 2010 Alt-MSA Results



Source: www.mdreportcard.org

Figure 3: State of Maryland 2011 Alt-MSA Results

Alt-MSA Snapshot			
% Proficient + Advanced			
	Math	Reading	Science
Grade 3	88.0	92.5	
Grade 4	87.6	89.7	
Grade 5	89.7	92.1	86.5
Grade 6	89.3	94.0	
Grade 7	91.3	94.4	
Grade 8	86.8	91.9	83.0
Grade 10	88.3	90.9	76.3

Source: Maryland State Department of Education

Recommendations Reviewed for Consideration

The MSDE has reviewed and analyzed all of the results from each activity held in response to Senate Bill 557 for consideration regarding the Alt-MSA. As the MSDE reviewed the results of the activities and considered the final recommendations regarding the Alt-MSA, it was important to consider that the NCLB, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and the IDEA Act 2004, are currently being reauthorized. The reauthorizations will require changes in instruction and assessment systems aligning to the National Common Core Standards. In order to accomplish a redesign of the Alternate Assessment System prior to imminent changes in federal law would create a burden to the State budget. The MSDE is sensitive to fiscal constraints while still considering making positive changes to the Alt-MSA. Therefore, the MSDE reviewed the most prevalent recommendations that were generated from this review and the costs associated with each one. In the chart below, listed are the ten (10) recommendations that appeared to be the most prevalent from all activities. These recommendations were reviewed and considered by the MSDE. Also included in the chart, is a response to each recommendation based on MSDE’s review, the cost associated with each recommendation, the status of the consideration, 2011/2012 implementation plan, future design consideration, and current and ongoing implementation plan.

Final Report Senate Bill 557-Alt-MSA Recommendations for Consideration			
Recommendation	MSDE Response	Timeline/Cost	Status
1. Develop a Bank of Mastery Objective Artifacts	Artifact development took place in 2010-2011 for the 2011-2012 school year. During the 2009-2010 Alt-MSA Item Mastery Objective Review, MSDE asked the group of Maryland teachers to recommend Mastery Objectives for artifact creation. A total of 84 artifacts were developed by the Alt-MSA vendor in collaboration with the MSDE Content Staff for the 2012 school year. In addition, the MSDE Online Professional Development Modules developed in 2010 includes an additional thirty-four (34) artifact pre-approved by the MSDE; twelve (12)-reading, eleven (11)-math, and eleven (11)-science. The artifacts were vetted by an Item Review Committee consisting of content specialists and Alt-MSA teachers from across the State. Reading-21 Math-27 Science-36	No additional cost was required for the development of 84 artifacts. This cost was replaced with the development of new Mastery Objectives for 2012 year as found in the current contract. Will return to the development of new Mastery Objectives for 2013 year as found in the current contract.	2011/2012 Implementation <u>Artifacts Developed</u> Reading-21 Math-27 Science-36 To be posted by September 1, 2011 (when the 2012 Alt-MSA test window opens).

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Recommendation	MSDE Response	Timeline/Cost	Status
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grade 5-15 • Grade 8-10 • Grade10-11 <p>The development of the artifacts was done in Microsoft Word for ease of accessibility for all teachers. Teachers can use their own artwork and adjust artifacts to fit their students’ needs. The final artifacts will be provided in a pdf format as well.</p> <p>If the teachers use the pdf format with no changes to the artifact, the scorers will automatically score the artifact for correct alignment to the MO. However, if the artifact is changed using the Word format, the artifact will not automatically be approved and the scorers will review for correct alignment to the MO. Although commonly used among teachers, BoardMaker was not acceptable for artifact development due to copyright requirements for Pearson and the lack of uniformity with various picture communication symbols.</p> <p>If the MSDE were to create artifacts for each Mastery Objective, it would be difficult for the MSDE to determine the complexity of each artifact based on individual student’s needs, which include but are not limited to: the student’s response mode, use of appropriate words, pictures, and number of questions to ask a student based on a Mastery Objective.</p>	<p><u>Future Development of Artifacts Costs</u> The bank currently contains 2,908 MOs. The creation of 3 artifacts per MO would produce a total of <u>8,724</u> artifacts. The price for each individual artifact is approximately \$1,235 which includes unique art and staff time to</p>	<p>Future Redesign Consideration</p>

Final Report Senate Bill 557-Alt-MSA Recommendations for Consideration			
Recommendation	MSDE Response	Timeline/Cost	Status
		<p>complete the development of each artifact. Total Cost is <u>\$10,774,000.00</u></p> <p><u>Item Review Meetings</u> Item Review Meetings will be approximately <u>\$109,141</u> per year. This cost includes the formation of 9 Item Review committees with 5 members each for a total of 45 local system participants.</p> <p><u>Alt-MSA Online System</u> The system would need to be refined so the teacher can view each available artifact during MO selection. The total estimated price for the development and quality review of this effort is <u>\$826,599.</u></p>	
2. Elimination of Science aligned Mastery Objectives in Reading and Mathematics in non-assessed grades (3,4, 6 and 7)	The MSDE is in favor of this recommendation; however, at this time, budgetary restraints prevent the MSDE from implementing this recommendation.	Pricing estimate is approximately <u>\$81,000.00 – \$85,000.00 as of March 7, 2011</u>	Future Redesign Consideration
3. Exemption/Excusal for the most significantly cognitive student (1% of the 1%)	<u>Exemption</u> is not an option. Based on USDE guidelines, only two exemptions are allowed. The first is that English language learners (ELLs) who are in their first year of enrollment in a U.S. school may	No Cost	2011/2012 Implementation Update included in the 2012 Handbook. Release date on

Final Report Senate Bill 557-Alt-MSA Recommendations for Consideration			
Recommendation	MSDE Response	Timeline/Cost	Status
	<p>substitute their test results on the English Language Proficiency Test for the Reading MSA rather than sitting for the MSA Reading test itself. The second exemption is a medical exemption, in which a student <i>cannot take the assessment during the <u>entire testing window (6 months for Alt-MSA)</u> because of a significant medical emergency.</i> A significant medical emergency is a significant health impairment that renders the student incapable of participating in ANY academic activities, including state assessments, for the testing window. According to Division of Accountability, Assessment and Data Systems (DAADS), only one medical exemption has been granted in the last five year for an MSA student.</p> <p>The MSDE is in favor of expanding the current <i>excusal</i> option allowed for participation in the Alt-MSA State Assessment to include medically fragile students who require full physical supports and are unable to demonstrate what they know and are able to do in the State academic curriculum. The IEP team may consider an <i>excusal</i> for such a student from participation in the Alt-MSA. Students who are excused from an assessment receive no score and no proficiency level designation. These students are treated as non-participants for accountability.</p>		<p>June 7, 2011 at the Local Accountability Coordinator and Alt-MSA Facilitator meeting.</p>
<p>4. Decrease scoring inconsistencies</p>	<p>The MSDE is in favor of this recommendation; however, at this time, budgetary restraints prevent the MSDE from implementing this recommendation.</p> <p>The Alt-MSA Quality Management</p>	<p>Scoring Proposal 1 is \$13,700 for one year</p> <p>Scoring Proposal 2 is \$13,700 for one year</p> <p>Scoring Proposal 3 is</p>	<p>Future Redesign Consideration</p>

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Recommendation	MSDE Response	Timeline/Cost	Status
	<p>Plan and the Alt-MSA Technical Report outline the quality controls implemented by the testing vendor to ensure scoring accuracy.</p> <p>Two key measurements utilized by Pearson at scoring are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Inter-rater Reliability Reports - used to document the percentage of time two scorers agree when scoring the same response. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. 2010 Alt-MSA IRR was 93.4% 2) Validity Reports - used to document what percentage of scores given agree with the “true score” determined by MSDE. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. 2010 Alt-MSA Validity was 80.7% <p>Alt-MSA has score points of 0 and 1, plus 17 condition codes. Alt-MSA is considered a multi-domain project. The reliability percentage for perfect agreement and the validity percentage of a multi-domain project (with 2 to 3 domains) are 65%. The Alt-MSA project has significantly exceeded the ISO standards for reliability and validity.</p> <p>The Alt-MSA testing vendor has recommended three scoring proposals as another measure to address scoring inconsistencies, which have cost implications.</p>	<p>approximately \$30,000 - \$36,000 for one year</p>	
5. Less focus on clerical errors associated with artifact requirements	<p>The MSDE is in favor of looking into this recommendation during future redesign of the Alt-MSA, once the reauthorization of NCLB and IDEA are final.</p>		Future Redesign Consideration

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Recommendation	MSDE Response	Timeline/Cost	Status
	<p>A Report to Principals, giving individual student results, is sent to the local school systems to provide feedback to the school team about how their student(s) performed on the Alt-MSA. This report provides additional information on the Alt-MSA scores, including the errors (known as “condition codes”) found in the artifacts during the scoring process. Examples of condition codes, which have been established based on the range finding and scoring process, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A student’s name is missing from an artifact.</i> • <i>The artifact date is incomplete or not present on the artifact.</i> This is a requirement of Alt-MSA to ensure that all artifacts are administered within the assessment window. In the past, assessment security concerns have been raised when dates on artifacts were misrepresented or changed. 		
6. Link to functional life skills	<p>The MSDE believes that the Alt-MSA provides the opportunity for functional living skills to be instructed and assessed within its current assessment. The Alt-MSA includes many MOs that align to functional life skills. Functional life skills should not be taught in a separate curriculum, but should be taught in the context of curricular content when appropriate.</p> <p>The IEP team has the opportunity to select clearly defined objectives that are developmentally appropriate, functionally relevant, and can be assessed on the Alt-MSA for students with severe and profound disabilities. If the IEP team does not see an MO that is appropriate for a student, the</p>	<p>No cost. Development of MOs would be covered under current contract.</p> <p>The price for each</p>	Current and Ongoing Implementation

Final Report Senate Bill 557-Alt-MSA Recommendations for Consideration			
Recommendation	MSDE Response	Timeline/Cost	Status
	<p>team may custom write an MO. New reading and mathematics MOs can be considered for development that are aligned to the MSDE content areas in the Health Curriculum and the Maryland Career Development Framework.</p> <p>Although the MSDE would like to consider artifacts development associated with new MOs developed, it would be a scope change to the current contract and would have a cost associated it.</p>	<p>individual artifact is approximately \$1,235 which includes unique art and staff time to complete the development of each artifact. Other cost would need to be included for an Item (Artifact) Review Process.</p>	<p>Depending on the number of artifacts developed it could be approximately a one to two year development timeline.</p>
7. Decrease the number of Mastery Objectives required	<p>The MSDE’s National Psychometric Council (NPC) determined that in order for the Alt-MSA to meet technical and validity requirements, there must be at least two test items/Mastery Objectives per content area. Decreasing the number of MOs to one MO per content area is not acceptable by the NPC.</p>		Future Redesign Consideration
8. Standardized test like MSA that can be modified to student needs	<p>Since each student participating in Alt-MSA has unique learning needs, the Alt-MSA test design allows decisions about reading, mathematics and science instruction and assessment related to the Maryland Content Standards to be made directly by the team that teaches the student, instead of by the State. Not every standard in the general curriculum must be taught for students with significant cognitive disabilities, it is not appropriate. The IEP team will determine what the most appropriate element from the standards selected is appropriate for a student to access and learn reading, math and science.</p>		Not a Consideration
9. Extending Testing Window	<p>The Alt-MSA Testing window cannot be extended due to data requirement timelines imposed by NCLB . The Alt-MSA testing window ends in early</p>		Not a Consideration

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Recommendation	MSDE Response	Timeline/Cost	Status
	<p>March. The scoring process takes approximately 10 weeks to complete. This scoring process includes: Rangefinding, Scorer training, scoring and data file clean-up. The USDE requires that all schools receive results prior to the end of the school year in order for schools systems to plan for the upcoming school year. Currently, local school systems receive Alt-MSA home reports during the first week in June.</p>		
<p>10. Elimination of Grade Band Requirements for Science</p>	<p>Currently, the Alt-MSA is designed with the reading and mathematics non-assessed embedded science Mastery Objectives (grades 3, 4, 6 and 7) and the accompanying artifacts containing accurate science as found in the science state curriculum (SC). Grade band requirements do not apply to non-assessed science grades, which allow the embedded science content to extend back to lower grades. The assessed grades (5, 8 and 10) must be from the specified grade bands (5, 8) and biology (10). Changing this requirement would have a cost implication. Understanding the flexibility at the non-assessed grade level may be an implementation issue requiring further training at the local level. The MSDE will address this in the upcoming year with Alt-MSA Facilitators.</p> <p>One of the recommendations from the September 2009 Alt-MSA Science Alignment Study is that the MSDE consider adding Mastery Objectives in the Skills and Processes Standard area. As a</p>	<p>As of March 7, 2011, the approximate cost is \$81,000 to \$85,000 due to the required refinements to the Alt-MSA Online site as well as the various Alt-MSA reports to include the parent, school, district and state level reports.</p> <p>New Mastery Objectives were added in the Skills & Processes Standard One area which has no grade band requirements and no cost implications</p>	<p>2011/2012 Implementation and Future Redesign Consideration</p>

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Recommendation	MSDE Response	Timeline/Cost	Status
	<p>result of this alignment study, additional Mastery Objectives were added to the Item bank. Beginning with the 2012 test administration for Alt-MSA, test examiners may select the skills and processes MOs. These MOs can align to any grade level in the State Curriculum (SC) and is not bound to highlighted assessment limits. Therefore, the content alignment can align anywhere within the SC regardless of the skills and processes SC grade alignment. This significant change will allow students to access the science content area for the skills and processes standards at the pre-kindergarten level.</p>		

Final Recommendations

The final recommendations accepted by the MSDE to be implemented in the 2011-2012 school year, with no cost implication, are listed below. All recommendations, including those not listed in the chart titled *Final Report Senate Bill 557-Alt-MSA Recommendations for Consideration* found on pages 39 to 45 of this report will be revisited when the MSDE begins the process of redesigning the alternate assessment following the reauthorizations of NCLB and IDEA.

