

Impact of State Assessments in Maryland: Consequential Evidence of the  
Validity of the MSA Reading, Mathematics, and Science and HSA Biology,  
Algebra/Data Analysis, Government, and English; and Modified and  
Alternate Versions

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**Executive Summary**

The *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (AERA, APA, & NCME, 1999) require that the intended and unintended consequences of tests should be evaluated and recorded (*Standard 1.24*). This study was conducted by the Maryland Assessment Research Center for Education Success (MARCES) for the Maryland State Department of Education to collect evidence on the impact of Maryland’s current testing programs. We investigated two areas of inquiry:

1. What are the effects of the statewide assessments on the classroom curriculum and methods of instruction? Are there any consequences anticipated or not, positive or negative, on classroom activities and student learning?
2. What are the effects of the statewide assessment (MSA and HSA) on efforts at educational improvement? To what extent are teachers, principals and county central administrators familiar with MSA and HSA? To what extent do they use the results? Are there any consequences anticipated or not, positive or negative, on schools and districts as perceived by teachers, principals and central administration?

**Methodology**

In Phase I, a series of 5 interviews were conducted with representatives of each of the three stakeholder groups: teachers, principals and county central administration staff. The concerns and feedback on the areas of intended and unintended impact were used to modify and finalize a survey. In Phase II, the survey was administered electronically to a sample of teachers, school-based administrators, and district-based administrators that

were representative of the state. The survey judgments were analyzed item-by-item, overall, and broken down by the demographic items. In Phase III, three focus groups with each of the targeted educators (teachers, principals, and central county office personnel) were conducted after the surveys from Phase II were analyzed. The areas of intended and unintended impact obtained from the Phase II survey were presented to the participants who were asked to provide clarifications and explanations of relevant factors that can help us understand the survey results, as well as any steps that the state might take to maximize positive and minimize negative effects of assessments.

A stratified cluster sampling method was implemented using three factors to select sample schools: 1) two SES levels, 2) two school performance levels, and 3) three grade levels. A total of 115 schools were sampled with 10 schools per cell except for the cell that has low SES and low performance high schools, where only 5 schools existed and all were sampled. All educators in each of the sampled schools were invited to participate and were guaranteed anonymity.

### **Survey Data Analysis Results**

Two types of effects were examined for the 17 attitude items on impact of testing: main effects and interaction effects.

#### **Main Effects**

The general conclusions from each of the 17 attitude items were rank-ordered from highest percent agreement with the response(s) indicated to lowest:

- 88% of the respondents think the state test results are used to **help improve their school or district's program.**
- 86% of the respondents believe that without MSA-HSA, the **content taught in the tested subjects** would be different.
- 84% of the respondents believe that without MSA-HSA, there would be equal or less **curricular emphasis on math.**
- 83% of them think the **reports are clear and easy to understand.**
- 80% of the respondents know **what the state tests are supposed to cover.**

- 80% of the respondents believe that without MSA-HSA, there would be equal or less **curricular emphasis on reading**.
- 78% of the respondents think the tests **confirm what they already knew about the students**.
- 73% of the respondents believe that without MSA-HSA, there would be equal or less **curricular emphasis on science**.
- 68% of the respondents find the **released items helpful**.
- 66% of the respondents think the state test results are used to **help improve their own instruction**.
- 64% of the respondents believe that without MSA-HSA, there would be equal or less **curricular emphasis on social studies**.
- 63% of the respondents believe that without MSA-HSA, there would be equal or less **curricular emphasis on writing**.
- 63% of the respondents believe that without MSA-HSA, there would be equal or less **curricular emphasis on physical education**.
- 59% of the respondents believe teachers **spend too much time teaching students how to take tests in general** rather than teaching about the subject matter.
- 57% of the respondents believe that without MSA-HSA, there would be equal or less **curricular emphasis on higher-order thinking**.
- 52% of the respondents believe that without MSA-HSA, there would be equal or less **curricular emphasis on other subjects not included**.
- 50% of the respondents believe that without MSA-HSA, there would be equal or less **curricular emphasis on arts**.

