

Parent Handbook  
for  
Better Schools  
2000-2001



 **Maryland State Department of Education**

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**Equity Assurance and Compliance Branch**  
200 West Baltimore Street  
Baltimore, MD 21201-2595  
(410) 767-0433 VOICE  
(410) 333-6442 TTY/TDD  
(410) 767-0431 FAX

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# Today's Little Red

Our vision for schools,  
"Schools for Success,"  
was designed to  
help children meet  
the demands of the  
21st century.



What is your perfect vision of a school classroom? Does it involve a caring, dedicated teacher? Students who are excited about learning? Children eagerly raising their hands to answer tough questions?

Maryland's vision for schools encompasses all that and more. Our goal is to make every classroom in Maryland a place where every student is encouraged to succeed in school. We want our children to be able to read and write better. We want them to understand our government and history. We want our students to compete with the best from around the world in math and science. We want the same thing you do — the best education possible for every one of our children.

Our vision for schools,  
"Schools for Success," was  
designed to help children meet the  
demands of the  
21st century.  
The world is a  
different place  
than it was when  
many of us graduated  
from high school.  
People change jobs  
more often, there is



# Schoolhouse

less job security, and employers expect even entry-level workers to have high-level skills.

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) wants to help your child succeed in this world. We want to help your child read, write, and do math better. We want your child to be able to think clearly and critically, to know how to solve problems, and to be able to work well with other people and on his or her own. We want your child to have the basics, plus the higher-level skills he or she needs for college or a good job.

To do this, we had to change schools. We had to make sure that your child is getting the kind of real-life instruction that will prepare him or her for the world he or she will face after high school. This booklet will give you more information about our school improvement program and how you can help your child succeed.

we  
need  
to  
provide

real  
life  
instruction

# Raising Expectations

Three important beliefs are behind Maryland's school improvement efforts:

- All children can learn.
- All children have the right to attend schools in which they can progress and learn.

- All children shall have a real opportunity to learn equally rigorous content.

Maryland is one of the first states in the nation to require schools to raise expectations for all students. In fact, *Education Week* magazine awarded Maryland an "A" for its achievements in standards and accountability. Maryland is holding all schools accountable for higher student performance. If we want all children to have an equal chance for success in life, we must hold all schools to the same standards as the highest performing schools in our state.

The Maryland School Performance Program (MSPP) includes five ways to help all schools improve:

**1** Schools are now graded on how well they teach students. These "grades" are based on tests that measure minimum skills (like the Maryland Functional Tests), tests that measure

all  
children  
can  
learn



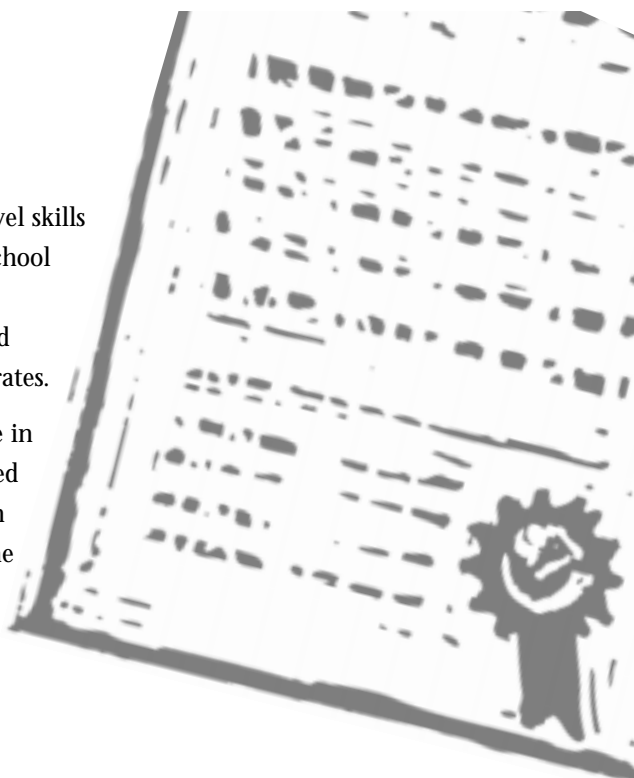
basic as well as higher-level skills (such as the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program — MSPAP), and dropout and attendance rates.

**2** School performance in these areas is now reported to the public each year in an annual report card (the *Maryland School Performance Report*) so that parents and communities know how well their schools are doing.

**3** Schools must work to improve student performance. For example, schools now have school improvement teams made up of teachers, parents, and other community members who determine the best way to teach their students.

**4** If a school performs poorly, the state can intervene in a process called reconstitution. Reconstitution ensures that a school gets the extra resources and attention it needs to improve instruction.

**5** Schools that make sustained, strong improvements in performance can receive financial rewards and public recognition.



**Schools are now graded on how well they teach students.**

# Preparing Students to



encourages teachers to engage in “performance-based” instruction. Performance-based instruction is one of the

best ways to make sure that children learn both the basics and the higher-level skills they will need when they graduate from school and enter “the real world.”

Simply put, performance-based instruction means that teachers help students to learn by using real-life, hands-on activities. Performance-based classes are often much harder to design and teach than

# hands-on activities

the lectures that many people grew up with, but they have been proven to help children learn better

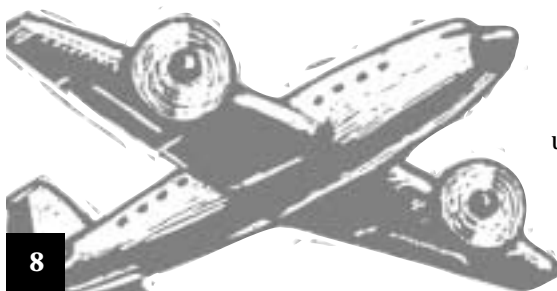
and become more excited about learning. They allow children to learn by doing, the same way many of us learn at our jobs.

None of us would get into a plane with a pilot who’d never flown before. Pilots must do more

than pass multiple choice tests —

they must prove they’ve mastered the knowledge and skills necessary to fly by actually

using them in the air. In the same



# Enter “The Real World”

way, performance-based instruction requires students to prove they’ve mastered reading, writing, language usage, mathematics, science, and social studies knowledge and skills by using them in real-life situations.

Performance-based lesson plans simulate the kinds of challenges students may find later on in life or at work.

Virtually every job nowadays requires employees to be able to “think on their feet” and solve problems on their own.

Today, even assembly line jobs require employees to have higher-level skills. For example, assembly line workers are also expected to recognize potential problems on the line, explain those problems verbally and in writing to a supervisor, and work in teams with other employees to figure out how to solve recurring problems. These are the same skills performance-based instruction is designed to teach.