1. Develop a Bank of Mastery Objective Artifacts

A total of eighty-four (84) new artifacts were developed by the Alt-MSA vendor in collaboration with the MSDE Content Staff for the 2011-2012 school year; twenty-one (21)-reading, twenty-seven (27)-mathematics, and thirty-six (36)-science. Maryland teachers recommended Mastery Objectives for artifact creation. The artifacts were vetted by an Item Review Committee consisting of content specialists and Alt-MSA teachers from across the State. The Committee also provided feedback for lesson seeds, modifying artifacts for different complexity levels, content guidance, prerequisite knowledge, and suggested activities. These suggestions were documented on an Artifact Support template, which will accompany each artifact and provide instructional guidance for the teachers.

The cost associated with this development replaced the development of new Mastery Objectives for the 2011-2012 school year as found in the current contract. In addition, the MSDE Professional Development Modules developed in 2010 include an additional thirty-four (34) artifacts preapproved by the MSDE; twelve (12)-reading, eleven (11)-math, and eleven (11)-science.

Although the recommendations were to create a bank of artifacts for each Mastery Objective, it would be difficult for the MSDE to determine the complexity of each artifact based on individual student's needs, which include but are not limited to: the student's response mode, the use of appropriate words, pictures, and the number of questions to ask a student based on a Mastery Objective. In addition, the bank currently contains 2,908 Mastery Objectives. The creation of three (3) artifacts per Mastery Objective would produce a total of 8,724 artifacts. The price for each individual artifact is approximately \$1,235 that includes unique art and staff time to complete the development of each artifact. The total cost is \$10,774,000. Due to fiscal constraints and the reauthorization of IDEA and NCLB, at this time, the MSDE cannot commit to such a cost. The MSDE will return to the development of new Mastery Objectives for 2013 year as found in the current contract.

2. Exemption/Excusal for the most significantly cognitive Student (1% of the 1%)

Based on USDE guidelines, only two exemptions are allowed. The first is that English language learners (ELLs) who are in their first year of enrollment in a U.S. school may substitute their test results on the English Language Proficiency Test for the Reading MSA rather than sitting for the MSA Reading test itself. The second exemption is a medical exemption, in which a student cannot take the assessment during the entire testing window because of a significant medical emergency. The Alt-MSA is a six (6) month testing window. A significant medical emergency is a significant health impairment that renders the student incapable of participating in any academic activities, including State assessments, for the testing window. According to the MSDE's Division of Accountability, Assessment and Data Systems (DAADS), only one medical exemption has been granted in the last five years.

The MSDE is in favor of expanding the current excusal option allowed for participation in the Alt-MSA to include medically fragile students who require full physical supports and who are unable to demonstrate what they know and are able to do in the State academic curriculum. The USDE participation requirement for all state assessments is 95% for the State, school districts and schools. This policy has been in effect since NCLB was passed in 2001. The IEP team may consider an excusal for such a student from participation in the Alt-MSA. Students who are excused from the Alt-MSA assessment will receive no score and no proficiency level designation. As required by NCLB, students will count in the "n" (n is the total number of students participating in the assessment) and be identified as a non-participant for accountability purposes. This could result in a school failing to make AYP. The process for submitting this excusal to the MSDE requires the local school system to submit supporting documentation for such an excusal for a verification review by the MSDE. The process to consider this excusal for a student eligible to participate in the Alt-MSA is

highlighted in the 2012 Alt-MSA Handbook. This handbook was released to local school systems on June 7, 2011.

3. Link the Mastery Objectives of the Alt-MSA to functional life skills of the students' IEPs

The MSDE believes that the Alt-MSA provides the opportunity for functional life skills to be instructed and assessed within its current assessment. The Alt-MSA includes many Mastery Objectives that align to functional life skills. Functional life skills should not be taught in a separate curriculum, but should be taught in the context of curricular content when appropriate. Reading and math skills taught using real life experiences are skills that can be considered functional skills. However, given the number of recommendations around this area, it is clear to the MSDE that this is an area that requires further support and guidance. Therefore, the MSDE will work closely with the Alt-MSA Facilitators from each LSS and representatives from nonpublic schools during the 2011-2012 school year to address this issue. The MSDE proposes developing guidance documents and training to highlight the Mastery Objectives that directly align to functional skills and how to implement those Mastery Objectives to meet the functional instructional needs of individual students.

In the current test design of the Alt-MSA, the IEP team has the opportunity to select clearly defined objectives that are developmentally appropriate, functionally relevant, and can be assessed on the Alt-MSA for students with severe and profound disabilities. If the IEP team does not see a Mastery Objective that is appropriate for a student, the team may custom write a Mastery Objective and/or back map within the curriculum to prerequisite skills at an earlier grade. However, in the feedback provided in the survey, it was clear that not all school systems allow their teachers to custom write Mastery Objectives and there is a lack of understanding of the back mapping process. This was addressed with Alt-MSA Facilitators at the June 7, 2011 meeting. The MSDE proposes to work with the Alt-MSA Facilitators to provide training and develop guidelines to assist teachers in selecting appropriate Mastery Objectives for students based on their instructional level, and writing custom Mastery Objectives that meet the students' individual needs but do not compromise the required alignment with academic content. In addition, the guidance the MSDE provides will provide support in understanding the back mapping process.

The MSDE also recognizes that the functional skills teachers are often referring to are content specifically related to the MSDE's Health Curriculum and the Maryland Career Development Framework. Therefore, the MSDE proposes to work with the Alt-MSA Stakeholder Advisory Committee Members, Alt-MSA Facilitators and teachers from across the State to develop Mastery Objectives for reading and mathematics that can be aligned with the context of health and career content. The development of new Mastery Objectives for 2012-2013, as found in the current year's scope of work, will focus on this activity. However, in order for the MSDE to consider artifact development associated with new Mastery Objectives, a change in the scope of work with additional costs to the current contract is required. The price for each individual artifact is approximately \$1,235 that includes unique art and staff time to complete the development of each artifact. The MSDE

will continue to move forward in developing additional Mastery Objectives.

4. Elimination of Grade Band Requirements for Science

Currently, the Alt-MSA is designed with the reading and mathematics non-assessed embedded science Mastery Objectives (grades 3, 4, 6 and 7) and the accompanying artifacts containing accurate science as found in the science State curriculum. Grade band requirements do not apply to non-assessed science grades, which allow the embedded science content to extend back to lower grades. The assessed grades (5, 8 and 10) must be from the specified grade bands (5, 8) and biology (10). Changing this requirement would have a cost implication. As of March 7, 2011, the approximate cost is \$81,000 to \$85,000 due to the required refinements to the Alt-MSA Online site as well as the various Alt-MSA reports to include the parent, school, district and state level reports. Understanding the flexibility at the non-assessed grade level may be an implementation issue requiring further training at the local level. The MSDE will address this in the upcoming year with Alt-MSA Facilitators.

One of the recommendations from the September 2009 Alt-MSA Science Alignment Study was for the MSDE to consider adding Mastery Objectives in the Skills and Processes Standard of the SC. Because of this alignment study, additional Mastery Objectives were added to the Mastery Objective item bank in September 2010. A number of these Mastery Objectives make a functional life skills connection such as making a simple scientific observation or what the weather is like outside. While the 10th grade skills and processes science Mastery Objectives must still align to biology, since that is the content the MSDE assesses at the high school level, the skills and processes Mastery Objectives in grades 5 and 8 can back map to any grade level and are not bound to highlighted assessment limits as outlined in the State curriculum. This significant change allows students to access the science content area for the skills and processes standard at the pre-kindergarten level. Teachers can now access science and align Mastery Objectives at the appropriate instructional level for a student based on individual needs. This addition was emphasized at the Alt-MSA LAC and Alt-MSA Facilitator meeting on June 7, 2011.

Next Steps for Redesign Consideration

As the MSDE considers the redesign of the Alt-MSA, Maryland will be involved in a few additional activities. This involvement will assist the State in determining the next redesign for the Alt-MSA in Maryland.

1. Longitudinal Examination of Alternate Assessment Progressions (LEAAP) Project

Maryland has received grant funding from the USDE in partnership with the State Departments of Education for Arizona, South Dakota and Wyoming. This Enhancement Assessment Grant (EAG) titled, “Longitudinal Examination of Alternate Assessment

Progressions (LEAAP)” will provide Maryland with additional data in preparation for redesigning the Alt-MSA to align with the National Common Core State Standards and the Race to the Top initiatives. Western Carolina University and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte are serving as the lead researchers and project coordinators.

The five goals associated with this grant are listed below:

- **Goal 1:** Conduct a retrospective study of content and performance expectations in states’ Alternate Assessments
- **Goal 2:** Investigate and define dimensions of growth in achievement for this population.
- **Goal 3:** Examine teacher and student variables in relation to alternate assessment content selection, administration, and progressions.
- **Goal 4:** Provide technical assistance to states on interpreting and using their findings in order to improve assessment systems.
- **Goal 5:** Disseminate project products and findings.

As noted in the goals listed above, Goal 3 specifically focuses on teacher variables related to alternate assessment. As part of Goal 3 in this grant (Goal 3: Examine teacher and student variables in relation to alternate assessment content selection, administration, and progressions.), student and teacher variables will be collected via survey and analyzed. The interaction between student characteristics and teacher decisions with curricular progressions will be examined.

Objective 3.1. of the grant is to examine the role of learner characteristics and teacher variables in item selection and administration. Objective 3.1 will help states examine how learner characteristics (including unique sensory, physical, cognitive, and communication needs), and teacher variables regarding instructional planning and decision making, relate to test administration (and portfolio task design) choices.

Maryland teachers had an opportunity to participate in completing the Learner Characteristics Inventory (LCI), part I of the survey for this grant. The LCI collects specific learning characteristics related to expressive and receptive communication, vision, hearing, motor skills, engagement, health issues, reading, and mathematics. The second part of the survey will assess (1) teacher decisions about assessment design and administration, (2) the factors that influence those decisions, (3) curricular priorities, and (4) supports and materials used in instruction for the target student. Finally, teachers will identify their alternate assessment administration choices (i.e., accommodations, modifications, design of tasks) for the target student.

The MSDE firmly believes that the LEAAP grant will provide assistance to Maryland when revising the Alt-MSA in the future. Goal 4 activities will ensure that the MSDE devotes time

to reflect on the implications of the LEAAP findings for its alternate assessment system. In addition, the MSDE will obtain Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) feedback to guide its planning. This will also give Maryland the opportunity to share the findings with its own National Psychometric Council (NPC) to organize a plan for concrete steps toward continuous improvement of the Alt-MSA.

LEAAP findings will also have implications for building capacity among teachers in the State. Goal 1 will point toward potential professional development on building skills in academic content areas across years. Goal 3 also has implications for instructional design, as it will provide evidence for how teachers are leveraging the flexibility of the Alt-MSA to reduce barriers and maximize learning for students. Finally, tools such as templates for score reporting and example curricular progressions will be designed with input from all four participating states to maximize future utilization. These resources will remain available to Maryland via the project website beyond the end of the project.

2. Joining a 1% Assessment Consortium

Maryland is currently considering joining one of two national state assessment consortia for alternate assessments. The National Center and State Collaborative Partnership (NCSC) is a collaborative network of national centers and nineteen (19) states. NCSC is developing a full system intended to support educators that includes formative assessment tools and strategies, professional development on appropriate interim uses for progress monitoring and management systems to ease the burdens of administration and documentation.

The Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment System Consortium is a consortium of eleven (11) states led by the University of Kansas. The Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment System Consortium will create an assessment system to support teachers in improving the learning of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities (SCD). Outcomes include developing alternate academic achievement standards aligned with the Common Core State Standards for college and career readiness and developing high-quality, valid, and reliable alternate assessments, using universal design principles and current research based on evidence-centered design and learning maps, that form a coherent system with assessments developed by RTTT assessment competition grantees. The proposed system will measure achievement and growth of students with SCD and report on student participation and performance on AA-AAS. The consortium will also develop clear, appropriate guidelines for IEP teams to use in determining which students should be assessed using an AA-AAS as well as develop and implement training on those guidelines for IEP teams. Finally, the consortium will create and implement professional development for teachers in instruction and assessment of challenging academic content to show progression of student learning.

The specific test design plan for both consortia has not yet been released, since the plans are still being developed. Once each consortium shares their final test design plan with the MSDE, it will decide if the plans align with Maryland's vision for its alternate assessment.

The expected timeline for release of these plans is within the next ten (10) to fifteen (15) months.

3. Active State Member of the Assessing Special Education Students (ASES) State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards (SCASS)

Maryland is one of thirty-three (33) states that is a member of the Assessing Special Education Students (ASES) State Collaboratives on Assessment and Student Standards (SCASS). ASES SCASS supports states in their efforts to develop assessment and accountability systems that provide full equity for students with disabilities. As the only national consortium of assessment and special education professionals, ASES SCASS addresses the inclusion of students with disabilities in standards, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and accountability systems, and the effects of these systems on education reform efforts.

ASES SCASS capitalizes on the synergy of shared efforts by the member states, partners, and associate members to improve practices for students with disabilities. ASES accomplishes this mission by:

- Increasing awareness among state education agency staff of issues, trends, promising practices, and resources,
- Creating products, research, and resources useful for reference or adaptability to state educational agencies, and
- Developing and/or reviewing potential policy statements that can be adapted or adopted by state and federal agencies

The focus of the ASES SCASS workgroups includes common core state standards, accommodations for the 21st Century, Alternate Assessments based on Alternate Achievement Standards (AA-AAS), and standards-based individualized education programs. The ASES SCASS also co-sponsors a variety of USDE Enhanced Assessment Grants (EAGs) and serves as an advisor to other EAGs and General Supervision Enhancement Grants (GSEGs).

As members in this collaborative, Maryland will benefit from discussions of other states that are redesigning their alternate assessments to align with the Common Core State Standards and the Race to the Top initiatives. Through the ASES SCASS membership, Maryland plans to meet with various states that have used a variety of formats to assess students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Maryland representatives plan to initially meet with the other State representatives that were recommended through the Senate Bill 557 activities (i.e. Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and Michigan). The lessons learned through this process will further assist Maryland in determining the next steps of the alternate assessment redesign.

Recommendations for Consideration by Local School Systems

The MSDE provided an immediate response to Senate Bill 557 by developing a technical assistance bulletin to address the myths and misinformation that were being shared in the field. Technical Assistance Bulletin 25: *Alternate Maryland School Assessment (Alt-MSA)*, Appendix E, was released as a Fact Sheet to local school systems on December 9, 2010. In addition, the MSDE also provided information in Technical Assistance Bulletin 17: *Understanding the Criteria and Eligibility Process for Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities Participating in the Maryland Assessment Program*, Appendix F. The MSDE recommends that local school systems ensure that their teachers are familiar with these documents at the beginning of the upcoming 2011-2012 school year.