Interaction Effects of each attitude item with each of the demographic items were examined and are described in the full report. There were very few interpretable patterns of interaction effects, indicating that the attitudes noted above were held by most respondent groups.

In general the state's assessments appeared to support their intended educational and instructional activities. However, there were a few items indicating either negative

impact of testing or whose interpretation was not clear to us, and these were studied using the focus groups.

### **Focus Group Data Analysis Results**

The main findings of the focus group study are following. First, respondents agree that the state testing program decreases teachers' emphasis on higher-order thinking skills to some degree, which is due to the large amount of content coverage by the state tests, and the limiting time constraints for teachers to deeply explore knowledge and skills. Second, partly due to instruction over surface understanding of the content and knowledge at lower grades, students are having greater difficulty understanding complex concepts at higher grades; therefore more and more students fall behind at higher grades, which results in more teachers in the lower grades feeling the State testing program has been positive than do teachers at the upper grades. Third, respondents think it is appropriate for teachers to teach test-taking strategies that are embedded with the subject matter knowledge and skills, such as identifying and eliminating distracters, as well as carefully reading through the question, making sense out of it, and rewording it to their own personal language.

Two other forms of the state testing program are Mod-MSA/HSA and Alt-MSA. The focus group study also collected people's perceptions on how the state Mod and Alt tests have influenced the curriculum and the instruction of this group of students. Most people believe that Mod-MSA/HSA keeps the same curriculum as regular MSA/HSA, only changing the item format. In terms of its influence on instruction, they think teachers' instruction on test-taking strategies changed to make students more comfortable with the Mod item format. A few people think that Mod-MSA/HSA is invalid and has negative impact.

For the Alt-MSA, participants think that these tests influenced the curriculum, generally for the better, especially since teachers who are teaching this group of students are required to have professional development to understand the corresponding curriculum. They also believe the alternate tests have considerable influence on the

instruction; since the instruction is more challenging, teachers can be more creative and be held accountable for more focused outcomes.

### **Recommendations**

First, the state might encourage and provide opportunity and support for educators at all levels to study the state curriculum more carefully in order to understand the curriculum at a deeper level. Professional development might also provide opportunities for teachers to communicate their teaching strategies and collaborate with others.

Second, the state was encouraged to have teachers update their instruction based on tests results and how the curriculum is focused and integrated. As a result, it was felt that higher-order thinking skills could be naturally emphasized.

Third, the state assessments could be more informative to stakeholders, and the state might provide guidance and support for districts to develop local benchmark assessments, and for teachers to develop classroom assessments. It was recommended that documents be developed by the state to provide detailed guidance, suggestions, and support to build a hierarchy of assessments at the local district level, school level and classroom level to complement the state assessment program.

Finally, the Survey demonstrated that the State of Maryland's testing program has had a generally positive impact, in the judgment of educators. In other words, Maryland state testing has had good consequential validity.

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**Abstract**

This study collected evidence on the impact of current testing programs (MSA, HSA and mod and alternate versions) on classroom curriculum and instruction and on the effects of the tests on efforts at educational improvement at classroom, school and district levels. A survey was first developed and modified by the authors through iteratively collecting feedback from a small but representative group of teachers, principals and county central administration staff in Maryland. Then the finalized survey was administered to the 115 stratified sampled schools that are representative of the state distributions of student poverty and achievement outcomes. Teachers and school/county administrators were asked to complete the survey. Through examining the main and interaction effects of the 3639 valid survey responses, it was concluded that in general, the state's assessments (1) move the enacted curriculum toward the state's intended content standards, (2) provide sufficient information about what the tests are supposed to cover, (3) improve school or district's programs in the eyes of respondents, (4) provide clear and understandable reports, and (5) are consistent with what teachers know about their students. However, we did find some evidence that (6) somewhat more respondents think that the state testing program decreases teachers' emphasis on higher-order thinking skills, (7) more teachers in the lower grades feel that the State testing program has been positive than do teachers at the upper grades, and (8) some teachers feel they spend too much time on instruction about how to take tests rather than teaching the subject matter knowledge and skills.