**Performance-based lesson plans simulate the kinds of challenges students may find later on in life or at work.**



Performance-based instruction should be part of your child's everyday classroom instruction. Following are some of the changes MSPP is helping to make in the classroom:



Students usually learned only what they were taught by the teacher in class.

Teachers usually stressed individual work.

Students usually used only one skill at a time. Math, English, science, and other subjects were taught separately from one another.

Students learned how to solve simple multiple-choice or true-false problems that had only one right answer and were easy to grade.

Students learned how to solve simple, specific problems that may have had little to do with the real-life situations they faced when they got out of school.

**Students are encouraged to be actively involved in their own learning — they are taught how to learn on their own, as well as how to learn from the teacher.**

**Students learn to work both alone and in groups.**

**Students learn to use many skills at the same time to solve complex tasks. Students are taught how to use the skills they learn in many different subjects to complete an activity.**

**Students learn how to solve problems that require critical thinking and may have more than one right answer. Grading these answers usually takes more time.**

**Students learn how to solve the kind of complex, real-life problems they will face when they start a career.**

# What to Expect from Your Child's School



After studying schools that have performed well on MSPAP, which tests how well schools are teaching the basics and higher-level skills, we know many of the characteristics these schools share. As you examine the quality of instruction at your child's school, you may want to ask yourself the following questions. If you don't know the answers, talk to your child, your child's teacher, or the school principal.

- Does your child read and write in all subjects?
- Do teachers teach the basics?
- Do teachers have high expectations for all students?
- Do students get the chance to learn by doing?
- Are lessons based on what will help a student learn best?

students should get the chance to

learn  
by  
doing



visit the  
School  
Improvement  
in Maryland  
web site

at  
mdk12.org

- Is your child taught to be responsible for his or her own learning? Is your child motivated to learn and read on his or her own, as well as in class?
- Does your child work both independently and in groups?
- Do teachers work together as a team to help students and to improve instruction?
- Do school staff use MSPAP scores, attendance rates, and other school data to help improve instruction and other programs for students?
- Does the school make sure students are safe?
- Does the school have an orderly and positive learning environment?
- Does the school hold Parent Nights or other activities to keep parents informed about testing and instruction?
- Do parents and community members volunteer at the school?
- Do parents make sure their children do their homework?
- Do parents meet regularly with teachers to check on their children's progress?

If you think your school could improve in some of these areas, talk to your school principal to find out what is being done and what you can do to help.

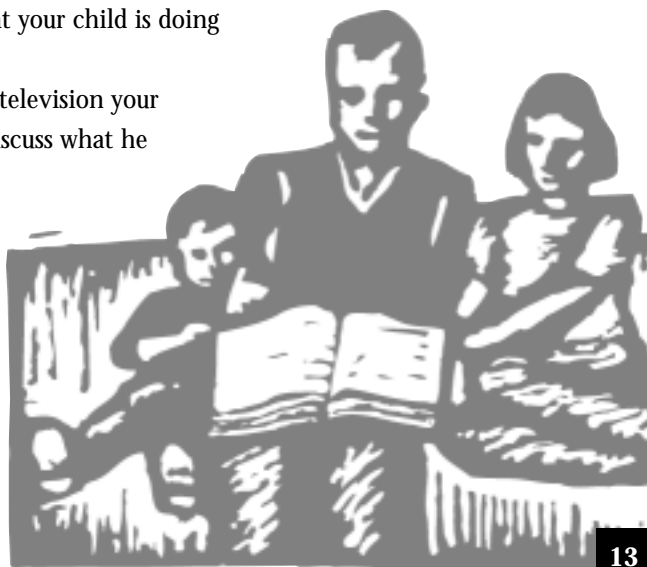
# What You Can Do to Help

As you know, your child can't do his or her best in school without your support. Following are some of the many ways you can help your child get the most out of school:

- Set high expectations for your child.
- Talk with your child's teachers regularly to discuss how your child is doing in school and what you can do to help him or her improve.
- Meet with your child's teachers or the school principal to discuss the school's MSPAP and other test scores.
- Read and write with your child and take time to read aloud to him or her, no matter how old your child is.
- Provide a quiet place for your child to study.
- Help your child with his or her homework.
- Show interest in what your child is doing in school.
- Limit the amount of television your child watches, and discuss what he or she sees on TV.
- Volunteer to help with school activities, and try to get other parents involved as well.

# show interest

in what  
your  
child is  
doing



# You Are Your Child's



here are many household projects you can let your child help with that will teach him or her the problem-solving, communication and critical thinking skills he or she will need in the future. Plus, working together can be fun for both of you!



Make sure you read to your child regularly. Gather together as a family to share a good book or read the newspaper. Make sure there are plenty of items available for your child to read. Reading at home is one of the most important things you can do to help your child do better in school.

**Reading at home is one of the most important things you can do to help your child do better in school.**

## **In the Kitchen**

Have your child help you cook. Cooking usually requires reading, gathering the proper materials, measuring exact amounts, and organizing steps in the proper order.

## **Traveling**

Are you planning to take a trip to visit your aunt who lives across town? Or are you getting ready for the annual trip to Ocean City? Get out the map and have your child plot the route and determine the distance you have to travel. If you're taking public transportation, let your child help pick the best bus route. If you're taking a car, tell your child how many miles per gallon of gas your car gets and

# First Teacher

ask him or her to figure out how many gallons you will need for the trip.

During or after the trip, help your child create a written travel log to share with family and friends.

# household projects

## Gardening

If you are planting a garden or window-boxes, first go to the library with your child and read more about what you might want to plant and how to do it. Together, find out about different plants and let your child help pick some seeds that would grow well in your area. Ask your child to help figure out how much space you will need depending on which seeds you plant.

will teach your child problem-solving and critical-thinking skills



# A Sample Performance

Following is an example of a second-grade performance-based lesson. This lesson, *Frog Jumping Contest*, takes several days to complete and can be used to teach life science skills and a variety of mathematics skills, including:



- how to read time and temperature.
- how to interpret and describe information from a chart or other display.
- how to use money in real-life problem situations.
- how to estimate and verify measurements.
- how to collect, organize, and display data for given situations.
- how to use appropriate displays, such as bar graphs or pictographs.
- how to read, write, and discuss mathematics using appropriate language, signs, and symbols.

To begin these activities, students review the “ad” on this page, as well as a chart listing frog growth stages. Then, using a calendar, students determine the date and day the frog jumping contest will take place. Next, students are given five pictures of frogs in different stages of development and asked to cut them out and glue them in the right growth order in boxes provided in a student answer booklet.