The results of the activities in response to Senate Bill 557 provided the MSDE with insightful information regarding the Alt-MSA at the local level. While the MSDE recognizes that there are issues in the design of the assessment that the MSDE will address in the upcoming year and in future redesigns, there are implementation issues that need to be addressed at the local level. To address the implementation issues, the MSDE will continue to meet monthly with Alt-MSA Facilitators during the school year to provide guidance and professional development related to best practices for implementing the Alt-MSA.

Among the feedback provided in the survey and in the Focus Group sessions, some recommendations made by the participants are currently in place. Those recommendations are listed below. The MSDE will work with the Alt-MSA Facilitators to ensure that the information is shared with teachers.

- 1. Provide teachers with the Alt-MSA Handbook before school starts each year.**
Current Practice: Annually, the Alt-MSA Handbook is released to local school system administrators in June. Handbooks can be ordered and are made available to local school system staff as early as mid July. It is the local school system's decision when the Handbook is ordered and released to staff.
- 2. Provide resources for content areas and help teachers align artifacts. Make resources more accessible.**
Current Practice: The MSDE provides resources through a variety of means including, but not limited to, the mdk12.org website and the Alt-MSA Online website.
- 3. Offer an annual meeting/training at the beginning of the school year.**
Current Practice: Each school system is required by COMAR 13A.03.04.03 to provide training to all school system personnel involved in the Alt-MSA process. A trainer-of-trainer model is used to instruct the Local Accountability Coordinator and the Alt-MSA Facilitator and non-public representatives on the policies and procedures of the Alt-MSA in June of each year. This early training by the MSDE allows the local school systems to prepare professional development activities for the upcoming school year. It is a local decision when

training is provided to school system staff. It is recommended by the MSDE that training occur prior to the start of the Alt-MSA testing window. There are several districts that choose to train in the summer months, while others choose to train upon immediate return of teachers at the beginning of the school year.

4. Provide someone at the State level whose sole responsibility is to offer technical assistance to teachers about the Alt-MSA.

Current Practice: Since 2007, the MSDE has been providing two technical assistance and support staff members to LSSs and nonpublic schools regarding the Alt-MSA: Karen Andrews, Section Chief for Alternate Assessments, Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services can be reached at (410) 767-0782 or at kandrews@msde.state.md.us. In addition, Trinell Bowman, Program Manager for Alternate Assessments, Division of Assessment and Accountability can be reached at (410) 767-2498 or tbowman@msde.state.md.us.

5. Make funds available for substitute staff so that teachers can have time to create artifacts.

Current Practice: Each year, the MSDE provides LSSs an opportunity to apply for an Alt-MSA Discretionary Grant. Priorities for the grant focus on applications that offer plans for the use of substitute staff or stipends for test examiners to attend professional development opportunities pertaining to Alt-MSA, including training on the Alt-MSA IEP Team Decision-Making Tool, the Maryland Reading, Mathematics, and Science Content Standards; planning the Alt-MSA with test examiner teams; selecting Mastery Objectives; and organizing portfolios. A focus on funds used for the purchase of reading, mathematics, and science instructional materials that directly relate to Mastery Objectives for students participating in Alt-MSA is also considered.

Alt-MSA implementation issues and misinformation about the Alt-MSA was confirmed during the 2011 Alt-MSA Range finding and Scoring Process. Each year, Rangefinding is held at the end of the assessment window prior to scoring to assist in the development of training materials: anchor sets, practice sets, qualifying sets, validity sets and content resources that ensure quality, consistency and integrity throughout all aspects of the scoring process. At rangefinding, Maryland administrators and teachers who are involved in all aspects of Alt-MSA, review and refine the scoring rubric to ensure it encompasses the current Alt-MSA requirements. The rangefinders apply the scoring rubric to score selected portfolios. The scoring rubric and the scores assigned to these portfolios form the basis for scorer training. The scorers use the scoring rubric to score each artifact.

In review of student's portfolios, it was evident that there appears to be a lack of understanding in several areas, including:

- Selecting appropriate Mastery Objectives to meet the instructional level of students
- Using academic content that is appropriate and functional for students

- Developing the most appropriate artifacts for the students based on unique learner characteristics
- Presenting the content to students, through adaptations and modifications, to demonstrate the mastery of a skill based on individual needs and unique learner characteristics.

The MSDE will work with the Alt-MSA Facilitators to address these areas in their local.

Each year, at the conclusion of the Alt-MSA rangefinding and scoring process, the MSDE School Summary Report is sent to LSSs. The report includes the results of the Alt-MSA and provides steps for using Alt-MSA scores for instructional planning. The MSDE will continue to provide this guidance to LSSs to make certain they have the necessary information for successful implementation of the Alt-MSA. Listed below, are recommendations for the LSSs to consider when implementing the Alt-MSA.

- Plan instructional interventions with staff. Although the students' reported Alt-MSA proficiency levels reflect achievement in Maryland's reading and mathematics content standards, these data should be used in conjunction with other measures of student performance, such as IEP progress report data, teacher observations, and other formal and informal assessments, to inform instructional decisions. Refer to the State's website, <http://mdk12.org> for further guidance in understanding standards, assessments, and AYP; leading the school improvement process; analyzing and using data; and teaching and assessing the content standards.
- Consider current instructional practice for alignment with grade-level reading, mathematics, and science objectives. Explore how instruction in reading, mathematics, and science can be connected with other areas of instruction such as social studies, art, music, physical education, health, therapies, and employment education, both in-school and outside-school communities.
- Re-evaluate how instructional learning time is used.
- Verify that students' current IEP goals and objectives support access to the grade level Maryland content standards.
- Record current levels of Alt-MSA performance on the next developed IEP to guide the selection of IEP goals and objectives that support access to grade-level content standards.
- Employ practices to link daily instruction with assessment in reading, mathematics, and science that is meaningful to Alt-MSA students based on individual needs.
- Ensure all members of the Test Examiner Team (TET) have ready access to copies of the general education curriculum.
- Provide instructional resources that support instruction in mathematics, reading, and science content standards (some examples include books, print materials, non-print materials, instructional manipulatives, and assistive technologies).

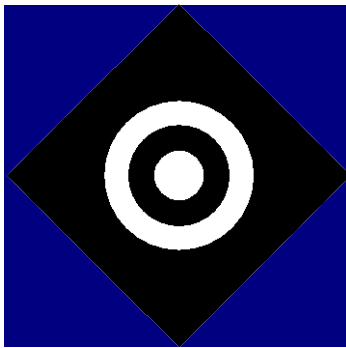
- Identify and implement strategies to structure time for TET collaboration.

The MSDE continues to recognize the need to provide professional development guidance to staff who administers the Alt-MSA to include special educators, general educators, related service providers, and instructional assistants. The MSDE is reviewing its current professional development opportunities and will take the necessary steps to meet the needs of Test Examiners as highlighted in the results of the Senate bill activities. The MSDE recommends that the LSSs analyze student and school Alt-MSA data to identify topics for professional development.

Potential areas for LSS staff development addressing many of the needs highlighted in the Senate bill activities include the following:

- Increasing knowledge and understanding of Maryland reading, mathematics, and science content standards.
- Collecting and analyzing instructional and assessment data to make instructional decisions.
- Developing the Alt-MSA Portfolio: rationale, practices to organize the development of the portfolio and identifying strategies to engage the student in the portfolio development process.
- Selecting Mastery Objectives related to grade level content standards.
- Collaborating on the Alt-MSA implementation process within test examiner and instructional teams; involving all instructional staff in TETs.
- Aligning instruction with the grade-level general education curriculum.
- Applying principles of self-determination to instruction and assessment.
- Connecting reading, mathematics, and science instruction to other critical areas of instruction including social studies, art, music, physical education, health, and employment education.

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Appendices

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Appendix A:

SENATE BILL 557

F1

0lr0788

By: **Senator Pinsky**

Introduced and read first time: February 4, 2010

Assigned to: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Committee Report: Favorable with amendments

Senate action: Adopted

Read second time: March 24, 2010

CHAPTER _____

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Education – Alternate Maryland School Assessment – Review ~~and Revision~~**

3 FOR the purpose of requiring the State Department of Education to review ~~and revise~~
4 the Alternate Maryland School Assessment (ALT-MSA) on or before a certain
5 date; requiring the Department to survey certain teachers regarding
6 satisfaction, or lack thereof, of the ALT-MSA, solicit certain recommendations,
7 and consider certain courses of action as part of a certain review; requiring the
8 Department to report to the Governor and to certain legislative committees
9 regarding a certain review; and generally relating to the review ~~and revision~~ of
10 the ALT-MSA.

11 Preamble

12 WHEREAS, The federal No Child Left Behind Act requires all students to be
13 assessed; and

14 WHEREAS, The assessment of students should be a tool used as part of
15 instruction; and

16 WHEREAS, ~~Students~~ Some students with severe disabilities may need
17 functional and life skills instruction as well as academic instruction and assessments;
18 and

19 WHEREAS, Students with severe disabilities also receive an Individualized
20 Education Program (IEP); and

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.

Underlining indicates amendments to bill.

Strike-out indicates matter stricken from the bill by amendment or deleted from the law by amendment.



2

SENATE BILL 557

1 WHEREAS, Assessments should not be so time-consuming as to displace
2 ongoing instructional needs; and

3 WHEREAS, Special education teachers are spending an inordinate amount of
4 their instructional hours creating, preparing, and administering the many aspects of
5 the Alternate Maryland School Assessment (ALT-MSA), including selecting mastery
6 objectives for each student, developing the artifacts to accomplish the mastery
7 objective, and creating sample worksheets and data sheets to document these actions;
8 and

9 WHEREAS, The ALT-MSA lends itself to great subjectivity, given the nature of
10 the administration of the assessment and the flexibility provided for scoring the
11 assessment; and

12 WHEREAS, The scoring of the ALT-MSA lends itself to great subjectivity; now,
13 therefore,

14 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF
15 MARYLAND, That:

16 (a) On or before July 1, 2011, the State Department of Education shall
17 review ~~and revise~~ the Alternate Maryland School Assessment (ALT-MSA) with the
18 goal of reducing the time required to administer the ALT-MSA.

19 (b) As part of the review required under subsection (a) of this section, the
20 Department shall:

21 (1) ~~(i) Survey all teachers of severely disabled students and~~
22 ~~students who are likely to be impacted by the ALT-MSA regarding satisfaction, or~~
23 ~~lack thereof, with the ALT-MSA; and~~

24 (ii) ~~Solicit recommendations for improvement to the ALT-MSA;~~
25 ~~and~~

26 (2) ~~consider~~ Consider:

27 ~~(i)~~ (i) Providing greater guidance and taking primary
28 responsibility for the creation of the ALT-MSA while allowing modification to be
29 effectuated by the special education instructor;

30 ~~(ii)~~ (ii) Reducing the number of mastery objectives that are
31 currently required for each student in each subject; ~~and~~

32 ~~(iii)~~ (iii) Creating State-approved artifacts for each mastery
33 objective, including tasks, products, and actions; ~~and~~.

SENATE BILL 557

3

1 (4) ~~For the most severely disabled students, incorporating a living~~
2 ~~skills-based assessment into the existing academic-based assessment.~~

3 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That on or before October 1,
4 2011, the State Department of Education shall report to the Governor and, in
5 accordance with § 2-1246 of the State Government Article, the House Committee on
6 Ways and Means and the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
7 Committee regarding the review conducted under Section 1 of this Act.

8 SECTION 3. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect
9 July 1, 2010.

Approved:

Governor.

President of the Senate.

Speaker of the House of Delegates.

Appendix B:
Survey Results

Survey Questions	Response Percent	Response Count
1. What is your LEA name?		
2. Please enter your school name (optional question).		
3. What is your role in the Alt-MSA Process?		
Central Office Administrator	1.4	11
Principal/School Administrator	14.1	113
Special Education Teacher	76.9	618
General Education Teacher	1.5	12
Related Service Provider	3.9	31
Paraprofessional	2.4	19
4. How many years have you administered the Alt-MSA?		
Less than one Year	13.4	108
1-2 years	16.9	136
3-4 years	25.5	205
5-6 years	19.5	157
7+ years	24.6	198
5. In what type of school program do you work?		
Public Special School	26.4	212
Public Comprehensive School	67.3	541
Nonpublic School	6.3	51
6. Are you the only person in your school responsible for the administration and implementation of the Alt-MSA?		
Yes	11.4	92
No	66.6	712
7. Who do you work in collaboration with when implementing the Alt-MSA? (check all that apply)		
Classroom staff (e.g., teacher, paraprofessional)	90.4	722
School staff (e.g., related service providers)	57.1	459
District staff	41.4	333
8. The Alt-MSA Handbook is useful in planning and implementing instruction and assessment in the Alt-MSA for my students.		
Strongly Agree	18.3	147
Agree	43.8	352
Neutral	20.0	161
Disagree	11.4	92
Strongly Disagree	6.5	52
9. How much planning time is required to prepare for the implementation of the Alt-MSA?		
1-3 hours per week	13.2	106
4-7 hours per week	41.3	332
8 or more hours per week	45.5	366
10. The Alt-MSA accurately assesses the reading, mathematics and science skills my students are learning in the classroom.		
Strongly Agree	3.9	31
Agree	19.7	158