A focus group study was conducted to try to clarify these items on the impact of testing. The focus group study results indicated that (1) decrease of teachers' emphasis on higher-order thinking skills may be due to the large amount of content coverage by the

state tests, and the limiting time constraints for teachers to go deeper into the knowledge and skills; (2) due to the accumulations of surface understanding of the contents and knowledge at lower grades, students are having greater difficulty in understanding complex concepts at higher grades; therefore more and more students fall behind at higher grades, which results in more teachers in the lower grades feeling the State testing program has been positive than do teachers at the upper grades; (3) respondents believe that it is appropriate to teach the test-taking strategies, which are embedded with the subject matter knowledge and skills, and are important parts of the learning process and test taking. It is recommended that the state should focus on helping teachers understand the state curriculum, particularly the extent that depth of knowledge should be included; beyond that, the state could consider ways to provide further guidance and support for teachers' instructional activities, as well as help in developing aligned and effective county and classroom assessments to support decision making at the building and classroom levels.

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# Validity of the MSA Reading, Mathematics, and Science and HSA Biology, Algebra/Data Analysis, Government, and English; and Modified and Alternate Versions

## **Background**

The *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (AERA, APA, & NCME, 1999) requires that the intended and unintended consequences of tests should be evaluated and recorded (*Standard 1.24*). Some frameworks for evaluating the impact of testing have been proposed. Lane, Parke, & Stone (1998) suggested that such an evaluation should include class, school and district as multiple levels as well as various stakeholders (e.g. students, teachers and principals). Mehrens (1998) specified several areas for evidence of test consequences: curriculum and instruction, motivation of teachers, motivation and self-concept of students, improvement of student learning, and public notification of the data. Besides those areas, Cizek (2001) also mentioned evaluating the consequences of tests as they influence students' and teachers' knowledge about testing, the collection and use of the data at all levels from the classroom to the district, local educators' intimacy with their own disciplines, the quality of tests, and whether they lead to an improvement of student learning. Several studies have been conducted for different states (e.g., Maryland, Kentucky, Colorado, Florida, New York, South Dakota, and North Carolina) on the consequences of state high-stakes testing. Schafer, Wang, and Wang (2008) have suggested that the U.S. Department of Education is likely to ask states for evidence on the consequences of testing in the future. In an effort to anticipate this request from the Department of Education and recognizing that many states have already moved in this direction, including Maryland with an earlier testing program, this study was conducted to collect evidence on the impact of current testing programs in Maryland. This is sometimes referred to as consequential evidence of validity.

## **Research Questions**

MSA (Maryland State Assessment given in grades three through eight) and HSA (an end of course High School Assessment given after completion of each of four courses

– Biology, English, Algebra/Data Analysis, and Government), along with an alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards (Alt-MSA) and an alternate assessment based on modified achievement standards (Mod-MSA) are the currently used statewide tests in Maryland. We were interested in their impact on students, teachers and central administrations in the counties of this state. The research questions are:

1. What are the effects of the statewide assessments on the classroom curriculum and methods of instruction? Are there any consequences anticipated or not, positive or negative, on classroom activities and student learning? The focus of this set of questions is on the classroom.
2. What are the effects of the statewide assessment (MSA and HSA) on efforts at educational improvement? To what extent are teachers, principals and county central administrators familiar with MSA and HSA? To what extent do they use the results? Are there any consequences anticipated or not, positive or negative, on schools and districts as perceived by teachers, principals and central administration?

### **Methodology**

The goal of this study was to collect data from a systematic statewide survey of the two general research question areas that assessment is likely to have the greatest impact upon. A survey designed to solicit systematic information regarding consequences of the statewide assessment program was administered (see the Appendix A). In order to implement the study, three phases of activity were engaged. These were as follows:

Phase I: A series of 5 interviews were conducted with representatives of each of the three stakeholder groups: teachers, principals and county central administration staff in several representative counties and at the state level. The areas of intended and unintended impact that were perceived to be of the greatest concern and greatest reward regarding statewide assessment were solicited and recorded. Each took the survey and gave us feedback. The concerns and feedback were used to modify and finalize the survey.

