

Parent Overview of the MSAA

GRADE

8

Parent Overview of the MSAA: Grade 8

This overview of the Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA) explains:

- alternate assessment,
- importance of academic instruction,
- possible instructional supports, and
- ways to work with your child's teachers.

Alternate Assessment

When you receive your child's test results, the report will show your child's score and performance level on the MSAA test. These scores and performance levels reflect appropriate academic expectations and were developed specifically for students who participate in this alternate assessment. The test was designed using the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and has built-in supports such as:

- reduced passage length in reading;
- pictures and graphics included to help students understand;
- models in reading, writing, and mathematics;
- common geometric shapes and smaller numbers on the mathematics test; and
- the option to have the entire test read aloud.

The alternate assessment is designed to work with the way your child communicates. The MSAA is designed to work with the supports your child needs as identified in their IEP. The MSAA offers a full set of sample items that can be used to practice and become familiar with item types, accessibility features, accommodations, and the online platform. To view the sample items, visit: www.msaaassessment.org/sample-items.

The MSAA test results, reported in the Individual Student Report (ISR), may be used to identify areas for needed improvement as well as areas of strength so that everyone can work together to help your child. Teachers may use this information to guide their planning and teaching so that students learn the knowledge and skills of the grade-level academic content with appropriate supports.

Parent and teacher resources are available at www.msaastates.com. Please talk with your child's teacher for more information on the resources they use to create lessons.

College, Career, and Community Skills

- **Reading and writing** are important to understand books, gather and learn new information, make notes, share thoughts and stories, compare information, read schedules, etc.
- **Mathematics** is important to understand numbers, solve problems, schedule, arrange transportation, manage money, etc.
- **Communication skills** are important to advocate for self, participate in social and educational conversations, express wants and needs, access information, make requests, shop, prepare a meal, etc.
- **Age-appropriate social skills** are important to build knowledge and shared experiences with peers in school, the community, and work.
- **Independence and teamwork** are important to build problem-solving skills, understand and follow directions, complete a new task, work with others, and use provided supports.
- **Skills to access support systems** are important for academic instruction, collaborative work with peers, developing independence, requesting assistance, and using appropriate tools (e.g., calculator) to complete a task.

Academic Instruction

Changes in our culture, our technology, and our work are happening at a fast pace. There are recognized college, career, and community skills that prepare our children for the world they will live in as adults. This preparation requires instruction that is individualized to meet your child's unique needs and is focused on skills to communicate, read, write, use mathematics, and develop work skills.

Instructional Supports

Teachers have many tools and techniques to teach academic content. Teachers will provide the supports identified in your child's IEP. This should help your child learn the content and improve their knowledge, skills, and abilities as well as demonstrate them on the test.

The principles of UDL provide flexible approaches for curriculum and are used throughout the MSAA to provide support and accommodations as needed for all children, including your child. Teachers can use these same strategies to support your child in learning. For example, in reading, your child may listen to the story read by someone else and answer questions using a communication system. In mathematics, your child might use counters to help solve problems and follow steps that are provided for calculations instead of having to memorize the steps. Supports will be important as your child is introduced to new content.

Additional examples of supports include providing:

- information presented in different ways (e.g., with pictures, manipulatives, and simplified text),
- access to learning materials in different ways (e.g., listening to a story while using a screen reader or a version enhanced with textures, providing word or picture choices),
- different ways to show what your child has learned (e.g., answering using a switch-activated recording, presenting using technology, using eye gaze to select words or pictures to write a story), and
- multiple options to engage your child (e.g., providing choices, using topics of personal interest).

You can find more about UDL at www.cast.org.

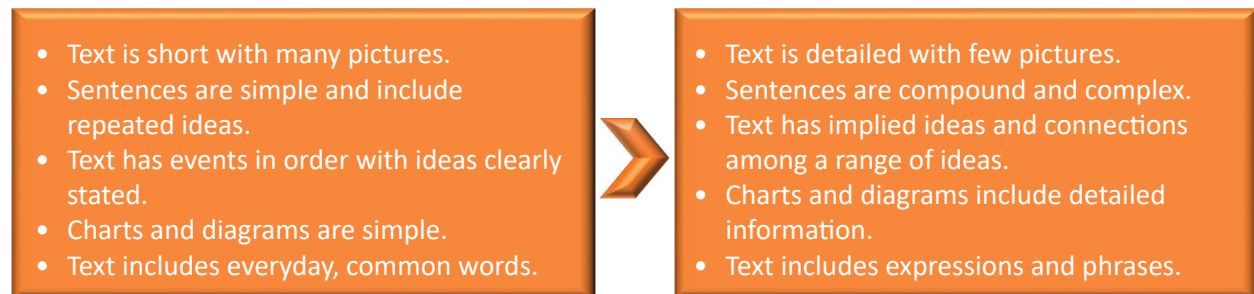
English Language Arts – Grade 8

In middle school, your child’s instruction has an increased focus on informational texts but still includes enjoying reading, or listening to, and learning more about literary (non-fiction) texts. Your child will:

- read/listen to stories, plays (e.g., *The Crucible*), poems, and informational texts (e.g., biographies, memoirs, historical documents, technical documents, etc.) that may be adapted;
- produce different types of writing: stories, informational, and persuasive; and
- learn communication skills (e.g., class discussions and presentations).

The complexity of the stories and informational text your child will read or listen to will increase throughout the year and as they move to the next grade. The following are a few ways that stories and text become more complex.

Range of Text Complexity



Instructional activities should be individualized for your child as needed. For example, to teach how to determine what the author is claiming and the evidence the author uses to support the claim, the teacher reads a persuasive article (e.g., *Driving Age Should Be Lowered*). The teacher projects a chart on the board that has three sections: author’s claim, evidence, and page number. The teacher has the class complete the chart through a class discussion to determine the author’s claim and evidence used to support the claim. Some students provide a response by pointing to the evidence in the text. Some students will choose from provided options. The teacher has students independently complete their own chart using a different article. Some students may listen to a recording of the article; some students may read an adapted version of the article (e.g., two short sentences on each page paired with a picture). Some students may dictate their responses for the chart. Some students may copy from the text.

Teachers often pair reading and writing together. The teacher points to words in the article that the students just read that indicate evidence (e.g., for example, because) and has students brainstorm a list of similar words. The teacher directs the students to choose from a list of topics to write a persuasive article. The teacher provides a graphic organizer and reminds students to use words like the ones on the list they made. Some students may write their article using sentence frames (e.g., I believe _____ because _____). Some students may dictate the information.

ELA Sample Instructional Strategies (text complexity increases in each grade)

Grade 8

- Learning the meaning of new academic and content words (e.g., galaxy), and how they affect eighth-grade-level stories or informational texts
- Understanding how the big idea or central idea of stories and informational text are developed by finding evidence throughout the piece
- Comparing two or more texts to see how the characters' points of view are similar or different and how they affect the story
- Analyzing two or more informational texts that provide conflicting information on the same topic
- Determining the author's claim and evaluating the evidence used to support the claim
- Determining how a text is structured (e.g., cause/effect, chronological order)
- Sharing ideas and information by producing persuasive pieces that include clear reasons, ideas, and evidence; informational pieces using content-specific vocabulary; and stories that use language such as imagery (e.g., juicy and sweet) that build understanding and appreciation
- Communicating claims and information to classmates

High School Preview

- Learning the meaning of new academic and content words and why an author uses certain words in high school-level texts
- Finding what the two or more big ideas or central ideas of stories are and how they are developed
- Deciding how the author's choice in developing story elements (e.g., characters, details, ideas, events, etc.) affects a text
- Evaluating multiple sources of information to answer a question or solve a problem
- Understanding how the author's use of details and how the author structured parts of the text help the reader gain the meaning
- Identifying the author's point of view or claim and deciding whether the reasoning is correct and the evidence is sufficient
- Sharing ideas and information by producing persuasive pieces that include an appropriate organization of the information, relevant facts, details, and examples, and using appropriate vocabulary and phrases for the type of writing (e.g., imagery for narrative writing)
- Communicating decisions, goals, and action plans

Mathematics – Grade 8

In grade 8, the focus in mathematics is on creating and solving equations about real-world problems, solving problems using positive and negative numbers, studying how changing positions and size affects geometric figures, determining how one angle in a geometric figure affects other angles, calculating volume of three-dimensional objects, using data from different types of graphs, and determining probability. All of these learning activities that you can expect your child to be involved in might be individualized for your child. This allows the skills to be taught, practiced, and learned so that your child can make progress more easily. Here is a mathematics example that shows how individualization might work.