Neutral		17.5	141
Disagree		22.3	179
Strongly Disagree		36.7	295
	Yes	No	Response Count
11. The Alt-MSA Mastery Objective Bank provides me with an adequate selection of Mastery Objectives.			
Reading	7% (476)	39.3% (308)	784
Mathematics	57.2% (449)	42.8% (336)	785
Science	44.1% (337)	55.9% (428)	765
12. If I do not find a Mastery Objective in the Alt-MSA Bank to address a skill my students are working on in the classroom, I custom write a Mastery Objective to meet my student's instructional needs.			
Reading	92.2% (190)	93.8% (595)	
Mathematics	87.9% (181)	94.8% (601)	
Science	73.8% (152)	95.6% (606)	
Response Count	206	634	
13. I feel that my current training in the state curriculum has prepared me to successfully teach and assess students in reading, mathematics and science.			
14. How do you link your Alt-MSA Mastery Objectives to the functional skills your students are working on during their instructional program? Please be as specific as possible (open ended)			
This was an open-ended question and there 804 responses, which consist of 73 total pages; results are available upon request			
Reading	96.4% (589)	53.6% (200)	
Mathematics	91.0% (556)	61.1% (228)	
Science	66.9% (409)	66.9% (409)	
Response Count	611	373	
Survey Questions		Response Percent	Response Count
15. In what content area would you like to see more Mastery Objectives written? (Select all that apply).			
Reading		63.8	513
Mathematics		66.9	538
Science		74.5	599
16. The selection/writing of Mastery Objectives for the Alt-MSA can be linked to the functional skills my students are working on during their instructional program.			
Strongly Agree		4.4	35
Agree		23.1	186
Neutral		17.5	141
Disagree		26.0	209
Strongly Disagree		29.0	233
17. If the Alt-MSA was redesigned, I would like to see the assessment eliminate the requirement for alignment to science in two reading and two mathematic Mastery Objectives for non-assessed science grades (Grades 3, 4, 6, and 7)?			
Strongly Agree		56.2	452
Agree		17.7	142
Neutral		20.0	161
Disagree		4.9	39
Strongly Disagree		1.2	10
18. If the Alt-MSA was redesigned, I would like to see the elimination of the 5 alignment Mastery Objectives to reading and mathematics for the assessed science grades (Grades 5, 8			

<i>and 10), replacing them with 5 science Mastery Objectives for a total of 10 science Mastery Objectives?</i>		
Strongly Agree	29.0	233
Agree	16.3	131
Neutral	23.0	185
Disagree	13.7	110
Strongly Disagree	18.0	145
Survey Questions	Response Percent	Response Count
19. <i>The Maryland State Department of Education is considering providing a sample data base (certain established number) of baseline and mastery artifacts for certain reading, mathematics and science Mastery Objectives in word format. What are your thoughts on using these artifacts?</i>		
I would use the artifacts posted, if they aligned to the skills my students are working on in the classroom	42.7	343
I would use the artifacts posted, but modify them to align to the skills my students are working on in the classroom	54.0	434
I would not use the artifacts developed, I prefer to develop my own artifacts to align to the skills my students are working on in the classroom.	3.4	27
20. <i>As a Test Examiner Team (TET) member, I feel I have adequate resources and supports to assist me in successfully implementing the Alt-MSA?</i>		
Strongly Agree	10.3	83
Agree	32.2	259
Neutral	21.5	173
Disagree	19.3	155
Strongly Disagree	16.7	134
21. <i>What resources do you find final most useful when implementing Alt- MSA? (check all that apply)</i>		
Condition Code Packet	25.1	202
Exemplar Artifacts	70.0	563
Alt-MSA Online Professional Development Modules	29.4	236
Mdk12.org website	34.0	273
MSDE Alt-MSA Content Guidance Documents	35.9	289
22. <i>How often do you meet with a content specialist or general education teacher in order to plan for classroom instruction and develop artifacts?</i>		
Daily	5.0	40
Weekly	26.6	214
Monthly	28.1	226
Quarterly	14.3	115
Never	26.0	209
23. <i>What resources and supports have been the most useful to you in implementing Alt-MSA? (open ended)</i> **This was an open-ended question and there 804 responses, which consist of 44 total pages; results are available upon request**		
24. <i>Understanding that all students with disabilities will participate in State and district assessments based on the requirements of IDEA and NCLB, if you were given an opportunity</i>		


to recommend changes to the design of the Alt-MSA, what would your recommendations for change be? Please list your top two specific recommendations. (open ended)

****This was an open-ended question and there 804 responses, which consist of 66 total pages; results are available upon request****

25. In which areas do you feel you need additional training in to successfully implement Alt-MSA? (click all that apply)

Alt-MSA Guidelines	23.3	187
State Curriculum: Reading/Mathematics/Science	32.0	257
Instructional/Assessment Prompting	25.1	202
Modifying/Adapting Instruction	32.0	257
Selecting/Writing Mastery Objectives	18.2	146
Artifact Selection & Development	59.6	479
Data Collection	27.5	221

Appendix C.1:
Public Forum Listening Session Invitation

	<p>Nancy S. Grasmick State Superintendent of Schools</p>
<p>200 West Baltimore Street • Baltimore, MD 21201 • 410-767-0100 • 410-333-6442 TTY/TDD • MarylandPublicSchools.org</p>	

Maryland State Department of Education To Hold 4 Regional Public Listening Sessions On Alternate Maryland School Assessment (Alt-MSA)

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), in accordance with Senate Bill 557, passed by the Maryland General Assembly in 2010, is conducting a review of the Alternate Maryland School Assessment (ALT-MSA). The ALT-MSA is taken by students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who cannot take the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) with or without accommodations as determined by a student’s Individualized Educational Program (IEP) Team. ALT-MSA stakeholders are invited to share their comments and present recommendations for consideration by MSDE at any of the four regional public listening sessions listed below. Speakers will be allocated three minutes for their presentation and are asked to register in advance at the meeting location. Speakers are also encouraged to submit a typed or clearly printed copy of their testimony for the record. The Maryland State Department of Education will not directly respond to any comments during the sessions.

Wednesday, December 8, 2010

6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Urbana High School Auditorium
3471 Campus Drive
Ijamsville, MD 21754
(240)-236-7600

Thursday, December 9, 2010

6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Easton High School Auditorium
723 Mecklenburg Avenue
Easton, Maryland 21601
(410) 822-4180

Wednesday December 15, 2010

6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Thomas Stone High School Auditorium
3785 Leonardtown Rd
Waldorf, Maryland 20601
(301) 645-2601

Monday, December 20, 2010

6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Laurel High School Auditorium
8000 Cherry Hill Road
Laurel, Maryland 20707
(301) 497-2050

Persons unable to attend the sessions may send written testimony by **December 22** to the Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services, 200 West Baltimore Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21201 or email comments to alt-msa@msde.state.md.us. Requests for a sign language interpreter and/or any special accommodations for a speaker should be directed to Karen Andrews via email at kandrews@msde.state.md.us on or before the following deadline for each session:

SESSION	DEADLINE to request accommodation
December 8	December 2
December 9	December 3
December 15	December 9
December 20	December 14

Appendix C.2

Public Forum Listening Session Script for Facilitator

Opening

- On behalf of the Maryland State Department of Education, I would like to welcome you to the Alternate Maryland School Assessment Public Listening Forum.
- My name is Rosemarie Downer and I am from Precise Research & Evaluation and I will serve as your facilitator for this evening. The purpose of this public listening forum is for you to present your views and to share recommendations for the Alt-MSA with the Maryland State Department of Education.
- In order to prepare for your participation in this listening forum, the MSDE would like to remind you of the following:
- The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 requires that **all** students in public schools in grades 3 through 8 and in at least one high school grade be assessed on academic content standards.
- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 further requires states to establish alternate assessment opportunities so that **all** students, including students with significant cognitive disabilities, may participate in statewide and district assessment programs.
- The Alt-MSA proficiency scores in reading and mathematics contribute to school, local school system, and State Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).
- The United States Department of Education along with peer reviewers from other states have reviewed the Alt-MSA and have determined that the Alt-MSA is a valid and reliable assessment, which meets the professional assessment development standards.
- During tonight's public forum, the Maryland State Department of Education will not respond to any questions or concerns during this forum. You may present your written testimony by placing it in the box on the table at the door prior to your departure. You may also mail your written testimony to MSDE by December 22, 2010 or submit an email to address indicated on the flyer: alt-msa@msde.state.md.us
- Each speaker will have three minutes to share their views and recommendations about the Alt-MSA. If an agency, group or organization wishes to present, one individual should be selected to speak on behalf of that group and will follow the same 3 minute speaking protocol. When 1 minute is remaining, I will hold up a cue card to remind you of the time remaining. At the end of 3 minutes, I will hold up a final cue card to inform you that your 3 minutes have ended. I will then call the next speaker to come forward to begin their verbal testimony. This process will be followed until the last person speaks.
- Do you have any questions?
- Let's begin

Closing

- This concludes this Alt-MSA Public Listening Forum.
- I would like to thank you again for coming out this evening
- Again, I'd like to remind you that you can present your written testimony by placing it in the box on the table at the door prior to your departure. You may also mail your written testimony to MSDE by December 22, 2010 or submit an email to address indicated on the flyer: alt-msa@msde.state.md.us

Appendix C.3
Public Forum Listening Session Sign-In Sheet

Date: _____ Location: _____

NAME	AFFILIATION		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Central Office Administrator	<input type="checkbox"/> Special Education Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> Related Service Provider
	<input type="checkbox"/> Principal/School Administrator	<input type="checkbox"/> General Education Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> Paraprofessional
	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent	<input type="checkbox"/> Advocate	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Central Office Administrator	<input type="checkbox"/> Special Education Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> Related Service Provider
	<input type="checkbox"/> Principal/School Administrator	<input type="checkbox"/> General Education Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> Paraprofessional
	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent	<input type="checkbox"/> Advocate	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Central Office Administrator	<input type="checkbox"/> Special Education Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> Related Service Provider
	<input type="checkbox"/> Principal/School Administrator	<input type="checkbox"/> General Education Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> Paraprofessional
	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent	<input type="checkbox"/> Advocate	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Central Office Administrator	<input type="checkbox"/> Special Education Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> Related Service Provider
	<input type="checkbox"/> Principal/School Administrator	<input type="checkbox"/> General Education Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> Paraprofessional
	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent	<input type="checkbox"/> Advocate	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Central Office Administrator	<input type="checkbox"/> Special Education Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> Related Service Provider
	<input type="checkbox"/> Principal/School Administrator	<input type="checkbox"/> General Education Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> Paraprofessional
	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent	<input type="checkbox"/> Advocate	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Central Office Administrator	<input type="checkbox"/> Special Education Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> Related Service Provider
	<input type="checkbox"/> Principal/School Administrator	<input type="checkbox"/> General Education Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> Paraprofessional
	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent	<input type="checkbox"/> Advocate	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Central Office Administrator	<input type="checkbox"/> Special Education Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> Related Service Provider
	<input type="checkbox"/> Principal/School Administrator	<input type="checkbox"/> General Education Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> Paraprofessional
	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent	<input type="checkbox"/> Advocate	

Appendix D.1 Focus Group Guide for Advocates

Introduction

Thank you very much for agreeing to come to this discussion group today. My name is Rosemarie Downer, and I work for Precise Research, an independent research organization that is not part of the Maryland State Department of Education. We are doing a study for the MSDE to gather information from stakeholders like you about the Alternative Maryland State Assessment (Alt-MSA). A primary means of collecting this information is through discussion groups, such as this one.

Before we start, I want to share some guidelines to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to actively participate in the discussion group.

- First, taking part in this discussion is voluntary, and you can choose to not answer a question if you wish.
- I will be asking some questions and I'd like everyone to feel comfortable to share information. We want to hear from everyone, so we will work together to make sure everyone has a chance to speak. Please speak one at a time and loud enough so that everyone can hear you. It's important to avoid side conversations with your neighbors, as those conversations may make it difficult for others to hear.
- Please respect each other's points of view. There are no right or wrong answers. Please feel free to share positive feedback regarding the Alt-MSA or suggestions for improvement related to the assessment.
- At times, I may need to move the conversation along. If I interrupt you, it's due to my effort to facilitate the meeting process so that we can cover everything.
- We will need to audiotape and take written notes of the discussion, so I can accurately report what was shared.
- The session will last about 2 hours, and we will not take any formal breaks. However, please feel free to get up at any time to stretch or use the restroom.
- Are there any questions before we get started?

To get started, let's have introductions. Tell us:

- Your first name,
- What you do in your position as an advocate for students with disabilities and their families, and
- How long have you been an advocate for students who participate in the Alt-MSA.

A. Requirements in the Law

Let's begin by talking about the laws that relate to the assessment requirements for children with and without disabilities.

1. The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 requires that **all** students in public schools in grades 3 through 8 and in at least one high school grade be assessed on academic content standards. What is your reaction to the requirements in this law?
 - **PROBE:** How do you interpret this information as it relates to students with significant disabilities
2. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 further requires states to establish alternate assessment opportunities so that **all** students, including students with significant cognitive disabilities, may participate in statewide and district assessment programs. What is your reaction to the requirements in this law?

- **PROBE:** How do you interpret this information as it relates to students with significant disabilities

B. Teacher Preparation

Let's begin by talking about the skills that are required to administer the Alt-MSA and how you feel about teachers being adequately prepared to administer it?

Do you feel like teachers are adequately prepared to administer the Alt-MSA?

- **PROBE:** Why do you feel they are adequately prepared?
- **PROBE:** Why don't you feel they are adequately prepared?
- **PROBE:** What can school principals do to better prepare teachers for the Alt-MSA?
- **PROBE:** What can the Local School System do to better prepare teachers for the Alt-MSA?
- **PROBE:** What can MSDE do to better prepare teachers for the Alt-MSA?

Do you feel teachers are adequately prepared and skilled to provide instruction to students with significant cognitive disabilities?

- **PROBE:** Why do you feel they are adequately prepared?
- **PROBE:** Why don't you feel they are adequately prepared?
- **PROBE:** What can school principals do to prepare teachers?
- **PROBE:** What can Local School System do to prepare teachers?
- **PROBE:** What can MSDE do to better to prepare teachers?

C. Parents Role in Alt-MSA

Now, I'd like to ask you some questions about the role of parents in the Alt-MSA process.

Do you feel that parents know what their role is in the Alt-MSA process as outlined in the Alt-MSA handbook?

Do you know the role parents have in the Alt-MSA process?

- **PROBE:** Describe the involvement, if any, parents have had with reviewing the mastery objectives for their children.
- **PROBE:** Describe the opportunity, if any, parents have had to review their children's portfolio prior to submission for scoring.
- **PROBE:** Describe how the questions, if any, parents have had regarding their children's portfolio was handled by their children's teacher, principal or school district.

Do you see a link between Alt-MSA, the IEP and Classroom Instruction?

- **PROBE:** If yes, describe.

Are you familiar with the resources that are available to parents regarding the Alt-MSA?

PROBE: Do you feel that parents know how to access those resources?

What recommended changes can MSDE make to the test?

- **PROBE:** If MSDE makes changes to the Alt-MSA, how should parents receive information about the changes?