Phase II: The survey was administered electronically (using Survey Monkey, a platform that has been successful in other states) to a sample of teachers, school-based administrators, and district-based administrators that is representative of the state. The sampling plan (see the next section) was designed to sample clusters that mirror the state distributions of race, geography, poverty, and student achievement outcomes. The data from the second section was analyzed item-by-item, overall, and broken down by the demographic and experiential items in the first section.

Phase III: Several focus groups with each of the targeted educators (teachers, principals, and central county office personnel) were conducted after the surveys from Phase II were analyzed. We met with three focus groups representing each of the three client groups. The areas of intended and unintended impact that were obtained from the Phase II survey were presented to the participants who were asked to provide clarifications and explanations of relevant factors that can help us understand the survey results, as well as any steps that the state might take to maximize the positive and minimize the negative effects of assessments as detected in the survey results. Approximately 10 members of each of the three groups were asked to participate in each focus group. They were selected from schools that differ in terms of their mean performance level and poverty level and matched the research design used for the survey to the extent possible. Some participants were from school districts that were represented in the survey data collection and some were not.

### Sampling Participants

A stratified cluster sampling method was implemented using three factors to select sample schools: 1) SES level: using the percent of free and reduced meals (FARMS) as an indicator to define schools with low and high SES level; 2) School performance level: using the school's mean performance level to define schools with low and high performance levels; and 3) Grade levels: elementary, middle school and high school. Ten schools were planned to be selected (but see the next paragraph) within each of the 12 cells, which makes a total of 120 schools (10 schools \* 2 SES \* 2 school performance \* 3 grade levels) that were included in this study.

The 41.5th and 58.5th percentiles were used to define low and high cut points for classifying schools for both variables FARMS (free and reduced meals) and Performance to ensure enough schools existed in each cell to be sampled. Finally, a total of 115 schools were sampled with 10 schools per cell except for the cell that has low SES and low performance high schools, where only 5 schools existed and all were sampled.

For the selected 115 schools, all teachers, and the principal or his or her designee of that school were invited to complete the questionnaire. In addition, the relevant county central staffs were asked to respond to the survey.

### Data Collection Procedure

We administered the surveys online through “Survey Monkey”, which were delivered electronically to each identified person in each county school and central administration office. A letter that requests participation from the state superintendent was sent to the sampled local districts and schools. The districts and schools were also contacted by phone and email about the purposes of the study and the implementation of the survey. The Maryland Assessment Research Center for Education Success (MARCES), of the University of Maryland collected the electronic data and the focus group data, did the analyses and prepared this report. Individual results are kept confidential within MARCES, only.

### Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire was designed to provide answers to the research questions and to collect respondents’ attitudes on a) effects of MSA/HSA on curriculum change for different subjects, b) effects of MSA/HSA on classroom instruction, c) effectiveness of MSA/HSA on reporting the results, and d) effectiveness of MSA/HSA results on improving teachers’ instruction and schools’/districts’ program.

A single questionnaire (see Appendix A) for teachers, principals, and county central administrators was used so that comparisons of the groups could be facilitated during the data analysis phase.

Principal component analysis (PCA) was used to verify the structure of the survey design with the collected data, and it confirmed the design of the survey (see Appendix B).

## Survey Data Analysis Results

### Respondents Demographic Information

There are 9 demographic items. The response statistics were summarized in the following tables from Tables D-1 through D-9. To read the tables, for example, Table D-1, it suggests that among the 3639 valid survey responses, 91.3% of the respondents work at the school level, and the rest work at the county level.