Each box has the price for a frog at that stage of development listed underneath. After stu-

# - Based Lesson Plan

dents paste the pictures of the eggs, tadpoles, and frogs in the right growth order, they will know how much it would cost them to buy that frog at the local pet store.



Students are then asked which frog they should buy, knowing that the contest is in six weeks (students need to use the calendar and the frog growth chart to answer this question). They then draw the coins they need to pay for their frog and fill out sample contest entry forms.

On the day of the contest, students learn that the contest isn't for real frogs, but for kids who jump like frogs. For the contest, students are told to work in groups to estimate how far they might jump and then to jump like frogs, measure their jumps, and record the data for each jumper on a chart.

Working individually, students use the data from their charts to complete a bar graph that shows how far each child in the group jumped. The teacher explains how to number the graph. Students then use the graph to determine who jumped the farthest and how far they jumped.

The teacher then helps students determine how far everyone in the class jumped. Using that information, students select the three winners of the contest and write a short explanation of how they decided who the winners were.

**The children learn how to collect, organize, and display data for given situations.**

# Maryland Content



In July 1999, the Maryland State Board of Education approved the **Maryland Content Standards**, which specify what students from kindergarten through grade 12

should know and be able to do in English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.

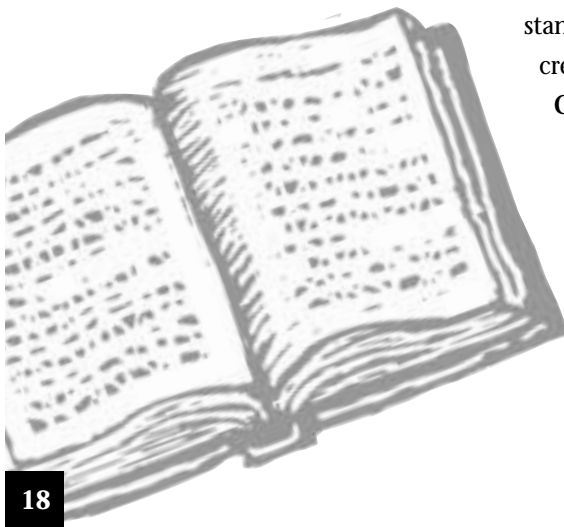
Maryland school systems use the content standards as a guide when they are writing curriculum and preparing students for MSPAP and the Maryland High School Assessments.

The Maryland Content Standards represent what should be *taught* in Maryland schools. However, not all of the content standards are *tested* by the state. For example, there are content standards for speaking and listening skills and for advanced mathematics, but this content is not tested on

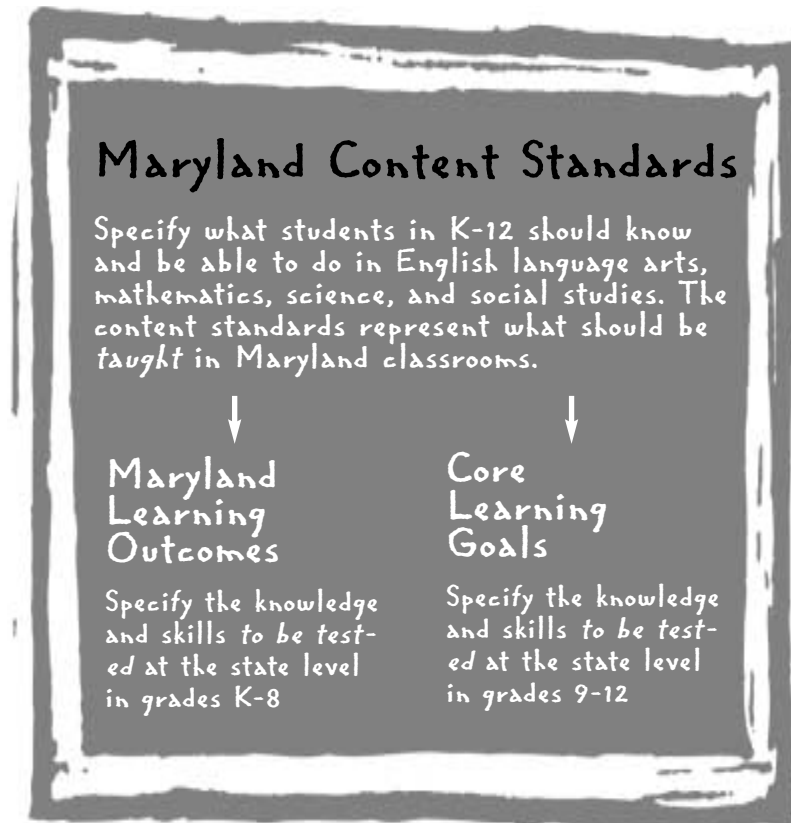
MSPAP or the Maryland High School Assessments.

In order to help schools better understand what will be tested, the state created the **Maryland Learning Outcomes**, which outline what skills and content will be *tested* by the state in grades K-8, and the **Core Learning Goals**, which outline what skills and content will be *tested* by the state in grades 9-12.

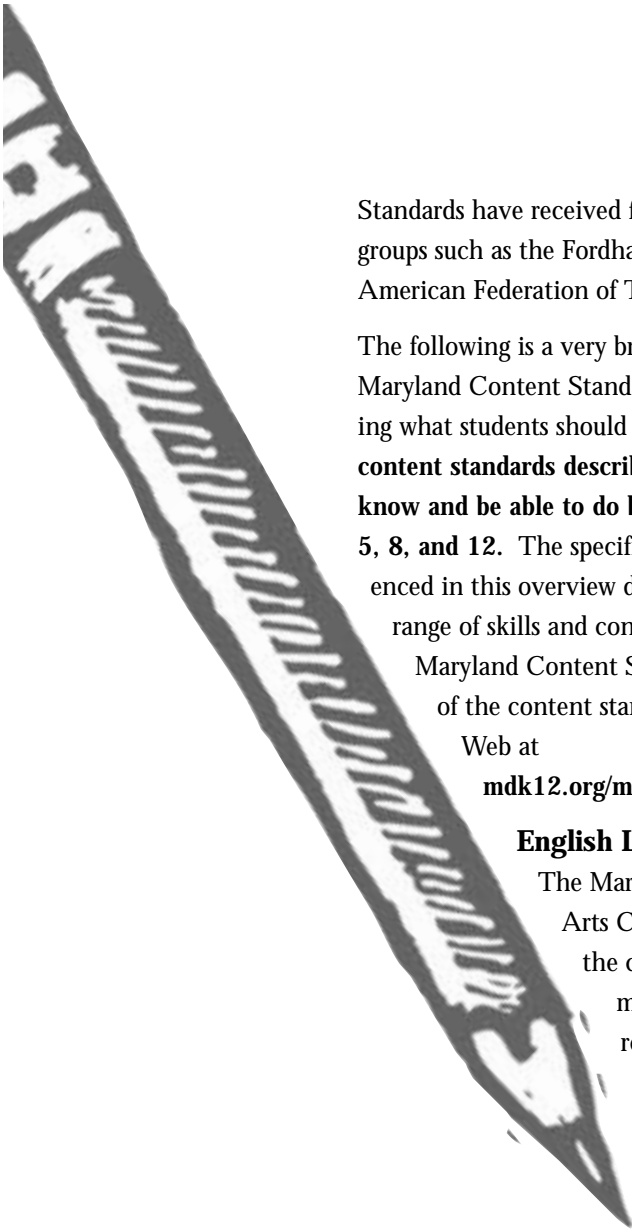
**The Maryland Content Standards have received favorable ratings from the Fordham Foundation and the American Federation of Teachers.**