D. Advocate Perceptions

Now, I'd like to ask you about your thoughts about the Alt-MSA and how it influences your perception on a child's instructional program and progress in achieving instructional success. I will begin this section by discussing how you believe Alt-MSA influences the educational environment.

To what extent do the requirements and results of Alt-MSA influence

- Students,
- teaching,
- state content standards,
- curriculum materials,

- instructional materials,
- a child's school's priorities or initiatives,
- a child's school district's priorities or initiatives, or
- administrator expectations?

How do you believe the results of Alt-MSA are used by

- a child's school to
 - allocate resources,
 - evaluate
 - reward or critique teachers, or
 - develop school improvement plans
- a child's school district to
 - allocate resources
 - evaluate
 - reward or critique teachers, or
 - develop school improvement plans

Do you fully understand the requirements and outcomes of Alt-MSA?

- **PROBE:** If no, what aspect of the Alt-MSA process is unclear to you?
- **PROBE:** Do you know what Alternate Academic Achievement Standards are? (brochure defines it)
 - Have you reviewed the Maryland Alternate Academic Achievement Standards?
 - Do you know where to access the Maryland Alternate Academic Achievement Standards?

Do you believe students understand the requirements and outcomes of Alt-MSA?

What is your understanding of the requirements and outcomes of Alt-MSA? (It is more than just passing a "test")

To what extent do you think Alt-MSA accurately reflects a student's skills, knowledge and performance?

- **PROBE:** What evidence is there that the Alt-MSA does or does not accurately reflect a student's skills, knowledge and performance?
- **PROBE:** What can MSDE do for the Alt-MSA to better reflect student skills, knowledge and performance?

Do you believe the Alt-MSA accurately assesses the reading, mathematics and science skills of students?

- **PROBE:** What evidence is there that the Alt-MSA accurately assesses the reading, mathematics and science skills of students?
- **PROBE:** What can MSDE do for the Alt-MSA to better assess the reading, mathematics and science skills of students?

Do you believe that students with significant cognitive disabilities can meet state academic content standards?

- **PROBE:** What can MSDE do to help students with significant cognitive disabilities meet state academic content standards?

What intended and unintended consequences do you think arise from the Alt-MSA results for

- students,
- teachers,
- a child's school,
- a child's school district

Do you feel the artifacts developed for a child you work with as an advocate demonstrates the knowledge of the child using his/her best response technique? (i.e. manipulatives, pictures or Picture

Communication Symbols (PCS), worksheets, video, audio, data sheets (observation of task performed)

E. Wrap-Up

Is there anything else that you would like to add about your experiences with the Alt-MSA, or are there other thoughts you had during our discussion that you would like to mention before we finish?

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and ideas. This discussion has been very useful in helping us learn more about the Alt-MSA.

Appendix D.2: Focus Group Guide for Principals

Introduction

Thank you very much for agreeing to come to this discussion group today. My name is Rosemarie Downer, and I work for Precise Research, an independent research organization that is not part of the Maryland State Department of Education. We are doing a study for the MSDE to gather information from stakeholders like you about the Alternative Maryland State Assessment (Alt-MSA). A primary means of collecting this information is through discussion groups, such as this one.

Before we start, I want to share some guidelines to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to actively participate in the discussion group.

- First, taking part in this discussion is voluntary, and you can choose to not answer a question if you wish.
- I will be asking some questions and I'd like everyone to feel comfortable to share information. We want to hear from everyone, so we will work together to make sure everyone has a chance to speak. Please speak one at a time and loud enough so that everyone can hear you. It's important to avoid side conversations with your neighbors, as those conversations may make it difficult for others to hear.
- Please respect each other's points of view. There are no right or wrong answers. Please feel free to share positive feedback regarding the Alt-MSA or suggestions for improvement related to the assessment.
- At times, I may need to move the conversation along. If I interrupt you, it's due to my effort to facilitate the meeting process so that we can cover everything.
- We will need to audiotape and take written notes of the discussion, so I can accurately report what was shared.
- The session will last about 2 hours, and we will not take any formal breaks. However, please feel free to get up at any time to stretch or use the restroom.
- Are there any questions before we get started?

To get started, let's have introductions. Tell us:

- your first name, and
- how long you have been a principal of Alt-MSA students

A. Requirements in the Law

Let's begin by talking about the laws that relate to the assessment requirements for children with and without disabilities.

1. The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 requires that **all** students in public schools in grades 3 through 8 and in at least one high school grade be assessed on academic content standards. What is your reaction to the requirements in this law?
 - **PROBE:** How do you interpret this information as it relates to students with significant disabilities
2. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 further requires states to establish alternate assessment opportunities so that **all** students, including students with significant cognitive disabilities, may participate in statewide and district assessment programs. What is your reaction to the requirements in this law?

- a. **PROBE:** How do you interpret this information as it relates to students with significant disabilities

B. Teacher Preparation

Let's begin by talking about the skills your teachers must have in order to administer the Alt-MSA and how you feel about the preparation they are receiving to adequately administer it?

What training and skill-specific preparation do you provide to teachers to better equip them to administer the Alt-MSA?

Do you feel like your teachers are adequately prepared to administer the Alt-MSA?

- **PROBE:** Why do you feel they are adequately prepared?
- **PROBE:** What kind of experiences do you provide that have helped prepare them?
- **PROBE:** Why don't you feel they are adequately prepared?
- **PROBE:** What can your Local School System do to better prepare them?
- **PROBE:** What can MSDE do to better prepare them?

Do you feel your teachers are adequately prepared and skilled to provide instruction to students with significant cognitive disabilities?

- **PROBE:** Why do you feel they are adequately prepared?
- **PROBE:** What kind of experiences do you provide that have helped prepare them?
- **PROBE:** Why don't you feel they are adequately prepared?
- **PROBE:** What can your Local School System do to better prepare them?
- **PROBE:** What can MSDE do to better prepare them?

C. Preparing the Test

Now, I'd like to ask you some questions about the steps your teachers have to take to prepare the Alt-MSA before they administer it to their students.

What challenges do your teachers encounter in preparing to administer the Alt-MSA?

- **PROBE:** Ask about challenges with
 - students,
 - school administration, and
 - parents

When your teachers are developing artifacts for the Alt-MSA, are there sufficient resources available to assist them?

- **PROBE:** Describe the resources you provide. Address the following: Condition Code Packet, Exemplar Artifacts, Alt-MSA Online Professional Development Modules, Mdk12.org websites, and MSDE Alt-MSA Content Guidance Documents.
 - Are these resources readily available to your teachers?
 - How do you make sure these resources readily available to your teachers?
 - How do you make sure your teachers are utilizing the resources?

What recommended changes can MSDE make to the test?

- If MSDE makes changes to the Alt-MSA, how should this information about these changes be passed on to
 - students
 - teachers
 - principals
 - parents
- How should teachers be prepared to implement the changes?

How would you describe the amount of time it takes your teachers to develop and prepare for the Alt-MSA before it is administered to their students?

- **PROBE:** Does it take away from the time teachers have to plan their lessons, teach, or perform any of their primary duties as a teacher?
- **PROBE:** How do you support your teachers in the amount of time it takes to develop, prepare and administer the Alt-MSA?

D. Principal Perceptions

Your thoughts about the Alt-MSA and how it influences teaching and curriculum content is important to influence change or improvement. I will begin this section by discussing how you believe Alt-MSA influences teaching.

To what extent do the requirements and results of Alt-MSA influence

- students,
- teaching,
- state content standards,
- curriculum materials,
- instructional materials,
- your school's priorities or initiatives,
- your school district's priorities or initiatives, or
- administrator expectations?

How are the results of Alt-MSA used by

- your school to
 - allocate resources,
 - evaluate
 - reward or critique teachers, or
 - develop school improvement plans
- your school district to
 - allocate resources
 - evaluate
 - reward or critique teachers, or
 - develop school improvement plans

Do you believe parents understand the requirements and outcomes of Alt-MSA?

- **PROBE:** What makes you think parents do or do not understand the requirements and outcomes of Alt-MSA?
- **PROBE:** What do you do to help parents understand the requirements and outcomes of the Alt-MSA?

Do you believe you have students who understand the requirements and outcomes of Alt-MSA?

- **PROBE:** What makes you think students do or do not understand the requirements and outcomes of Alt-MSA?
 - Do they understand they are being evaluated or tested?

What is your understanding of the requirements and outcomes of Alt-MSA?

To what extent do you think Alt-MSA accurately reflects students' skills, knowledge and performance?

- **PROBE:** What evidence is there that the Alt-MSA does or does not accurately reflect students' skills, knowledge and performance?
- **PROBE:** What can MSDE do for the Alt-MSA to better reflect students' skills, knowledge and performance?

Do you believe the Alt-MSA accurately assesses the reading, mathematics and science skills of your students?

- **PROBE:** What evidence is there that the Alt-MSA accurately assesses the reading, mathematics and science skills of your students?
- **PROBE:** Do you see a link between Alt-MSA, the IEP and Classroom Instruction? Why or why not?
- **PROBE:** What can MSDE do for the Alt-MSA to better assess the reading, mathematics and science skills of your students?

Do you believe that students with significant cognitive disabilities can meet state academic content standards?

- **PROBE:** Do you know what Alternate Academic Achievement Standards are? (brochure defines it)
 - Have you reviewed the Maryland Alternate Academic Achievement Standards?
 - Do you know where to access the Maryland Alternate Academic Achievement Standards?
- **PROBE:** When planning Alt-MSA for students in your building, are your teachers looking at extended Maryland content standards and aligning those to the instructional levels of your students?
 - Do you think teachers clearly understand how to “back map” from grade level content standards, extending the Maryland content standards, to meet the individual instructional levels of their students?
- **PROBE:** What can your local school system do to help students with significant cognitive disabilities meet state academic content standards?
- **PROBE:** What can MSDE do to help students with significant cognitive disabilities meet state academic content standards?

What intended and unintended consequences do you think arise from the Alt-MSA results for

- students,
- teachers,
- your school,
- your school district

E. Administering the Test

What challenges do your teachers encounter in administering the test?

- **PROBE:** What challenges do your teachers experience with students?
- **PROBE:** What challenges do your teachers experience with school administration?
- **PROBE:** What challenges do your teachers experience with parents?
- **PROBE:** What challenges do your teachers experience with other test examiner team members?

What challenges or conflicts do your teachers encounter in providing instruction to students to prepare them for the Alt-MSA?

Are your teachers fully equipped to provide instruction to their students with significant cognitive disabilities to prepare them for the Alt-MSA?

- **PROBE:** What has helped you believe your teachers have this level of competence or incompetence?
- **PROBE:** What can be done to increase your teachers’ level of competence by
 - your school?
 - your school district?
 - MSDE?

F. Alt-MSA Results

1. Do you see the results for your students who participated in Alt-MSA?

- **PROBE:** When do you review the results of your students?
- **PROBE:** Do you use the previous year's results to plan for the new Alt-MSA assessment?

G. Wrap-Up

Is there anything else that you would like to add about your experiences with the Alt-MSA, or are there other thoughts you had during our discussion that you would like to mention before we finish?

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and ideas. This discussion has been very useful in helping us learn more about the Alt-MSA.

Appendix D.3: Focus Group Guide for Principals, Teachers and Related Service Providers

Introduction

Thank you very much for agreeing to come to this discussion group today. My name is Rosemarie Downer, and I work for Precise Research, an independent research organization that is not part of the Maryland State Department of Education. We are doing a study for the MSDE to gather information from stakeholders like you about the Alternative Maryland State Assessment (Alt-MSA). A primary means of collecting this information is through discussion groups, such as this one.

Before we start, I want to share some guidelines to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to actively participate in the discussion group.

- First, taking part in this discussion is voluntary, and you can choose to not answer a question if you wish.
- I will be asking some questions and I'd like everyone to feel comfortable to share information. We want to hear from everyone, so we will work together to make sure everyone has a chance to speak. Please speak one at a time and loud enough so that everyone can hear you. It's important to avoid side conversations with your neighbors, as those conversations may make it difficult for others to hear.
- Please respect each other's points of view. There are no right or wrong answers. Please feel free to share positive feedback regarding the Alt-MSA or suggestions for improvement related to the assessment.
- At times, I may need to move the conversation along. If I interrupt you, it's due to my effort to facilitate the meeting process so that we can cover everything.
- We will need to audiotape and take written notes of the discussion, so I can accurately report what was shared.
- The session will last about 2 hours, and we will not take any formal breaks. However, please feel free to get up at any time to stretch or use the restroom.
- Are there any questions before we get started?

To get started, let's have introductions. Tell us:

- Your first name, and
- how long you have been a teacher of students with special needs

To get started, please introduce yourself. Tell us:

- your first name, and
- how long you have been a teacher of students with special needs

B. Requirements in the Law

Let's begin by talking about the laws that relate to the assessment requirements for children with and without disabilities.

The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 requires that **all** students in public schools in grades 3 through 8 and in at least one high school grade be assessed on academic content standards. What is your reaction to the requirements in this law?

- **PROBE:** How do you interpret this information as it relates to students with significant disabilities

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 further requires states to establish alternate assessment opportunities so that **all** students, including students with significant cognitive

disabilities, may participate in statewide and district assessment programs. What is your reaction to the requirements in this law?

- **PROBE:** How do you interpret this information as it relates to students with significant disabilities

B. Teacher Preparation

Let's begin by talking about the skills that are required to administer the Alt-MSA and how you feel about the preparation you've received to adequately administer it?

What training and skill-specific preparation have you received to better equip you to administer the Alt-MSA?

Do you feel like you are adequately prepared to administer the Alt-MSA?

- **PROBE:** Why do you feel you are adequately prepared?
- **PROBE:** What kind of experiences have you had that have prepared you?
- **PROBE:** Why don't you feel you are adequately prepared?
- **PROBE:** What can your school administrators do to better prepare you?
- **PROBE:** What can your local school system do to better prepare you?
- **PROBE:** What can MSDE do to better prepare you?

Do you feel you are adequately prepared and skilled to provide instruction to students with significant cognitive disabilities?

- **PROBE:** Why do you feel you are adequately prepared?
- **PROBE:** What kind of experiences have you had that have prepared you?
- **PROBE:** Why don't you feel you are adequately prepared?
- **PROBE:** What can your school administrators do to better prepare you?
- **PROBE:** What can your local school system do to better prepare you?
- **PROBE:** What can MSDE do to better prepare you?
- **PROBE:** What can your school administrators do to better prepare you?
- **PROBE:** What can your local school system do to better prepare you?