Table D-1

**Do you work at school level or county level?**

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
School level	91.3%	3439
County level	8.7%	327
	<b>Total Response Count</b>	<b>3766</b>

Table D-2

**What is the highest level of education you have completed? (check one)**

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Less than bachelor's degree.	2.2%	80
Bachelor's degree.	27.0%	984
Master's degree.	68.6%	2496
Doctoral degree.	2.2%	79
	<b>Total Response Count</b>	<b>3639</b>

Table D-3

**What is your job role (check the one best description)?**

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
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Teacher.	75.7%	2753
School-Based Administrator.	5.9%	214
Curriculum Coordinator.	1.8%	65
District-Based Administrator.	2.3%	83
Not Applicable.	0.5%	19
Other (please specify)	13.9%	505
	Total Response Count	3639

Note: Examples of other specified job roles are counselor, reading specialist, special education coordinator, department head, resource teacher, teaching specialist, instructional assistant, and library media specialist.

Table D-4

**Including the current year, how long have you been employed in an educational setting? (check one)**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Less than 2 years.	6.3%	229
3 to 5 years.	16.1%	585
6 to 10 years.	21.6%	787
11 to 15 years.	16.2%	590
Over 15.	39.8%	1448
	Total Response Count	3639

Table D-5

**Including the current year, how long have you been in your current position? (check one)**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Less than 2 years.	23.3%	848
3 to 5 years.	32.1%	1167
6 to 10 years.	21.4%	777
11 to 15 years.	10.0%	364
Over 15.	13.3%	483
	Total Response Count	3639

Table D-6

**Check the student grade levels that you primarily work with? (check the one most relevant)**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
K-4	24.6%	897
5-6	9.5%	344
7-8	24.4%	889
9-12	37.2%	1352

Not applicable	4.3%	157
	Total Response Count	3639

Table D-7

**Which subject(s) (if any) do you teach on a day-to-day basis? (check all that apply)**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Reading or English	35.6%	1294
Writing	24.3%	883
Math	30.5%	1109
Science or Biology	21.1%	767
Government	7.3%	264
Other	32.0%	1165
Not applicable	19.8%	719
	Total Response Count	6201

Table D-8

**Do you work primarily with students with special needs (check all that apply)?**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
No.	62.9%	2290
Yes, physical disabilities.	8.7%	315
Yes, Cognitive disabilities.	24.0%	873
Yes, Emotional disabilities.	17.0%	620
Yes, English language learners.	9.6%	349
Not applicable.	10.0%	363
	Total Response Count	4810

Table D-9

**With which of the state tests are you most familiar (check the one or more most closely related to your job role)?**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
MSA	59.1%	2149
HSA-English	10.8%	392
HSA-Algebra	11.6%	422
HSA-Biology	8.0%	292
HSA-Government	7.8%	283
HSA in General	10.6%	386
Alt-MSA	7.0%	254
Not Applicable	12.9%	470
	Total Response Count	4648

## Attitude Items on Impact of Testing

Two types of effects were examined for the 17 attitude items on impact of testing. They are main effects and the interaction effects with the demographic items.

**Main Effects** of an attitude item were examined and reported by providing a table that includes descriptive information on each of the options in that item. To label the tables, the letter “M” was used to stand for main effects, and followed by a number from 1 to 17 standing for one of the attitude items. Therefore, the tables ranged from Table M-1 through Table M-17. By looking at the main effects tables, readers will be able to tell the distribution of respondents’ attitudes of the items on the impact of testing.

Table M-1.

**Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on reading change in your school or district? (check one)** Percent Missing: 18

Answer Options	Percent	Frequency
There would be much more emphasis.	9	241
There would be somewhat more emphasis.	11	327
There would be about the same emphasis.	64	1783
There would be somewhat less emphasis.	13	347
There would be much less emphasis.	3	81
Total	100	2779

For example, Table M-1 provides the main effects of the item “*Without MSA-HSA how would the curricular emphasis on reading change in your school or district?*” 18% of missing indicates that 18% of the respondents selected “*Not applicable.*”. Among the respondents who provide an attitude option, 9% of them selected “*There would be much more emphasis.*”, 11% of them selected “*There would be somewhat more emphasis.*”, 64% of them selected “*There would be about the same emphasis.*”, 13% of them selected “*There would be somewhat less emphasis.*”, and 3% of them selected “*There would be much less emphasis.*”. Overall, 80% of them believe that there would be equal or less curricular emphasis on reading without MSA-HSA. The corresponding frequency was also presented in the frequency column which is next to the percent column.