# Standards



The development of the Maryland Content Standards took over a year and a half and involved hundreds of teachers, administrators, and education experts from Maryland's 24 local school systems, MSDE, and national organizations. The content standards underwent a rigorous review process, during which they were reviewed by more than 40 national experts and compared to widely respected state and national organization standards. Since their creation, the Maryland Content



Standards have received favorable ratings from groups such as the Fordham Foundation and the American Federation of Teachers.

The following is a very brief overview of the Maryland Content Standards. Rather than describing what students should learn grade-by-grade, the **content standards describe what students should know and be able to do by the ends of grades 3, 5, 8, and 12.** The specific skills and content referenced in this overview do not represent the full range of skills and content to be found in the Maryland Content Standards. The actual text of the content standards is available on the Web at

**[mdk12.org/mspp/standards/index.html](http://mdk12.org/mspp/standards/index.html)**.

### **English Language Arts**

The Maryland English Language Arts Content Standards outline the content and skills students must master in order to read and communicate. For example, the standards call for students in all grades to study literature and English grammar and to develop their reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills.

The Maryland English Language Arts Content Standards allow school systems and teachers flexibility in deciding how to teach material to students. However, the standards are specific in iden-

tifying the skills students must have at certain grades. **Here are just a few examples** of the specific skills and knowledge students should learn in English language arts class:

■ By the end of grade 3, students should be able to apply phonics skills when reading.

■ By the end of grade 5, students should be able to determine the theme of a text and to explain how an author's life and time are reflected in his or her writing.

■ By the end of grade 8, students should be able to communicate clearly in writing using correct punctuation, grammar, and spelling.

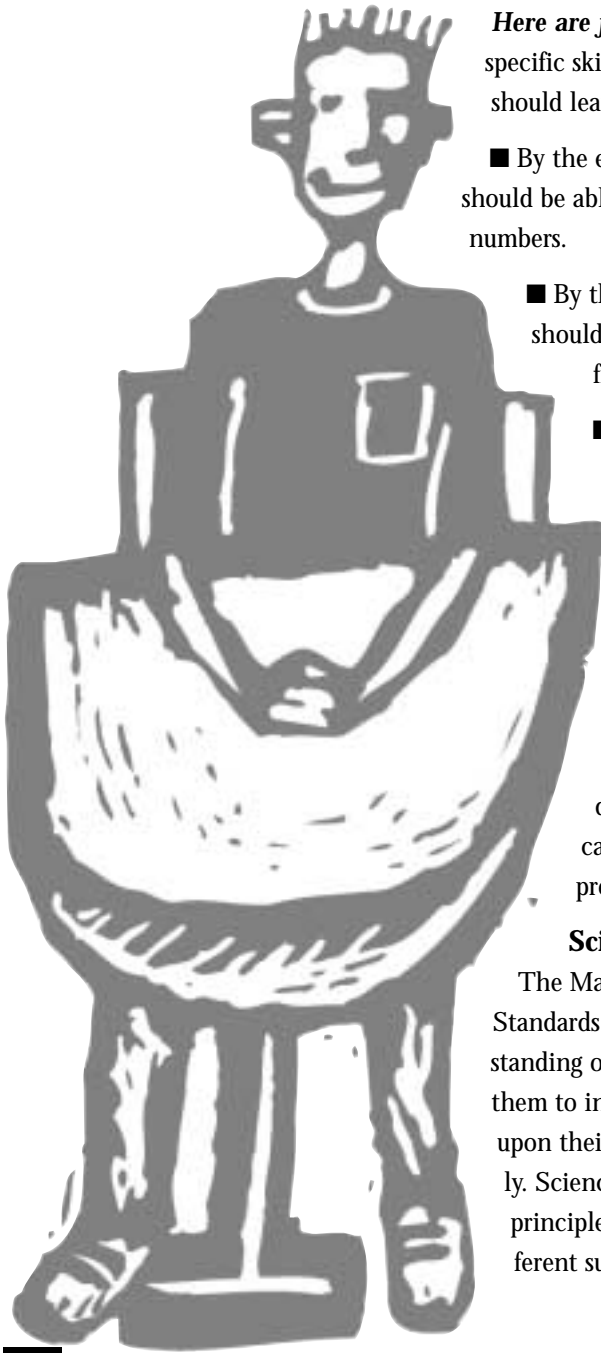
■ By the end of grade 12, students should be able to independently research a topic, analyze the information gathered, and write an essay with a thesis that is clearly communicated, well developed, and supported with details or examples.

### **Mathematics**

The Maryland Mathematics Content Standards outline the knowledge and processes that students should learn in math class. For example, at all grade levels students need to develop such math skills as problem-solving and reasoning. The standards also outline the content that students should master in areas such as number computation, measurement, algebra, geometry, and statistics.

view  
Maryland's  
content  
standards  
on the

**Web at**  
**[mdk12.org/mspp/standards/index.html](http://mdk12.org/mspp/standards/index.html)**



**Here are just a few examples** of the specific skills and knowledge students should learn in math class:

- By the end of grade 3, students should be able to add and subtract whole numbers.

- By the end of grade 5, students should be able to add and subtract fractions and decimals.

- By the end of grade 8, students should be able to solve linear equations and inequalities and to apply the Pythagorean theorem to solve problems.

- By the end of grade 12, students should be able to design and conduct a statistical investigation to study a problem.

### **Science**

The Maryland Science Content Standards develop students' understanding of science by challenging them to investigate carefully, reflect upon their findings, and think critically. Science content includes facts, principles, skills, and processes in different subject areas, such as biology

and chemistry. Students learn best when they combine skills and knowledge to solve a problem or conduct an experiment.