C. Preparing the Test

Now, I'd like to ask you some questions about the steps you have to take to prepare the Alt-MSA before you administer it to your students.

What challenges do you encounter in preparing to administer the Alt-MSA?

Do you develop and prepare for the Alt-MSA independent of others or do you consult with others?

When developing your artifacts for your students, are there sufficient resources available to assist you?

- **PROBE:** Describe the resources you use. Address the following: Condition Code packet, Exemplar Artifacts, Alt-MSA Online Professional Development Modules, Mdk12.org websites, and MSDE Alt-MSA Content Guidance Documents.
- Are these resources readily available to you?

What recommended changes can MSDE make to the test?

- **PROBE:** If MSDE makes changes to the Alt-MSA, how should teachers receive information about the changes?
How should teachers be prepared to implement the changes?

How would you describe the amount of time it takes to develop and plan for the Alt-MSA before it is administered to your students?

- **PROBE:** Does it take away from the time you have to plan your classroom lessons, teach, or perform any of your primary duties as a teacher?

- **PROBE:** Do you need more time to develop and plan for the Alt-MSA? If yes, how much time?
- **PROBE:** At what point of your day or schedule would be the best time to develop Alt-MSA artifacts, so that it does not interfere with your teaching?

Other than Alt-MSA, how do you assess or evaluate your student's learning?

- **PROBE:** Do you use classroom tests?
 - Do you use formative assessments? If so, please describe?
 - Do you use summative assessments? If so, please describe?

D. Teacher Perceptions

Your thoughts about the Alt-MSA and how it influences your teaching and curriculum content is important to influence change or improvement. I will begin this section by discussing how you believe Alt-MSA influences your teaching.

To what extent do the requirements and results of Alt-MSA influence

- your students,
- your teaching,
- state content standards,
- curriculum materials,
- instructional materials,
- your school's priorities or initiatives,
- your school district's priorities or initiatives, or
- administrator expectations?

How do you believe the results of Alt-MSA are used by

- your school to
 - allocate resources,
 - evaluate
 - reward or critique teachers, or
 - develop school improvement plans
- your school district to
 - allocate resources
 - evaluate, reward or critique teachers, or
 - develop school improvement plans

Do you believe parents understand the requirements and outcomes of Alt-MSA?

- **PROBE:** What makes you think parents do or do not understand the requirements and outcomes of Alt-MSA?
- **PROBE:** What do you do to help parents understand the requirements and outcomes of Alt-MSA?

Do you believe you have students who understand the requirements and outcomes of Alt-MSA?

- **PROBE:** What makes you think students do or do not understand the requirements and outcomes of Alt-MSA?

What is your understanding of the requirements and outcomes of Alt-MSA?

To what extent do you think Alt-MSA accurately reflects student skills, knowledge and performance?

- **PROBE:** What evidence is there that the Alt-MSA does or does not accurately reflect student skills, knowledge and performance?
- **PROBE:** What can MSDE do for the Alt-MSA to better reflect student skills, knowledge and performance?

Do you see a link between Alt-MSA, the IEP and Classroom Instruction? Why or why not?

Do you believe the Alt-MSA accurately assesses the reading, mathematics and science skills of your students?

- **PROBE:** What evidence is there that the Alt-MSA accurately assesses the reading, mathematics and science skills of your students?
- **PROBE:** What can MSDE do for the Alt-MSA to better assess the reading, mathematics and science skills of your students?

Do you believe that students with significant cognitive disabilities can meet state academic content standards?

- **PROBE:** What can your school administrators do to help students with significant cognitive disabilities meet state academic content standards?
- **PROBE:** What can your local school system do to help students with significant cognitive disabilities meet state academic content standards?
- **PROBE:** What can MSDE do to help students with significant cognitive disabilities meet state academic content standards?

Do you know what Alternate Academic Achievement Standards are? (brochure defines it)

Have you reviewed the Maryland Alternate Academic Achievement Standards?

Do you know where to access the Maryland Alternate Academic Achievement Standards?

What intended and unintended consequences do you think arise from the Alt-MSA results for

- students,
- teachers,
- your school,
- your school district

E. Administering the Test

What challenges do you encounter in administering the test?

- **PROBE:** What challenges do you experience with students?
- **PROBE:** What challenges do you experience with school administration?
- **PROBE:** What challenges do you experience with parents?
- **PROBE:** What challenges do you experience with other test examiner team members?

What challenges or conflicts do you encounter in providing instruction to students to prepare them for the Alt-MSA?

Do you feel fully equipped to provide instruction to your students with significant cognitive disabilities to prepare them for the Alt-MSA?

- **PROBE:** What has helped you feel this level of competence or incompetence?
- **PROBE:** What can be done to increase your level of competence by
 - your school?
 - your school district?
 - MSDE?

What challenges do you experience in preparing the Alt-MSA portfolio prior to submission?

- **PROBE:** Do you verify that each artifact has met all required artifact elements?
- **PROBE:** Do you understand all required artifact elements?
- **PROBE:** What supports does your school provide to you in reviewing artifacts and the portfolio prior to submission to ensure all required components of the portfolio are present?
- **PROBE:** What supports does your local school system provide to you in reviewing artifacts and the portfolio prior to submission to ensure all required components of the portfolio are present?

F. Alt-MSA Results

1. Do you see the results for your students who participated in Alt-MSA?

- **PROBE:** When do you review the results of your students?

- **PROBE:** Does your school administrator review the Principal's Report with you?
- **PROBE:** Do you use the previous year's results to plan for the new Alt-MSA assessment?

G. Wrap-Up

Is there anything else that you would like to add about your experiences with the Alt-MSA, or are there other thoughts you had during our discussion that you would like to mention before we finish?

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and ideas. This discussion has been very useful in helping us learn more about the Alt-MSA.

Appendix D.4: Focus Group Guide for Parents

Introduction

Thank you very much for agreeing to come to this discussion group today. My name is Rosemarie Downer, and I work for Precise Research, an independent research organization that is not part of the Maryland State Department of Education. We are doing a study for the MSDE to gather information from stakeholders like you about the Alternative Maryland State Assessment (Alt-MSA). A primary means of collecting this information is through discussion groups, such as this one.

Before we start, I want to share some guidelines to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to actively participate in the discussion group.

- First, taking part in this discussion is voluntary, and you can choose to not answer a question if you wish.
- I will be asking some questions and I'd like everyone to feel comfortable to share information. We want to hear from everyone, so we will work together to make sure everyone has a chance to speak. Please speak one at a time and loud enough so that everyone can hear you. It's important to avoid side conversations with your neighbors, as those conversations may make it difficult for others to hear.
- Please respect each other's points of view. There are no right or wrong answers. Please feel free to share positive feedback regarding the Alt-MSA or suggestions for improvement related to the assessment.
- At times, I may need to move the conversation along. If I interrupt you, it's due to my effort to facilitate the meeting process so that we can cover everything.
- We will need to audiotape and take written notes of the discussion, so I can accurately report what was shared.
- The session will last about 2 hours, and we will not take any formal breaks. However, please feel free to get up at any time to stretch or use the restroom.
- Are there any questions before we get started?

To get started, let's have introductions. Tell us:

- Your first name,
- the age and a brief description of your child's disability

C. Requirements in the Law

Let's begin by talking about the laws that relate to the assessment requirements for children with and without disabilities.

The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 requires that **all** students in public schools in grades 3 through 8 and in at least one high school grade be assessed on academic content standards. What is your reaction to the requirements in this law?

- **PROBE:** How do you interpret this information as it relates to students with significant disabilities

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 further requires states to establish alternate assessment opportunities so that **all** students, including students with significant cognitive disabilities, may participate in statewide and district assessment programs. What is your reaction to the requirements in this law?

- **PROBE:** How do you interpret this information as it relates to students with significant disabilities

B. Teacher Preparation

Let's begin by talking about the skills that are required to administer the Alt-MSA and how you feel about teachers being adequately prepared to administer it?

Do you feel like teachers are adequately prepared to administer the Alt-MSA?

- **PROBE:** Why do you feel they are adequately prepared?
- **PROBE:** Why don't you feel they are adequately prepared?
- **PROBE:** What can the school principal do to better prepare teachers for the Alt-MSA?
- **PROBE:** What can the Local School System do to better prepare teachers for the Alt-MSA?
- **PROBE:** What can MSDE do to better prepare teachers for the Alt-MSA?

Do you feel teachers are adequately prepared and skilled to provide instruction to students with significant cognitive disabilities?

- **PROBE:** Why do you feel they are adequately prepared?
- **PROBE:** Why don't you feel they are adequately prepared?
- **PROBE:** What can the school principal do to prepare teachers?
- **PROBE:** What can Local School Systems do to prepare teachers?
- **PROBE:** What can MSDE do to better to prepare teachers?

C. Parents Role in Alt-MSA

Now, I'd like to ask you some questions about your role in the Alt-MSA process.

Do you know what your role in the Alt-MSA process as outlined in the Alt-MSA handbook?

Describe the role you have taken in your child's Alt-MSA process?

- **PROBE:** Describe the involvement, if any, you have had with reviewing the mastery objectives for your child.
- **PROBE:** Describe the opportunity, if any, you have had to review your child's portfolio prior to submission to scoring.
- **PROBE:** Describe how the questions, if any, you have had for your child's teacher about your child's portfolio were handled.

Do you see a link between Alt-MSA, the IEP and Classroom Instruction?

- **PROBE:** If yes, describe.

What resources are available to you regarding the Alt-MSA?

PROBE: How do you access those resources?

What recommended changes can MSDE make to the test?

- **PROBE:** If MSDE makes changes to the Alt-MSA, how should parents receive information about the changes?

D. Parent Perceptions

Now, I'd like to ask you about your thoughts about the Alt-MSA and how it influences your child's instructional program and progress in achieving instructional success. I will begin this section by discussing how you believe Alt-MSA influences the educational environment.

To what extent do the requirements and results of Alt-MSA influence

- Students,
- teaching,
- state content standards,
- curriculum materials,
- instructional materials,
- your child's school's priorities or initiatives,
- your child's school district's priorities or initiatives, or

- administrator expectations?

How do you believe the results of Alt-MSA are used by

- Your child's school to
 - allocate resources,
 - evaluate
 - reward or critique teachers, or
 - develop school improvement plans
- your child's school district to
 - allocate resources
 - evaluate
 - reward or critique teachers, or
 - develop school improvement plans

Do you fully understand the requirements and outcomes of Alt-MSA?

- **PROBE:** if no, what aspects of the Alt-MSA process is unclear to you?
- **PROBE:** Do you know what Alternate Academic Achievement Standards are? (brochure defines it)
 - Have you reviewed the Maryland Alternate Academic Achievement Standards?
 - Do you know where to access the Maryland Alternate Academic Achievement Standards?
- **PROBE:** What has your child's teacher, school administrator or school district done to help you understand the requirements and outcomes of Alt-MSA?

Do you believe your child understands the requirements and outcomes of Alt-MSA?

What is your understanding of the requirements and outcomes of Alt-MSA? (It is more than just passing a "test")

To what extent do you think Alt-MSA accurately reflects your child's skills, knowledge and performance?

- **PROBE:** What evidence is there that the Alt-MSA does or does not accurately reflect your child's skills, knowledge and performance?
- **PROBE:** What can MSDE do for the Alt-MSA to better reflect student skills, knowledge and performance?

Do you believe the Alt-MSA accurately assesses the reading, mathematics and science skills of your child?

- **PROBE:** What evidence is there that the Alt-MSA accurately assesses the reading, mathematics and science skills of your child?
- **PROBE:** What can MSDE do for the Alt-MSA to better assess the reading, mathematics and science skills of your students?

Do you believe that students with significant cognitive disabilities can meet state academic content standards?

- **PROBE:** What can MSDE do to help students with significant cognitive disabilities meet state academic content standards?

9. What intended and unintended consequences do you think arise from the Alt-MSA results for

- students,
- teachers,
- your child's school,
- your child's school district

Does your child take classroom tests or other assessments?

- If so, how are they administered?
- If not, do you know how the classroom teacher knows when your child has demonstrated progress?

Do you feel the artifacts developed for your child demonstrates the knowledge of your child using his/her best response technique? (i.e. manipulatives, picture symbols or PCS, worksheets, video, audio, data sheets (observation of task performed))

E. Wrap-Up

Is there anything else that you would like to add about your experiences with the Alt-MSA, or are there other thoughts you had during our discussion that you would like to mention before we finish?

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and ideas. This discussion has been very useful in helping us learn more about the Alt-MSA.

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Appendix E:



December 2010

**Division of Accountability and Assessment
Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services**

**Alternate Maryland Assessment (Alt-MSA)
Measuring the Academic Progress of Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities**

The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 requires that **all** students in public schools in grades 3 through 8 and in at least one high school grade be assessed on academic content standards. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 further requires states to establish alternate assessment opportunities so that **all** students, including students with significant cognitive disabilities, may participate in statewide and district assessment programs. The Alternate Maryland State Assessment, or Alt-MSA, is Maryland’s alternate assessment program for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Some Facts about the Alternate Maryland State Assessment (Alt-MSA)

- In Maryland, students with the most significant cognitive disabilities participate in the Alt-MSA.
- The Alt-MSA measures a student’s progress on skills in *reading* and *mathematics* in grades 3 through 8, and in high school grade 10.
- The Alt-MSA also measures a student’s progress on skills in *science* in grades 5, 8 and 10.
- The Alt-MSA is not a traditional assessment given to students one time during the school year. Instead, the Alt-MSA uses a six-month assessment window to combine instruction with assessment. Students are instructed on customized learning objectives. When the student masters the objective, evidence of mastery is placed in a portfolio.
- The team that teaches and works with the student in the school is the Test Examiner Team (TET) for the student in the Alt-MSA program. This team may include the student’s general education teacher, special education teacher, related service providers, and instructional assistants when under the direct supervision of the teacher or related service provider.

1. What are Mastery Objectives?

Mastery Objectives are also known as “MOs”. MOs represent the skills and concepts on which a student will be instructed and assessed for the Alt-MSA.