The main effects Table M-2 through Table M-17 have the same structure as Table M-1, thus can be read in terms of the distribution of respondents' attitudes. The general conclusions from each of the 17 attitude items were rank-ordered from highest percent to lowest:

- 88% of the respondents think the state test results are used to **help improve their school or district's program.**
- 86% of the respondents believe that without MSA-HSA, the **content taught in the tested subjects** would be different.
- 84% of the respondents believe that without MSA-HSA, there would be equal or less **curricular emphasis on math.**
- 83% of them think the **reports are clear and easy to understand.**
- 80% of the respondents know **what the state tests are supposed to cover.**
- 80% of the respondents believe that without MSA-HSA, there would be equal or less **curricular emphasis on reading.**
- 78% of the respondents think the tests **confirm what they already knew about the students.**
- 73% of the respondents believe that without MSA-HSA, there would be equal or less **curricular emphasis on science.**
- 68% of the respondents find the **released items helpful.**
- 66% of the respondents think the state test results are used to **help improve their own instruction.**
- 64% of the respondents believe that without MSA-HSA, there would be equal or less **curricular emphasis on social studies.**
- 63% of the respondents believe that without MSA-HSA, there would be equal or less **curricular emphasis on writing.**
- 63% of the respondents believe that without MSA-HSA, there would be equal or less **curricular emphasis on physical education.**
- 59% of the respondents believe teachers **spend too much time teaching students how to take tests in general** rather than teaching about the subject matter.

- 57% of the respondents believe that without MSA-HSA, there would be equal or less **curricular emphasis on higher-order thinking**.
- 52% of the respondents believe that without MSA-HSA, there would be equal or less **curricular emphasis on other subjects not included**.
- 50% of the respondents believe that without MSA-HSA, there would be equal or less **curricular emphasis on arts**.

In order to compare the results on respondents' different attitude on the change without MSA-HSA, the following side by side results are presented.

#### **Without MSA-HSA,...**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 86% feel the <b>content taught in the tested subjects</b> would be different.</li> <li>• 50 % feel there would be more emphasis on <b>arts</b>.</li> <li>• 47% feel there would be more emphasis on <b>other subjects not included</b>.</li> <li>• 43 % feel there would be more curricular emphasis on <b>higher-order thinking</b>.</li> <li>• 37% feel there would be more emphasis on <b>writing</b>.</li> <li>• 37% feel there would be more emphasis on <b>physical science</b>.</li> <li>• 36 % feel there would be more emphasis on <b>social studies</b>.</li> <li>• 27% feel there would be more emphasis on <b>science</b>.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 14% feel the <b>content taught in the tested subjects</b> wouldn't be different at all.</li> <li>• 4% feel there would be less emphasis on <b>arts</b>.</li> <li>• 4% feel there would be less emphasis on <b>other subjects not included</b>.</li> <li>• 6 % feel there would be less curricular emphasis on <b>higher-order thinking</b>.</li> <li>• 12% feel there would be less emphasis on <b>writing</b>.</li> <li>• 4% feel there would be less emphasis on <b>physical science</b>.</li> <li>• 11% feel there would be less emphasis on <b>social studies</b>.</li> <li>• 16% feel there would be less emphasis on <b>science</b>.</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

- 20 % feel there would be more emphasis on **reading**.
- 16 % feel there would be more emphasis on **math**.
- 16% feel there would be less emphasis on **reading**.
- 15% feel there would be less emphasis on **math**.

Again, the conclusions above are based on overall results and combine responses. More specific information about respondents’ attitudes can be found in the main effects tables in Appendix C.

**Interaction Effects** of each attitude item with each of the demographic items were examined and reported by providing a two-way contingency table that includes both the attitude item and the demographic item. The tables were organized by demographic items within attitude items; that is, within each of the 17 attitude items, its interactions with the 11 demographic items were examined. To name the interaction tables hierarchically, the letter “I” was used to stand for “Interaction”, followed by a number from 1 to 17 standing for one of the 17 attitude items, then followed by a number from 1 to 11 standing for one of the 11 demographic items. Therefore, tables were ranged from Table I-1-1 through Table I-17-11.