For example, students may study the anatomy and physiology of oysters and examine how oysters interact with the environment to help pose a solution to the problem of oyster decline in the Chesapeake Bay.

***Here are just a few examples*** of the specific skills and knowledge students should learn in science class:

■ By the end of grade 3, students should be able to identify sources of electricity and list common uses of electricity in daily life (e.g., electrical outlets, batteries, and static electricity).

■ By the end of grade 5, students should be able to demonstrate and explain how the rotation of the Earth produces the cycle of night and day.

■ By the end of grade 8, students should be able to analyze the structure and function of cells, tissues, organs, and systems in the human body.

■ By the end of grade 12, students should be able to explain how the number and arrangement of electrons can be used to predict when an atom will transfer or share electrons to form a bond and explain how the resulting materials are different from the original material.

students will demonstrate the thinking and acting inherent in the

# practice of science

# Maryland Content Standards

## Social Studies

The Maryland Social Studies

Content

Standards help

students value

underwent a  
rigorous review  
process

democratic beliefs and behavior, understand themselves in the context of contemporary life, and live responsibly in the global community. Through social studies, students learn to identify, understand, and work to resolve problems that confront them, their communities, the nation, and the international community. To accomplish these tasks and to work effectively as citizens, students need knowledge of past civilizations and an understanding of how economics, geography, and sociopolitical concepts affect civilization.

***Here are just a few examples*** of the specific skills and knowledge students should learn in social studies class:

- By the end of grade 3, students should be able to describe the lives of American heroes who took risks to secure freedoms.
- By the end of grade 5, students should be able to explain the rights and responsibilities of being a citizen of the United States.
- By the end of grade 8, students should be able to analyze the key events and turning points of the Civil War and compare and contrast the goals, resources, and strategies of the North and South, including the geographical advantages and

obstacles, technological advances, and military leadership.

■ By the end of grade 12, students should be able to analyze major U.S. foreign policy initiatives and responses to major crises since the early 1970s.

To view the full text of the Maryland Content Standards, visit

[mdk12.org/mspp/standards/index.html](http://mdk12.org/mspp/standards/index.html).

**Students need to understand how economics, geography, and sociopolitical concepts affect civilization.**



# MSPAP and CTBS/5 —



Two of the best measures we have for how well our schools are doing are MSPAP (Maryland School Performance Assessment Program, often pronounced “Mizpap”) and CTBS/5 (Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills). CTBS/5 is given in grades two, four, and six and uses multiple choice questions to test basic skills. MSPAP is given in grades three, five, and eight and measures how well schools are teaching students to use the basics and higher-order knowledge and skills to solve real-life problems.

MSPAP scores provide information that helps to

## improve instruction

Let’s talk about MSPAP.

When schools receive their MSPAP scores, they can see

how well their students can use what they know to solve problems in reading, writing, language

usage, mathematics, science, and social studies.

Schools then use this information to help improve instruction, focusing their efforts in the areas where MSPAP scores show students need the most help.

Since the Maryland School Performance

Assessment Program began in 1993, statewide composite scores are up 13.6 percentage points.

MSPAP tasks are similar to performance-based lessons like *Frog Jumping Contest*. The tests include problems that measure how well students can use what they know to solve problems.

# Measuring School Performance

For example, one fifth grade activity asks students to determine if their school could raise \$200 for a school banner in six weeks by recycling aluminum cans. By using a chart on aluminum can recycling and responding to questions on the test, students figure out what the school would need to do to reach the fund-raising goal. Then, students write to the student council presenting their findings. To solve this problem, students must have good problem-solving skills, as well as basic mathematics, reading, and writing skills.

Just like performance-based instruction, typical MSPAP tasks ask students to:

- work alone and in groups to solve problems.
- compare and contrast ideas, characters, and events.
- develop a plan to solve a problem.
- carry out the steps necessary to provide a solution.
- figure out the answer.
- explain how and why they got the answer they did.

Following are some sample activities adapted from MSPAP tasks.



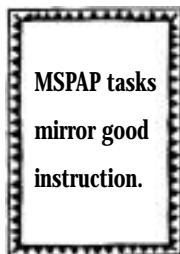
**Typical MSPAP tasks ask students to explain how and why they got the answer they did.**

# Adapted MSPAP Sample Activities



The following examples have been adapted from MSPAP tasks. For the complete version of these tasks and their scoring guides, or for copies of other tasks available to the public, visit

[mdk12.org/mspp/mspap/look/index.html](http://mdk12.org/mspp/mspap/look/index.html). You can also call the Maryland State Department of Education Public Information Line, listed in the back of this booklet.

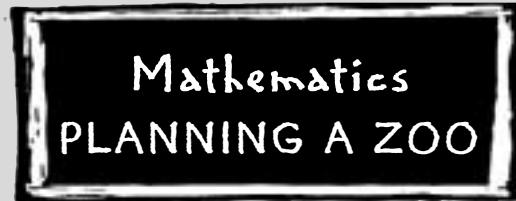


These activities represent one or two steps from a much longer, multi-step task. A complete MSPAP task can take more than an hour to complete and involves a variety of activities. Some activities are done individually and some are done in groups. The following sample activities will give you an idea of what the tasks are like. As you will see, the tasks mirror good performance-based instruction. In fact, most MSPAP tasks can be adapted into high-quality lesson plans. Students who engage in performance-based instruction in their daily classwork should be comfortable completing MSPAP tasks.

Please note that the sample student responses are just that — *samples*. Except as noted in the comments following each activity, these responses would receive high scores. But there are often many different “right” responses to the different activities. Remember, the tasks are designed to test students’ abilities to solve problems and apply the knowledge and basic skills they have learned in school. General guidelines for what test scorers look for in answers are included in the notes following each sample response.

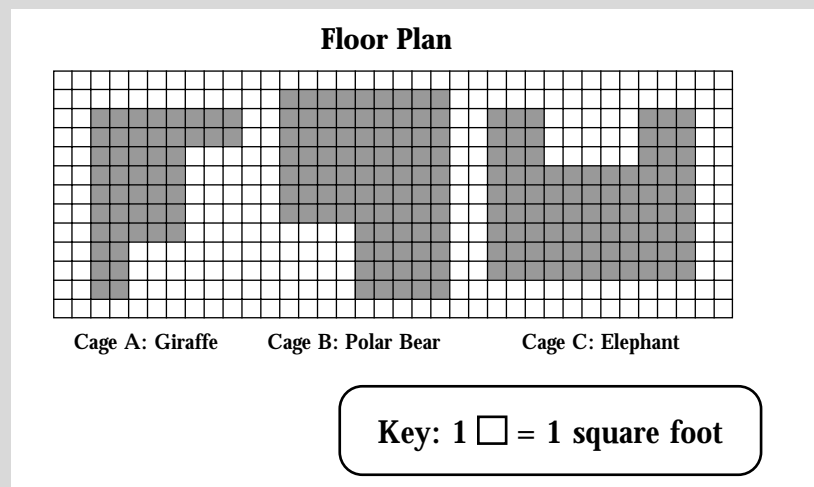
Answers to many common MSPAP questions follow the activities.