The teacher is beginning to teach congruency and similarity of geometric figures. Students will be practicing on worksheets the teacher has given them. Some students may work on three transformations (e.g., turns, flips, slides), some students may work on two transformations, and some students may work on one. Some students may have to complete transformations, and some students may have to identify what transformation has been completed for them. Some students may have to come up with an answer on their own, and some students may choose from several answer choices (some students may choose from four answer choices, some students may choose from three answer choices, and some students may choose from two answer choices).

Mathematics Sample Instructional Strategies

Grade 8

- Working with rational and irrational numbers
- Adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing fractions, decimals, or positive/negative numbers
- Recognizing and comparing congruent and similar figures; describing scale change on surface area, area, and volume
- Changing a two-dimensional shape using turns, flips, or slides
- Learning about how angles are related to each other (e.g., supplementary, complementary, and adjacent)
- Solving problems involving angle measure, area, surface area, and volume including cylinders, cubes, and spheres
- Solving linear equations; graphing linear functions
- Interpreting information from graphs and plots
- Conducting and analyzing probability experiments

High School Preview

- Learning about exponents and scientific notation
- Solving problems with rational and irrational numbers
- Using tools to make geometric constructions
- Solving real-world geometric problems by using transformations and finding dimensions of figures
- Graphing and using linear equations to solve geometric problems
- Writing and solving variable expressions that represent word problems
- Identifying, completing, predicting, comparing, and making conclusions from data displayed in graphs and box plots
- Calculating the mean and median of a set of data
- Describing, predicting, and making conclusions about real-world probabilities

Families Working with Teachers

Children learn well when teachers and families work together. You can help your child learn when you and their teachers share information with each other. You can share how your child learns best and what their interests are. It is also important to provide your child with learning activities suggested by their teachers. To do this, you should find out what your child's instruction looks like and what your child is expected to learn and do. For example, the activity might be to read and answer questions about a story. The teacher might say that the most important part is for your child to answer the questions, which they can do after listening to the story instead of reading it alone. Likewise, writing might include the way your child communicates their thoughts and ideas. This might be by using the computer, assistive technology, or dictation instead of using a pencil and paper.

For more information, please visit www.msaastates.com. Parents are encouraged to review their child's Individual Student Report (ISR), which provides detailed information about their child's performance. The Performance Level Descriptors (PLDs) can help you understand the skills your child is demonstrating during instruction, while the "What's Next" section offers guidance on skills to focus on for the upcoming grade. The included questions can also help guide conversations with your child's teacher. Using these resources and working closely with your child's teacher can help support your child's development of college, career, and community skills.

Summary

As everyone works together to support your child's learning of the college, career, and community skills, the MSAA provides guidance on the appropriate content and supports. Teachers and families working together will make individualized instruction meaningful and will help your child develop those skills. As you read through this overview and look at your child's ISR, please contact your child's teacher if you need more information.

MSAA Resources for Teachers and Parents

- Content Modules (explanation of grade-level content)
- Instructional Families (skills for each grade)
- Curriculum Resource Guides (examples for teaching grade-level content)
- UDL Units (model universally designed lesson plans)
- Instructional Resource Guide (instructional strategies)
- Systematic Activities for Scripted Systematic Instruction (samples of intensive instruction: LASSIs for language arts and MASSIs for mathematics)

Links to Transition Resources

These are activities that you need to start thinking about. If you haven't yet, please work with your school.

- [Disability Benefits 101](#)

Disability Benefits 101 gives you tools and information on health coverage, benefits, and employment. You can plan ahead and learn how work and benefits go together.

- [Future Planning Workbook](#)

This road map is designed as a tool to be used by individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, family members, direct support professionals, and advocacy groups to guide the planning process.

- [USA.gov Disability Jobs Training](#)

This website offers resources on employment and training opportunities for individuals with disabilities, including information on vocational rehabilitation services, job placement programs, and education options.

- [I'm Determined](#)

This project facilitates youth, especially those with disabilities to undertake a measure of control in their lives, helping to set and steer the course rather than remaining the silent passenger.

- [Family Guide to Transition Planning](#)

The purpose of the Family Guide to Transition Planning—Preparing Students with Disabilities for Life After High School is to assist families in understanding the transition planning process specifically from high school to life after high school. When families are knowledgeable about the transition process and invited to participate by educational organizations (EOs), students with disabilities experience improved post-school outcomes in the areas of employment, postsecondary education, and independent living.

- [Transition Resources from Encircle Families](#)

Transition can be a challenge. Depending on your child's disability, you may need to consider everything from postsecondary education to employment, from housing to finances. As you and your child plan for the future, consider these tips to help build a successful transition.