To illustrate how to read and interpret these interaction tables, a series of Table I-1-1 through Table I-1-11, the interactions effects between the first attitude item “*Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on reading change in your school or district?*” and the 11 demographic items are used. The full interaction tables (89 pages) are available on the MARCES web site (<http://www.marces.org/current.htm>).

Table I-1-1

**Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on reading change in your school or district? (check one)** Percent Missing: 19

**Answer Options** (Cells are percentages by Columns)

**Aggregated Performance**

	<b>Low</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Total</b>
There would be much more emphasis.	8	10	9
There would be somewhat more emphasis.	11	13	12

There would be about the same emphasis.	66	63	65
There would be somewhat less emphasis.	12	12	12
There would be much less emphasis.	3	2	3
Column Counts (N's)	1397	1142	2539
<b>Inferential Information</b>			
Chi-square test of independence	10.008 (df=4, p=0.040)		Interpretation
Cohen's w effect size	0.063		Small

Table I-1-1 is the interaction effects between the attitude item and the school Performance status (low vs. high). The percent of respondents at each of the attitude options were listed by their schools' performance status. The chi-square test of independence rejected the null hypothesis (10.008 with df=4, p=0.040), meaning that the respondents' attitude on impact of testing on reading emphasis in the curriculum is dependent upon their schools' performance status. When the test statistic results in rejection of a null hypotheses, that indicates statistical support for a relationship between the responses to the two variables (items), but it is prudent to evaluate the strength of the relationship since with large sample sizes, even trivial relationships can be statistically significant. Cohen's (1988) w effect size index was used to assess the size of the differences between the two school performance levels. According to Cohen, 0.10 indicates a small effect size, 0.30 indicates a medium effect size, and 0.50 indicates a large effect size. In the case here, w is equal to 0.063, therefore, the difference between the respondents' school performance levels on their attitudes on the item is small.

Table I-1-2

**Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on reading change in your**

**school or district? (check one)** Percent Missing: 19

<b>Answer Options</b> (Cells are percentages by Columns)	<b>Percent of free and reduced meals (FARMS)</b>		
	<b>Low</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Total</b>
There would be much more emphasis.	9	9	9
There would be somewhat more emphasis.	11	13	12
There would be about the same emphasis.	64	65	65
There would be somewhat less emphasis.	13	11	12
There would be much less emphasis.	3	2	3
Column Counts (N's)	1180	1359	2539
<b>Inferential Information</b>			Interpretation

Chi-square test of independence 5.214 (df=4, p=0.266) Not sig.

Table I-1-2 is the interaction effects between the attitude item on impact of testing on reading curriculum and the school FARMS status (low vs. high). The percent of respondents at each of the attitude options were listed by their school FARMS status. It is observed that the distributions of the responses under the two FARMS status are about the same. Furthermore, chi-square test of independence between the respondents' attitude on impact of testing on reading curriculum and the respondents' school FARMS status retained the null hypothesis (5.214 with df=4, p=0.266) that the two variables are independent with one another, meaning the respondents' school FARMS status has no effects on their attitude on impact of testing on reading curriculum. Cohen's w was not calculated because the null hypothesis of no relationship was not rejected.

These examples are intended to help the reader interpret the interaction tables that follow. Conclusions are presented following the tables.

Table I-1-3

**Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on reading change in your school or district? (check one)** Percent Missing: 18

<b>Answer Options</b> (Cells are percentages by Columns)	<b>Do you work at school level or county level?</b>		
	<b>School</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>Total</b>
There would be much more emphasis.	9	7	9
There would be somewhat more emphasis.	12	10	12
There would be about the same emphasis.	65	58	64
There would be somewhat less emphasis.	12	19	13
There would be much less emphasis.	3	7	3
Column Counts (N's)	2539	240	2779
<b>Inferential Information</b>			
Chi-square test of independence	27.793 (df=4, p-value=0.000)		Interpretation
Cohen's w effect size	0.100		Small