# Excerpt from a Grade 3 MSPAP Task



## Sample Activity:

Suppose that a new zoo is being planned for your community. Pretend that the zoo planners have asked your class to help with some of the planning. Below is the floor plan for three of the cages to be built at the new zoo.



Each animal's cage will need a fence enclosure. The cost of fencing is \$8 for each foot. First, find the perimeter of each cage. Then, use your calculator to find the cost of the fencing for each cage. Record your answers on the chart provided.

*Note: The task goes on to ask students to determine the area of the cages and the cost of flooring based on that area and a set price per square foot of flooring.*

*Students are also asked to place objects in the cages according to specific directions.*

**continued on next page**

## Planning a Zoo continued from previous page

### Sample Student Response:

Cage	Perimeter	Cost
A	36 ft.	\$288
B	40 ft.	\$320
C	46 ft.	\$368

*Note: This response shows that the student understands the concept of perimeter and knows how to determine the perimeter of an object. It also shows that the student understands how to compute the total cost of an item – the fencing – based on how much it costs per foot. This student has demonstrated that he or she knows how to use money in real-life situations.*

*If students make a mistake in determining the perimeter, they will not get credit for that part of the answer. Students would still receive credit for computing the cost of the flooring if their answer was correct based on the answer they gave in the perimeter column.*

# Excerpt from a Grade 5 MSPAP Task



## Sample Activity:

Suppose that it is the year 1912. The United States Congress is investigating child labor. A town meeting in your community has been called to examine the issues.

Decide whether you believe that it is right or wrong for children, like yourselves, to work. Take a firm stand.

Write a speech that you will read to citizens at the town meeting persuading them to accept your point of view on child labor. Use information from “A Letter to Hannah” and “Mill Children” to support your stand.

*Note: This is one of the final steps in a series of activities. Before responding to this activity, students will have read the materials referred to above and will have completed other activities using the information they learned from the reading selections.*

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## Child Labor continued from previous page

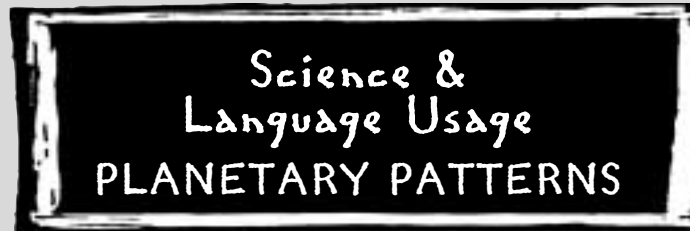
### Sample Student Response:

Citizens, the slaves who worked on the plantations and the children in the mills are the same. To piddle and toil with a machine in a poor environment and get very low wages is unfair to anyone, especially for children. Why must they do this? One day they will grow up uneducated except to using this loom. Many questions are still left, such as why must these children go to work instead of school? Educated people get better jobs. They are the uneducated leaders of our country! Educated enough only to use the loom.

Why do we abuse them like this? At the very least, give them a better education. Why don't adults get jobs? Free the children. Why do we do this? Why must we hire a boy to do a man's job? We must speak out. The government is against child labor! We have the advantage, use it! Seize the millers, they hired the children! I simply ask the government to free the children.

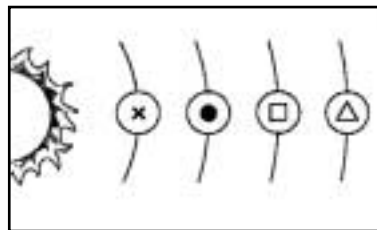
*Note: A variety of answers is acceptable. Responses should show that students understand what they have read and can support an opinion with ideas and information based on the reading selections. Students should be able to express and fully support their ideas. Ideas should be developed and organized effectively and spelling, grammar, punctuation, and word choice should be appropriate. Any errors should show that students were trying to use richer language or more complex sentences. This response would receive a high score in terms of reading and writing to persuade, but would receive only a satisfactory score in terms of language usage.*

# Excerpt from a Grade 8 MSPAP Task



## Sample Activity:

The table below and the orbit diagram on the right show current information about planets that have been discovered in a new solar system.



Name	Surface Temperature	Number of Moons	Tilt of Axis	Composition
△	0°C	4	15°	helium & nitrogen
x	200°C	9	90°	lead & nickel
●	30°C	0	25°	copper & sodium
□	20°C	6	60°	neon & carbon

**Step A:** Describe a pattern in this data which is similar to data from our solar system.

**Step B:** Write **at least** three questions (more if you can) about additional scientific data on the new solar system and its planets that could be gathered with further study.

continued on next page

## Planetary Patterns continued from previous page

**Step C:** Describe three repeating patterns of astronomical change that occur in the sky above us.

*Note: Before answering these questions, students will read an introduction explaining the task in more detail. After completing steps A, B, and C, students will plot the orbits of the planets using orbit diagrams that have been provided in the test materials. Students will predict the positions of the planets at different times of the year and predict the next planetary alignment.*

### Sample Student Response:

**Step A** A planet's temperature decreases as the distance from the sun increases.

#### **Step B**

Question 1: What size are the planets?

Question 2: Is there life on any of the planets?

Question 3: How long is each planet's year?

#### **Step C**

Pattern 1: The rising and setting of the sun.

Pattern 2: The cyclical eclipses of the sun.

Pattern 3: The phases of the moon.

*Note: These responses show that this student can study the sun, the moon, and the planets to see scientific patterns and can ask the kinds of questions which will help him or her understand the new solar system better. A variety of answers is acceptable.*

# Common Questions about MSPAP

## Is MSPAP a New Idea?

The ideas behind MSPAP are over 2,000 years old. Good teachers have always tested student performance with real-life problems.

## Does MSPAP Include the Basics?

Basic academic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics are directly assessed in the tasks through problem-solving activities. As we have studied schools that are improving on MSPAP, we have learned that the basics are a necessary key to success.

## When Are Students Tested?

Maryland's third, fifth, and eighth grade students take the test each May. MSPAP is given over a period of five days for 105 minutes per day.

