Inspired Instruction

MSTAR & MCAP

A Quick Guide to Similarities, Differences & Enhancements

🔗 Key Similarities

📘	**Content**	Both MCAP and MSTAR are built around the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards (MCCRS).
📝	**Item Types**	MSTAR uses the same types of items as MCAP. ELA: Multiple Choice (single and multiple answers), Two-Part Evidence-Based Response, and Extended/Constructed Responses. Math: Multiple Choice Single Answer, Technology-Enhanced Items, and Extended/Constructed Responses.
💻	**Practice Tests**	MSTAR links to both previously used MCAP practice tests as well as an updated online MSTAR practice test.
🛠️	**Digital Tools**	The digital tools available on MCAP are highly compatible with those on MSTAR.

↔ Key Differences

🧭	**Multi-Stage Testing**	MSTAR expands multi-stage adaptive testing across all content areas and grade levels. As students complete test modules, they are routed to question groups tailored to their performance level.
⏱️	**Shorter Length**	MSTAR is approximately 25% shorter than MCAP.
👨‍👩‍👧	**Family Portal**	A new family portal is being developed to provide access to score reports, progress indicators, and resources.
📊	**Centralized Reporting System**	Educators will access testing data through a centralized system, supporting student-progress tracking and informing staffing, professional development, and instructional decisions.
📈	**Baseline Scores**	Because MSTAR uses an adaptive testing format, it will establish a new operational baseline. MSTAR scores will not be directly comparable to MCAP scores or trends.

© 2026 Inspired Instruction, LLC. All Rights Reserved.

Inspired Instruction

✨ Key Enhancements

🗂️	**Expanded Item Bank**	MSTAR will use a larger pool of questions across complexity levels and expand the breadth and depth of assessment items.
🔒	**Test Administration Platform**	Updated tools include a secure student app and active assessment monitoring.
🎓	**Improved Standard Setting**	Maryland educators will help establish grade-level and course performance expectations.
📅	**Earlier Reporting**	Official student performance results will be available to districts by June 30.
🧰	**Tools and Resources**	The State is providing customizable templates and resources to help administrators and educators communicate with families about the transition to MSTAR.
🌐	**MSTAR Portal**	The portal provides technology guides, administration resources, tutorials, and practice tests, with links to the Family Portal and Centralized Reporting System.
🎯	**Increased Diagnostic Precision**	The adaptive format matches questions to student performance. Educator dashboards will provide more specific skill information to help identify where conceptual understanding may be limited.

Prepared as a quick-reference overview based on information available in October 2026.. Confirm current details and dates with the Maryland State Department of Education.

© 2026 Inspired Instruction, LLC. All Rights Reserved.