2. How are appropriate MOs selected for each student?

The team that teaches and works directly with the student in the school selects from the Alt-MSA MO Bank or writes the most appropriate MOs to be assessed. Before selecting MOs, the team must have a clear picture of the student’s unique abilities, and an understanding of the student’s IEP goals. The team selects MOs that are:

- Appropriate for the student’s ability level;

- Challenging to the student; and
- Attainable during the six-month assessment window.

3. What should the team avoid when selecting MOs?

The team should avoid selecting MOs that go beyond a student’s ability level. When using grade level content, teachers can back map to prerequisite skills that may better meet the ability level of a student. This process allows the teacher to select skills that the student needs to learn to meet grade level content standards. If the team is unable to find an appropriate MO within the Alt-MSA Online MO Bank choices provided, the team may choose to write a more appropriate objective. For example, a teacher wants to select a mathematics MO for a student in grade 8 in the content standard area of Algebra, Patterns and Functions. The student is functioning at a six-month to nine-month ability level. The teacher should not select an MO that would require the student to write equations and inequalities to represent relationships. Although this skill is grade level, it would be considerably beyond the student’s ability level. In order to make instruction purposeful for this student, the teacher would need to consider “back mapping” to a prerequisite skill. A more appropriate MO may be found at the prekindergarten grade level, which uses manipulatives to teach the prerequisite skill of equations and inequalities.

4. Does the student’s IEP identify MOs for assessment?

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) identifies the specially designed instruction, accommodations/modifications and related services needed to help a student with a disability access and make progress in the general curriculum. The IEP is not intended to be a student’s entire curriculum. The IEP team considers the range of needs for students in both academic and functional skills. Because skills in reading and mathematics are crucial for access to learning in all areas of life, the IEP team selects pertinent reading and mathematics objectives for each student. It is important to keep in mind that not all IEP goals link to academic content standards. Such IEP skills are important and will be addressed during a student’s instructional day, but not in the context of academic content. These skills are not to be assessed in the Alt-MSA. Other IEP goals *are* academic and have sufficient alignment to state standards to prepare students for the assessment required by federal laws. The IEP team has the opportunity to select clearly defined objectives that are developmentally appropriate, functionally relevant, and can be assessed on the Alt-MSA. The degree to which the student’s IEP goals and objectives align with the Alt-MSA will differ based on the needs of each student.

5. Does the Alt-MSA include MOs that align to functional life skills?

The Alt-MSA includes many MOs that align to functional life skills. Functional life skills refer to a variety of skills that are frequently demanded in natural domestic, vocational and community environments. These skills, which support communication, social skills, requisite learning behaviors, emotional / behavioral skills, as well as academics, are essential to the student’s participation in a variety of community environments. Functional life skills should not be taught in a separate curriculum, but should be taught in the context of curricular content when appropriate. Reading and mathematics skills are functional skills when applied to real experiences and everyday activities. Typical IEP skills such as cooking, basic job skills, and how much to pay for and make change from a purchase can be found within the current bank of MOs for Alt-MSA. Other IEP skills that are considered functional skills may be embedded within adapted grade-level activities across content areas and not taught in isolation. These IEP skills could include, but are not limited to: matching, sequencing, sorting, choice making, activating a switch to increase communication, increasing vocabulary, following direction, release and grasp, making a choice, letter and number recognition, answering Yes/No questions, counting, and following a schedule,

working with money.

Consider the following student scenarios:

- When an elementary student is taught how to measure liquids, the student can learn to measure liquids for cooking and can practice grasping and releasing the utensils needed to complete a recipe. The student will decide where ingredients fit within the sequence of steps in the recipe. The student may practice number recognition to learn how many cups of an ingredient are used for the recipe when reading the directions (picture vocabulary recipe). Then the student may practice counting how many cups of an ingredient are used during the cooking activity.
- When a middle school student is learning reading skills through the use of nonfiction materials, the student can learn to identify nonfiction materials, such as cookbooks, application forms, and newspapers, using his or her communication device to answer “yes/no” questions, follow directions in a recipe, or fill out personal information on an application form.
- When a high school student is studying sequencing steps in an investigation and measuring the correct amount of liquids during a science lesson on chemical reactions, the student may sort the materials needed for the investigation, then focus on which household or job site chemicals to avoid mixing, learning the correct safety signs when reading labels on products
- When certain IEP skills cannot be taught within the context of academic instruction, time should be set aside to teach the skills in their natural occurring environment.

The purpose of special education is to ensure that all children have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living. Once a high school student completes the Alt-MSA in grade 10, the student will have an academic foundation that will be needed as he/she prepares for transition to appropriate adult activities. This may result with educational goals to increase the skills needed for activities of daily living; as well as to increase the skills needed for further education and employment. The academic skills and other skills for independence will assist the student to make a smooth transition to adulthood.

6. Can an MO be repeated from one year to the next?

Yes. An MO from a previous school year may be selected again. However, the content used to teach the MO would change in the new grade and the student would be assessed using different material. For example, in Comprehension of Informational Text, one of the MOs is “*Given a set of directions/instructional manual/set of rules, the student will read the functional document and follow the steps.*” The following is a sample list of appropriate functional documents found in the State Curriculum that a teacher could use at different grade levels to assess this same MO year to year. The State Curriculum for all content areas can be found at www.mdk12.org.

- Grade 3: Classroom or Social Game Rules and/or Sets of Directions
- Grade 4: Other functional document (Classroom Schedule)
- Grade 5: Steps in a Science investigation
- Grade 6: Following a Recipe
- Grade 7: Using Fast food and Restaurant Menus
- Grade 8: Following steps in a “How to” Pamphlet on planting flowers for a prevocational activity
- Grade 10: Following a Work Schedule

7. Does the Alt-MSA take away from classroom instruction?

No. The Alt-MSA portfolio is developed within the student's daily instructional program. IEP and Alt-MSA instruction and assessment are not separate from one another. They are inclusive. Alt-MSA provides a way during instruction to determine whether a student has learned the skills that the teacher has taught consistent with the student's IEP. Teachers are strongly encouraged to begin working on Alt-MSA MOs early in the school year. Typically, a teacher works towards teaching and assessing *two* reading and mathematics MOs each month within the testing window. For students being assessed on science content, the teacher may teach *one* science MO each month. The science MO can sometimes be taught within a reading or mathematics lesson. The instructional process is shaped and adjusted based on the information gathered through ongoing assessments. Thoughtful planning, organization, and shared ownership of the Alt-MSA among the team that teaches a student will result in a portfolio that conveys student learning.

8. What about students who are medically fragile or miss several days or weeks from the school year?

All students who receive a public education must participate in statewide assessment of academic progress. Students who are medically fragile or miss several days or weeks of school should participate in the Alt-MSA when present in school. If home and hospital instruction is put in place, the teacher will continue to collect data for the student's portfolio in the home or hospital, as appropriate.

9. What types of artifacts may be included in a portfolio to demonstrate a student's mastery of a MO?

Teachers' plan how each MO will be taught and the type of artifact that would best reflect the students' mastery of the skill. Teachers have several choices in the types of artifacts they submit, including:

- **Work Sample:** This artifact can be a worksheet that demonstrates the student's performance on a given task or objective.
- **Data Chart:** This artifact summarizes the student's progress toward mastery of an objective with the teacher documenting what he/she observed the student doing when performing the task.
- **Videotape:** This artifact shows how the student performs on the task while the student is completing the task (real time).
- **Audiotape:** This artifact may be appropriate for certain types of MOs that require a student to verbally provide a response.

When selecting the appropriate artifact, teachers must consider the nature of the student's disabilities. For a student who is cognitively functioning below 24 months of age and works with assistive technologies and manipulatives, the Work Sample artifact may be too abstract. Instead, the teacher may choose to use a Data Chart or Videotape. That way, the teacher can document the student's performance on an objective as the student is performing a task.

10. How is the Alt-MSA portfolio scored?

Professionals scoring staff are hired and trained according to specifications established by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). Maryland teachers and MSDE staff are involved in developing and improving training materials to ensure quality, consistency, and integrity for all aspects of the scoring project. Two independent scorers using the Alt-MSA scoring rubric score each portfolio twice. Maryland teachers, in collaboration with the MSDE, develop the scoring rubric. The scoring rubric can be found in Part 5 of the Alt-MSA Handbook. If a discrepancy between scores exists, a third scorer would score the portfolio. If the third scorer is unable to assign a final score then an MSDE staff makes the final score decision. Educators

from across the state developed performance level descriptors for the Alt-MSA. The performance levels are designated as Basic, Proficient and Advanced. The student will receive a score for each content area. The score is based on the percentage of MOs attained:

- **Basic** if fewer than 60 percent of MOs are achieved;
- **Proficient** if at least 60 percent but less than 90 percent of MOs are achieved; or
- **Advanced** if 90 percent or greater of MOs are achieved

Although, some students will be considered proficient or advanced on the Alt-MSA, this designation is based on the student mastering skills when provided with the appropriate prompting and/or instructional supports according to their IEP. Results are reported as part of the State Education Accountability Program that meets the NCLB and IDEA requirements. The Alt-MSA proficiency scores in reading and mathematics contribute to school, local school system, and State Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

Performance level descriptors for each reading, mathematics and science are found at: <http://docushare.msde.state.md.us/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-93889/Alt-MSA%20PLDs.pdf>

11. How do teachers receive feedback regarding how their student has performed on the Alt-MSA?

Aggregated results at the school, local school system and state level are reported on the Maryland School Report Card website (<http://www.mdreportcard.org>).

A Report to Principals, giving individual student results, is sent to the local school systems to provide feedback to the school team about how their student(s) performed on the Alt-MSA. This report provides additional information on the Alt-MSA scores, including the errors (known as “condition codes”) found in the artifacts during the scoring process. Schools have been granted permission by the MSDE to make copies of the artifacts that were submitted for scoring and retain these copies in the student’s confidential assessment folder for review when results are returned. The individual student data results can be used by local school systems to examine current instructional practices, improve the portfolio development process and determine the resources that may be needed to implement the Alt-MSA at the school or district level. Examples of condition codes, which have been established based on the range finding and scoring process, include:

- *A student’s name is missing from an artifact.* At times, multiple students’ artifacts have been placed in a portfolio making it difficult for a scorer to determine to whom the student work belonged. This is why Alt-MSA requires that a student name be placed on each student’s artifact.
- *The artifact date is incomplete or not present on the artifact.* This is a requirement of Alt-MSA to ensure that all artifacts are administered within the assessment window. In the past, assessment security concerns have been raised when dates on artifacts were misrepresented or changed.
- *A page number missing from an artifact.* This would **not** render a condition code.

12. Is the Alt-MSA a valid assessment?

The Alt-MSA was developed according to professional assessment development standards. The United States Department of Education along with peer reviewers from other states have reviewed the Alt-MSA and determined that the Alt-MSA is a valid and reliable assessment. Each teacher receives the *Alt-MSA Handbook* and is provided intensive training and other strategies to support the process. The Handbook provides clear guidelines for the development of a student’s

Alt-MSA Portfolio. The Handbook can be found on the Maryland State Department of Education website www.marylandpublicschools.org.

13. What resources are available to assist teachers with the Alt-MSA?

There are many resources available to teachers to assist them in constructing the Alt-MSA Portfolio to include:

- Professional Development on Issues Pertaining to the Alt-MSA Process and Scoring
- Online Alt-MSA Professional Development Modules
- Content Guidance Documents for reading, mathematics and science
- MSDE Grant funds for local school systems
- Exemplar and Condition Code Artifact Packets
- Ongoing Technical Assistance/Support is Provided Daily via Telephone Calls, Emails, Site Visits by MSDE staff

14. Who are the Alt-MSA Facilitators and what is their role with the Alt-MSA process and implementation?

Each local school system appoints an Alt-MSA Facilitator to serve as a liaison between the MSDE and the local school system. The Alt-MSA Facilitators meet with the MSDE monthly and are provided professional development related to reading, mathematics and science. In addition, best practices for implementing the Alt-MSA are reviewed and instructional resources are shared among the group. Alt-MSA Facilitators review the Alt-MSA Handbook annually and provide feedback to the MSDE for refinements and revisions.

15. Who can a parent contact if they have questions or concerns regarding the Alt-MSA?

Parents, who have questions or concerns about their child's Alt-MSA, should first speak to their child's classroom teacher, school testing coordinator and, then your child's school principal. If you need further assistance, you can speak to your Alt-MSA Facilitator at the district level or the Local Accountability Coordinator. You can also contact MSDE directly and speak to the Program Manager for Alt-MSA in the Division of Accountability and Assessment or the Section Chief for Alternate Assessments in the Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services for any assistance with the Alt-MSA.

Additional Information on Alternate Assessments Based on Alternate Achievement Standards

- Alternate Assessments Based on Alternate Achievement Standards Non Regulatory Guidance from the United States Department of Education
<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/altguidance.pdf>
- Parents Guide to Learning Opportunities through Alternate Assessment released by the United States Department of Education
<http://www2.ed.gov/parents/needs/speced/learning/learning-opportunities.pdf>
- U. S. Office of Special Education Programs; Toolkit on Teaching and Assessing Students with Disabilities <http://www.osepideasthatwork.org/toolkit/index.asp>
- National Center for Education Outcomes
<http://www.cehd.umn.edu/nceo/TopicAreas/AlternateAssessments/altAssessTopic.htm>
- National Alternate Assessment Center <http://www.naacpartners.org/>
- The Access Center: Improving Educational Outcomes for All Students k-8
<http://www.k8accesscenter.org/index.php/category/standards-assessments/>

For more information, call 410-767-7548

Appendix F:

Technical Assistance Bulletin

Alt-MSA/Measuring the Academic Progress of Students with Cognitive Disabilities



December 2010

Division of Accountability and Assessment
and Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services

Alternate Maryland Assessment (Alt-MSA)
Measuring the Academic Progress of Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities

Overview

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) requires **all** students to participate in statewide assessment programs. The Maryland participation requirement is supported by federal legislation requiring the participation of students with disabilities in standards-based instruction and assessment initiatives. The federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) requires that **all** students be assessed and receive an individual score in reading and mathematics in grades 3–8 and a high school grade (Maryland has chosen to assess grade 10 content to fulfill this federal mandate). NCLB also requires that States provide an *Alternate Assessment Based on Alternate Academic Achievement Standards* and ensure access to the general curriculum when implementing statewide accountability systems. An assessment of this type is designed for students with the **most** significant cognitive disabilities who meet specific participation criteria. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) also requires States to have an Alternate Assessment that will ensure students with the most significant cognitive disabilities have access to the general curriculum. The Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) also mandates that **all** students be instructed in reading, mathematics, science, social studies, health, art, music, and physical education. This bulletin serves as additional guidance to assist Individualized Education Program (IEP) team members when determining the eligibility of students with the **most** significant cognitive disabilities to participate in the appropriate Maryland School Assessment (MSA).