## Do All Students Take the Tests?

In general, only children who are so disabled that they are focusing on functional life skills rather than seeking a Maryland high school diploma are exempted from taking the test. An exemption from the test means that the student is not included in the school's results. Students who are sick are excused from the test, the same way they would be excused from school any other day. In addition, students who would be seriously frustrated or upset by the test or who would disrupt others can be excused from taking the test. An excused student does not take the test, but is included in the calculation of the school's MSPAP scores.

## Who Develops the Test?

MSPAP tasks are created by Maryland teachers over the course of two school years. Working with

third  
fifth  
and  
eighth

grade  
students  
are  
tested





**Learn more about  
MSPAP on the  
web at  
[mdk12.org/mspp/  
mspap/index.html](http://mdk12.org/mspp/mspap/index.html).**

other teachers and MSDE staff, teachers make sure that the tasks are appropriate for the grade level of the students who will be taking the tests. In addition, the MSPAP Review Panel and the Assessment Issues Committee, both formed in the summer of 1997, review the test for appropriateness. Panel members include parents, teachers, principals, legislators, and other business, education, and government leaders, as well as at least one religious leader and one physician. The panels also have the task of looking for ways to improve communication with parents about MSPAP.

### **Will I Receive My Child's Test Scores?**

MSPAP's main purpose is to give information about how well schools are doing. Each student takes only one-third of the test, so the results do not give a complete picture of how any one child is doing. However, you can obtain your child's results from the school or the local school system.

### **How Is MSPAP Scored?**

Student responses to the performance tasks are open-ended. This means that a wide range of responses may be acceptable. Some responses receive full credit, some partial credit, and some no credit, depending on the quality of the response. Responses to the MSPAP tasks are scored by teams of Maryland educators who have been specially trained to use scoring guidelines (called rules and rubrics).

### **What Does MSPAP Mean for My Child’s School?**

MSPAP helps schools to improve instruction by showing areas where students need extra help. However, MSPAP is just one way schools measure performance. MSPAP results are used in combination with other test scores and classroom performance before changes are made in instruction.

### **How Can I Find Out How My Child’s School Did on MSPAP?**

Review the school’s performance report (or school “report card”). Your school principal may send a copy of the report card home, or it may be published in the local paper. It is also available on the web at [www.msp.msde.state.md.us](http://www.msp.msde.state.md.us). If you do not receive a copy, call the school.

### **What Happens If a School Doesn’t Score Well on MSPAP?**

Every school has a school improvement team that uses MSPAP and other information to make decisions about the best way to teach students. Parents and other community members serve on these teams and work with teachers and administrators on improving school performance. Schools that do very poorly on the tests or that do not improve their test scores over time may be eligible for state reconstitution. This means that the state will work with the school to make sure it will improve and become a better place to learn.

**MSPAP helps schools to improve instruction by showing where students need extra help.**

# Maryland High



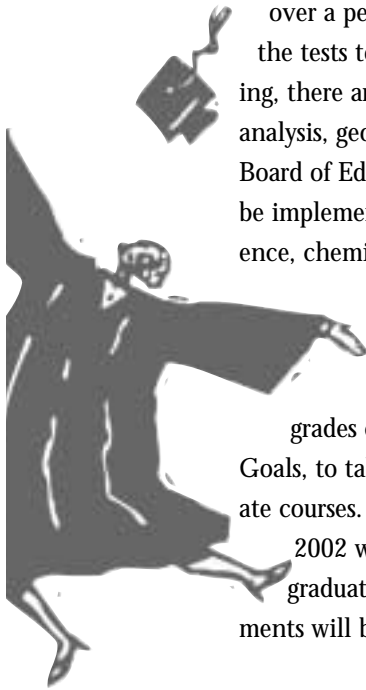
aryland's high school improvement program extends the higher expectations of MSPAP into grades 9-12 with the Maryland High School Assessments. With rigorous course-

work and individual accountability, Maryland will better prepare its students for the challenges of higher education and the business world.

The Maryland High School Assessments are a series of tests that will cover core academic areas in English, mathematics, science, and social studies. The tests will measure both school and individual student progress toward Maryland's Core Learning Goals. To view the Core Learning Goals on the web, go to: [mdk12.org/mspp/high\\_school/what\\_will/index.html](http://mdk12.org/mspp/high_school/what_will/index.html).

The Maryland High School Assessments will be phased in over a period of years. Eventually, students will have to pass the tests to receive a high school diploma. As of this printing, there are assessments for English I, biology, algebra/data analysis, geometry, and government. The Maryland State Board of Education will decide when additional tests should be implemented, including English II & III, earth/space science, chemistry, physics, U.S. history, and world history.

The current Maryland High School Assessments timetable calls for students entering ninth grade in fall 2001, as well as students in lower grades enrolled in courses covering the Core Learning Goals, to take the assessments as they complete the appropriate courses. Students entering grade nine in fall 2001 and fall 2002 will not have to pass the assessments in order to graduate. However, their percentile scores on the assessments will be reported on their high school transcripts.



# School Assessments

Students are slated to be required to take and pass the Maryland High School Assessments as a requirement for graduation beginning with students entering ninth grade in fall 2003. Students who do not pass an assessment will receive extra help and will be able to retake the test. For up-to-the-minute information on the assessments and the phase-in schedule, visit MSDE's high school improvement web page:

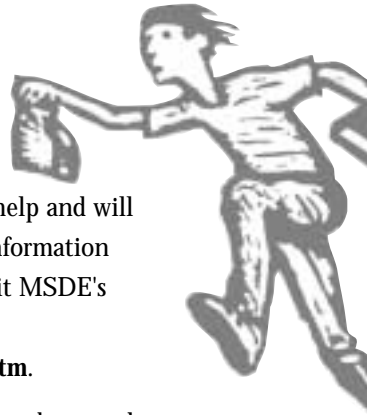
**[www.msde.state.md.us/hsimprovement/default.htm](http://www.msde.state.md.us/hsimprovement/default.htm)**

Educators, parents, business leaders, community members, and educational and professional organizations and associations from across Maryland collaborated on the development of the high school assessments. For more information on the high school improvement program or to view actual high school assessment test items, visit

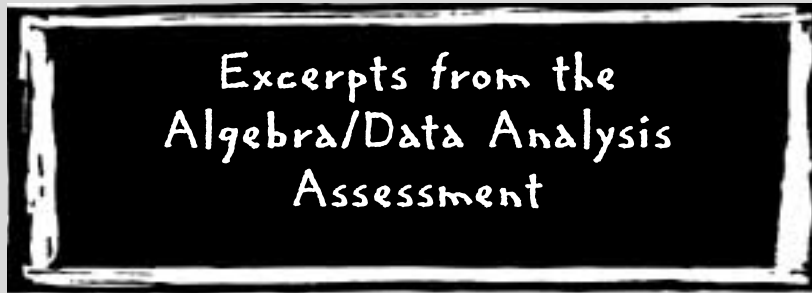
**[mdk12.org/mspp/high\\_school/index.html](http://mdk12.org/mspp/high_school/index.html)**

The high school assessments are comprised of four different types of test items: multiple choice, student-produced response, brief constructed response (short-answer), and extended constructed response (long-answer). The first two item types are similar; however, the student-produced response eliminates the possibility for students to guess the correct answer (see the student response on page 40).

The brief constructed response and extended constructed response formats give students the opportunity to solve a problem in a variety of ways and to explain how they arrived at their answer and/or demonstrate that their solution is correct. The constructed response formats support the processes of problem-solving, reasoning, communication and connections that students use in MSPAP.



# Maryland High School Assessments



The following test items are taken from the algebra/data analysis assessment that was field-tested during January and May of 2000. To see how students performed on each item during field-testing, visit [mdk12.org/mspp/high\\_school/look\\_like/](http://mdk12.org/mspp/high_school/look_like/).

### Directions:

Use the Response Grids in the Answer Book to complete the problem below.

Keisha charges \$5.50 per hour for yard work. She also charges a \$2.00 fee for supplies for each job. How many hours will she need to work at one job in order to be paid \$35.00?

### Student Response:

6				
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
<input type="radio"/> 0	<input type="radio"/> 0	<input type="radio"/> 0	<input type="radio"/> 0	<input type="radio"/> 0
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 1
<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 2
<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 3
<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 4
<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 5
<input checked="" type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 6
<input type="radio"/> 7	<input type="radio"/> 7	<input type="radio"/> 7	<input type="radio"/> 7	<input type="radio"/> 7
<input type="radio"/> 8	<input type="radio"/> 8	<input type="radio"/> 8	<input type="radio"/> 8	<input type="radio"/> 8
<input type="radio"/> 9	<input type="radio"/> 9	<input type="radio"/> 9	<input type="radio"/> 9	<input type="radio"/> 9

**Directions:**

Darken the appropriate circle to indicate your answer.

The table below shows the number of dogs in the United States that can perform certain tricks.

## Dog Tricks

Trick	Number (in millions)
Sit	5.3
Shake paw	3.8
Roll over	2.9
Stand on hind legs	1.9
Sing	0.8
Fetch newspaper	0.4

Steve adds the values in the table for dogs that can stand on hind legs and dogs that can sing. He concludes that there are 2.7 million dogs in the United States that can stand on their hind legs or sing. Why is this statement a misuse of data?

**Student Response:**

- A Steve did not consider some dogs do no tricks.
- B Steve did not consider some dogs do only one trick.
- C Steve did not consider all the dogs in the United States.
- D Steve did not consider that some dogs can do both tricks.

**Directions:** Complete the following problem in the Answer Book.

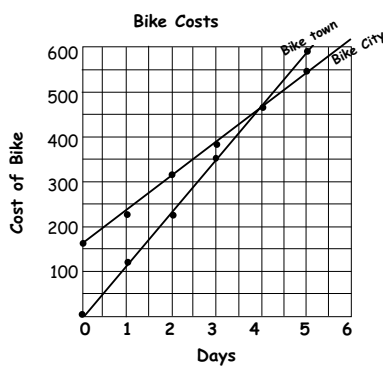
Two bicycle shops build custom-made bicycles. Bicycle City charges \$160 plus \$80 for each day that it takes to build the bicycle. Bike Town charges \$120 for each day that it takes to build the bicycle.

- Write an equation for each store that describes the charge (C) to build a custom-made bicycle in x days.
- For what number of days will the charge be the same at each store? What will be the charge for that number of days? Use mathematics to justify your answer. (If you solve the problem graphically, use the grid provided in the Answer book to add to your written response.)
- When is it less expensive to use Bicycle City to build a custom-made bicycle than Bike Town? When is it more expensive? Use mathematics to justify your answer.

**Student Response:**

Bike City  
 $160 + 80x = C$   
 $160 + 8(4) = 480$

Bike Town  
 $120x = C$   
 $120(4) = 480$



At 4 days the charge will be the same at each store \$480

Less expensive  
Bike City

$x > 4$

the line is lower after 4 days

Bike town  
 $x < 4$

*Note: Students may arrive at the solution in a variety of ways.*

# How to learn more about Maryland's school improvement efforts . . .

Good schools need informed and involved parents and communities. To find out more about the Maryland School Performance Program and how you can help your child's school improve, call your principal or your local school system.

The Maryland State Department of Education has a variety of publications that will tell you more about statewide efforts to improve schools. Fact sheets and public release tasks providing more information on school improvement, MSPAP, and the Maryland High School Assessments are also available.

For copies of these publications, or for more information about public education programs in Maryland, return the order form on the back of this booklet, or contact the Maryland State Department of Education.

**[www.msde.state.md.us](http://www.msde.state.md.us)**

**Baltimore Metro Area**  
(410) 767-0600

**All other areas, Toll-Free**  
1-888-246-0016

**TTY/TDD**  
(410) 333-6442

*Many of these publications are also available on the Web. Be sure to visit our website for the latest information on school reform.*



**Maryland State Department of Education  
Information Request**

*Please use this sheet to request more information.*

FACT SHEETS (a series of one-page information sheets)

- Maryland School Performance Assessment Program
- MSPAP Through the Eyes of a Student (specify 3rd, 5th, or 8th grade)
- High School Assessment
- School Reconstitution
- Maryland School Performance Highlights
  
- MARYLAND'S REPORT CARD ON SCHOOLS (an annual report on Maryland's performance and the performance of local school systems)
- EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (highlights from the annual report card)
- MSPAP POSTER: BASICS AND BEYOND (specify 3rd, 5th, or 8th grade)
  
- MARYLAND GOALS REPORT (a report on Maryland's progress toward the national education goals)
- SCHOOL REFORM WHERE IT COUNTS: SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS, SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL SYSTEMS (profiles of some of Maryland's high-performing schools)
  
- FACT BOOK (public education statistics)
- MSPAP PUBLIC RELEASE TASKS (actual MSPAP tasks that are no longer being used—specify 3rd, 5th, or 8th grade)

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Daytime Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to: **The Maryland State Department of Education  
School and Community Outreach Office  
200 West Baltimore Street  
Baltimore, MD 21201-2595**