1. What is the name of the assessment in the Maryland School Assessment Program for eligible students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who meet specific participation criteria?

The Alternate Maryland School Assessment based on Alternate Academic Achievement Standards (Alt-MSA) is the assessment in which students with the **most** significant cognitive disabilities may participate. Students participate in the Alt-MSA if, through the IEP process, it has been determined that they meet specific eligibility criteria. The Alt-MSA assesses and reports student attainment of individually selected indicators and objectives from the Reading, Mathematics, and Science Content Standards as outlined in the Maryland State Curriculum (SC) or Core Learning Goals (CLG). A portfolio for the Alt-MSA is constructed of artifacts (such as student work samples) that

document individual student mastery of the assessed Reading, Mathematics, and Science objectives. Students participate in the Alt-MSA in grades 3 through 8, and grade 10.

2. Who is a student with the most significant cognitive disability?

The term significant cognitive disability is a designation given to a small number of Maryland students with disabilities for purposes of their participation in the statewide assessment program. When IEP teams are making a decision as to whether a student is a student with the most significant cognitive disability for participation in the Alt-MSA, IEP teams must review and discuss multiple sources of information, including psychological assessments, classroom observations, formal and informal assessment data, curricular content for evidence of a significant cognitive disability and the participation eligibility criteria for Alt-MSA. IEP teams should review all information available pertaining to the cognitive and adaptive skills of the student. The IEP team must determine the impact of the cognitive disability on the student's academic performance. Poor performance on previous assessment results and/or below grade level scores does not qualify a student as having a significant cognitive disability. For a student to be identified as having a significant cognitive disability for purposes of participation in the Alt-MSA, EACH of the Alt-MSA eligibility criteria must be met.

3. What are Alternate Academic Achievement Standards?

The term Alternate Academic Achievement Standards has a specific meaning in the context of Maryland's State Assessment System as approved by the U.S. Department of Education. Alternate Academic Achievement Standards are performance standards that are based on a limited sample of content that is linked to grade-level Content Standards. This content, however, may not fully represent grade-level content and may include content which is substantially simplified.

4. How does and Individualized Education Program (IEP) team determine eligibility for students to participate in Alt-MSA?

The IEP team shall use the *Alt-MSA IEP Team Decision-Making Process Eligibility Tool* for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities to determine if the Alt-MSA is the appropriate assessment. The student's IEP team, which includes the parent/guardian, determines how the student will participate in Maryland's assessment program. Decisions made by the IEP team are documented in the student's IEP and reviewed annually. The IEP team reviews a comprehensive set of criteria to determine whether the student should participate in the MSA, Mod-MSA, HSA, Mod-HSA or Alt-MSA. The IEP team must use multiple sources of information, such as the current IEP, to include the present levels of academic achievement and functional performance in reference to the Maryland State Content Standards, results from formal and informal assessments and data gathered from classroom assessments and information gathered from parent or student, which document academic achievement, to guide the decision-making process for participation in the appropriate statewide assessment. The IEP team shall discuss and consider a student's participation in regular or modified statewide assessments with the use of accommodations and modifications. If the IEP team determines that a student cannot participate using accommodations and/or modifications on the regular or modified assessment, then the IEP team should consider eligibility for an alternate assessment.

5. What is the Alt-MSA IEP Team Decision-Making Process Eligibility Tool for Alt-MSA for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities?

The *Alt-MSA IEP Team Decision-Making Process Eligibility Tool* for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities is a tool that has been developed for IEP teams to guide them in

the decision making process for determining if Alt-MSA is an appropriate assessment for a student. The tool allows the IEP team to review and answer questions about each of the participation criteria. The tool uses criteria descriptors and additional requirements, which provides additional guidance to IEP teams in understanding the criteria for Alt-MSA.

6. What criteria should IEP teams use to determine the appropriate assessment for a student s with the most significant cognitive disabilities?

Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities will be eligible to participate in Alt-MSA if they meet each of the criteria found below:

Alt-MSA Eligibility Criteria	Eligibility Criteria Descriptors
The student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP).	
The student has a significant cognitive disability.	Review of student’s school records indicate that he/she has a moderate, severe, profound disability or multiple disabilities that significantly impacts cognitive function and adaptive behavior.
1. The student is learning (at emerging, readiness, or functional literacy levels) <i>extended</i> Maryland reading, <i>extended</i> Maryland mathematics, and <i>extended</i> Maryland science content standards objectives.	<p>All students access the Maryland State Curriculum (SC) or Core Learning Goals (CLG). There are no separate extended content standards in Maryland.</p> <p>The content learning objectives and expected outcomes for the student are <i>extended</i> to focus on the emerging, readiness (prerequisite) and/or functional (real life) application of the general curriculum.</p> <p>The student is substantially below grade level expectations even with documented participation in research-based interventions over multiple years in all content standard areas.</p>
2. The student requires explicit and ongoing instruction in functional skills.	<p>The student has substantial deficits in adaptive behavior*, such that the student has difficulty demonstrating independence in everyday living skills, including interpersonal and social interactions across multiple settings.</p> <p><i>*Adaptive Behavior is defined as essential for someone to live independently and to function safely in daily life. Adaptive behaviors include “real” life skills such as grooming, dressing, safety, ability to work, money management, and social and personal responsibility.</i></p>
Alt-MSA Eligibility Criteria	Eligibility Criteria Descriptors
<p>3. The student requires extensive and substantial modification (e.g., reduced complexity of objectives and learning materials, and more time to learn) of general education curriculum.</p> <p>Curriculum activities differ significantly from that of their non-disabled peers. They learn different objectives, may use different materials, and may participate in different learning activities.</p>	<p>The modifications needed by the student to participate in the regular assessment would compromise the validity of the test.</p> <p>The objectives written for the student in the designated content areas(s) are significantly less complex than the grade-level expectation and instructional pacing is significantly reduced, making the regular MSA/HSA or Modified MSA/HSA, even with accommodations, inappropriate for the student.</p>

<p>4. The student requires intensive instruction and may require extensive supports, including physical prompts, to learn, apply, and transfer or generalize knowledge and skills to multiple settings.</p>	<p>The student requires substantial, repeated, individualized instruction with extensive supports such as substantially adapted and modified materials, instructional prompting systems, individualized methods of accessing information in alternative ways such as tactile, visual, auditory, and multi-sensory, in multiple settings to acquire, maintain, generalize and demonstrate performance of skills.</p>
<p>5. The student requires extensive support to perform and participate meaningfully and productively in daily activities in school, home, community, and work environments.</p>	<p>The student requires intensive systematic instruction across multiple settings with tasks broken into small steps for all learning outcomes. The student is dependent on others, for some or all daily activities with the expectation that the student will require extensive ongoing support in adulthood.</p>
<p>6. As documented through the IEP Team Decision-Making Process Eligibility Tool for Alt-MSA, the student cannot participate in the regular MSA/HSA or Modified MSA/HSA even with the provision of accommodations.</p>	
<p>A Student not meeting each of the criteria above will participate in the MSA/Mod-MSA for grades 3-8 or HSA/Mod HSA, for the course level in which the student is enrolled, with or without accommodations, as appropriate, based on his/her IEP. Refer to the Maryland Accommodations Manual for more information about accommodations and Maryland's assessments.</p>	
<p>7. Is the Alt-MSA IEP Team Decision-Making Process Eligibility Tool mandatory for IEP teams to use when determining if the Alt-MSA is an appropriate assessment for a student?</p>	
<p>As part of the IEP Process, the IEP team is required to plan for the student's participation in the assessment(s) to be administered during the term of the current IEP. This tool allows teams to review and discuss multiple sources of information, including psychological assessments, classroom observations, formal and informal assessment data, and curricular content for evidence of a significant cognitive disability and the participation criteria for Alt-MSA. In the 2007 federal non-regulatory guidance for modified academic achievement standards, IEP teams must be provided with a clear explanation of the differences between the general grade-level assessments, and assessments based on Modified Academic Achievement Standards (Mod-MSA or Mod-HSA), and Alternate Achievement Standards (Alt-MSA). The MSDE developed a document titled, "Maryland's Differences Among Assessments Chart for Students Receiving Special Education Services." The chart outlines the differences between the Maryland School Assessments and High School Assessments (MSA/HSA); Modified Assessments (Mod-MSA/Mod-HSA); and Alternate Assessments (Alt-MSA). The MSDE has requested that local school systems disseminate the chart to each school in the school system, stressing the necessity of using this valuable resource to support assessment decisions that are made during the IEP team process.</p>	
<p>8. How often must an IEP team review a student's eligibility for participating in Maryland School Assessments?</p>	
<p>A student's IEP must be reviewed at least once within a calendar year. This is called the annual review. Additional IEP team meetings to develop, review, or revise the student's IEP may occur during the calendar year of the current IEP. During the IEP team meeting, as part of the IEP Process, the IEP team is required to plan for the student's participation in assessment(s) to be</p>	

<p>administered during the term of the current IEP.</p>
<p>9. Once the “Alt-MSA IEP Team Decision-Making Process Eligibility Tool” is completed, where should the tool be maintained?</p>
<p>The Alt-MSA IEP Team Decision-Making Process Eligibility Tool shall be kept with the student’s IEP that was in place when the tool was used to determine the student’s assessment participation.</p>
<p>10. What process should be followed if the parent/guardian or student disagrees with the IEP team’s decision for the student to participate in the Alt-MSA?</p>
<p>As a member of the IEP team, the parents/guardians, students, as appropriate, participate in the IEP decision-making process. The Alt-MSA IEP Team Decision-Making Process Eligibility Tool provides a space to document any disagreement with the decision by any IEP Team member. Every effort should be made, by the IEP team, to resolve any disagreements. However, if a parent/guardian or student continues to disagree with the decision(s) of the IEP team and believes his/her rights, under IDEA, have been violated, his/her concerns may be resolved in a variety of ways; including advocacy and partnering with the school system. The parent/guardian or student should, however, be aware that there are several formal ways in which families and school systems can resolve their differences. There is mediation, due process hearings and formal complaints which may be filed with the MSDE. While disputes are in place, the current IEP should remain in effect. Mediation is a process where a trained mediator helps a parent/guardian and school system staff to reach an agreement. However, all parties must be willing to participate since the mediation process is voluntary. Parents/guardians also have the right to file for a due process hearing. This is a more formal way to resolve disputes between families and school systems, and the hearing is conducted by an administrative law judge through the State Office of Administrative Hearings. Parents/guardians may request a due process hearing by submitting the request forms found on the MSDE website at www.marylandpublicschools.org.</p> <p>A parent/guardian may also file a State complaint with the MSDE. Should a parent/guardian decide to file a complaint, the complaint must be submitted to Dr. Carol Ann Heath, Assistant State Superintendent, Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services, MSDE, 200 W. Baltimore Street, Baltimore, MD 21201. A copy of the completed complaint form must also be sent to the Director of Special Education of the school system where the student is attending. Additional information concerning the filing of a State complaint, including the form for filing the complaint, can also be found by visiting the MSDE website, above. Please be aware that although there is not a requirement that the form be used, all of the information that is requested on the form must be provided in order for the MSDE, DSE/EIS to initiate a complaint investigation.</p>
<p>11. What is the relationship between the Alt-MSA and a Maryland High School Diploma?</p>
<p>When a student is determined eligible to participate in the Alt-MSA, the student is then progressing toward the receipt of a Maryland Certificate of Program Completion. If a student continues to participate in the Alt-MSA, he/she may not be eligible for a high school diploma because his/her educational program will not prepare him/her to meet the high school diploma. Students pursuing a Maryland High School Diploma shall complete the requirements for graduation, including enrollment, credits, services, additional local requirements, if applicable, and assessments. [COMAR 13A.03.02.09B] The decision to award a student with disabilities a Maryland High School Certificate of Program Completion will not be made until after the beginning of the student’s last year in high school unless the student is participating in the alternative Maryland School Assessment Program (Alt-MSA). [COMAR 13A.03.02.09D (3)] The Maryland High School Certificate of Program Completion shall be awarded only to students with disabilities who cannot meet the requirements for a Maryland High School Diploma, but who</p>

meet the following standards:

1. The student is enrolled in an education program for at least 4 years beyond grade 8 or its age equivalent, and is determined by an IEP team, with the agreement of the parents of the student with disabilities, to have developed appropriate skills for the individual to enter the world of work, act responsibly as a citizen, and enjoy a fulfilling life, including but not limited to:
 - Gainful employment;
 - Work activity centers;
 - Sheltered workshops; and
 - Supported employment; or
2. The student has been enrolled in an education program for 4 years beyond grade 8 or its age equivalent and will have reached age 21 by the end of the student's current school year.

[COMAR 13A.03.02.09D]

To be awarded a high school diploma, a student shall be enrolled in a Maryland public school system and shall have earned a minimum of 21 credits that include the following specified core credits:

- English—four credits of organized instruction in listening and speaking, reading and literature, and written composition and use of language;
- Fine arts—one credit in visual arts, music, theater, or dance, or a combination of these;
- Mathematics—three credits, including one with instruction in algebra/data analysis and one with instruction in geometry;
- Physical education—one-half credit;
- Health education—one-half credit;
- Science—three credits of which one shall be in biology and two from the earth, life, or physical sciences, or all of the above, in which laboratory experiences are an integral component;
- Social studies—three credits including one credit in United States history, one credit in world history, and one credit in local, State, and national government;
- Technology education—one credit that includes the application of knowledge, tools, and skills to solve practical problems and extend human capabilities; and
- Earn 5 credits from one of the following options:
 - Option 1- Credits 2 Foreign Language Credits and 3 Elective Credits
 - Option 2- Credits 2 American Sign Language Credits and 3 Elective Credits
 - Option 3- Credits 2 Advanced Technology Education Credits and 3 Elective Credits
 - Option 4- Credits 4 State Approved Career and Technology Program Credits and 1 Elective Credit

[COMAR 13A.03.02.04A]

For more information, call 410-767-7548