Table I-1-4

**Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on reading change in your school or district? (check one)** Percent Missing: 18

**What is the highest level of education you have completed?**

<b>Answer Options</b> (Cells are percentages by Columns)	Less than Bachelor's	Bachelor's	Master's	Doctoral	Overall
There would be much more emphasis.	16	7	9	5	9
There would be somewhat more emphasis.	16	13	12	6	12
There would be about the same emphasis.	42	66	64	64	64
There would be somewhat less emphasis.	16	12	13	16	13
There would be much less emphasis.	10	2	3	9	3
Column Counts (N's)	31	739	1942	67	2779
<b>Inferential Results</b>					
Chi-square test of independence	26.884 (df=12, p=0.008)				Interpretation
Cohen's w effect size	0.099				Small

Table I-1-5

**Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on reading change in your school or district? (check one)** Percent Missing: 19

**What is your job role?**

<b>Answer Options</b> (Cells are percentages by Columns)	Teacher	School-Based Administer	Curriculum Coordinator	District-Based Coordinator	Other	Overall
There would be much more emphasis.	9	10	2	5	10	9
There would be somewhat more emphasis.	12	11	11	8	12	12
There would be about the same emphasis.	65	67	61	60	60	64
There would be somewhat less emphasis.	12	11	20	25	15	13
There would be much less emphasis.	3	2	6	6	4	3
Column Counts (N's)	2116	188	54	65	349	2772
<b>Inferential Results</b>						
Chi-square test of independence	27.049 (df=16, p=0.041)					Interpretation
Cohen's w effect size	0.098					Small

Table I-1-6

**Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on reading change in your school or district? (check one)** Percent Missing: 19

**Including the current year, how long have you been employed in an educational setting?**

<b>Answer Options</b> (Cells are percentages by Columns)	Less than 2 years	3 to 5 years	6 to 10 years	11 to 15 years	Over 15	Overall
There would be much more emphasis.	7	11	9	8	9	9
There would be somewhat more emphasis.	14	12	14	12	10	12
There would be about the same emphasis.	65	65	62	67	64	64
There would be somewhat less emphasis.	15	11	12	11	14	13
There would be much less emphasis.	1	2	3	2	4	3
Column Counts (N's)	152	439	605	473	1110	2779
<b>Inferential Results</b>						Interpretation
Chi-square test of independence	22.173 (df=16, p=0.138)					Not sig.

Table I-1-7

**Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on reading change in your school or district? (check one)** Percent Missing: 19

**Including the current year, how long have you been in your current position?**

<b>Answer Options</b> (Cells are percentages by Columns)	Less than 2 years	3 to 5 years	6 to 10 years	11 to 15 years	Over 15	Overall
There would be much more emphasis.	8	8	10	7	11	9
There would be somewhat more emphasis.	12	12	12	10	12	12
There would be about the same emphasis.	64	64	62	70	64	64
There would be somewhat less emphasis.	14	13	13	10	10	13
There would be much less emphasis.	2	3	3	3	3	3
Column Counts (N's)	643	895	609	274	358	2779
<b>Inferential Results</b>						Interpretation
Chi-square test of independence	15.212 (df=16, p=0.509)					Not sig.

Table I-1-8

**Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on reading change in your school or district? (check one)** Percent Missing: 21

**Check the student grade levels that you primarily work with?**

<b>Answer Options</b> (Cells are percentages by Columns)	K-4	5-6	7-8	9-12	Overall
There would be much more emphasis.	5	5	7	14	9
There would be somewhat more emphasis.	7	10	9	18	12
There would be about the same emphasis.	78	69	64	53	64
There would be somewhat less emphasis.	9	13	17	11	12
There would be much less emphasis.	2	3	3	3	3
Column Counts (N's)	720	295	708	954	2677
<b>Inferential Results</b>					
Chi-square test of independence	162.033 (df=12, p=0.000)				Interpretation
Cohen's w effect size	0.246				<b>Medium</b>

Table I-1-3, Table I-1-4, and Table I-1-5 indicated that the respondents working status (school or county level), highest educational level, and job role, have small effects on their attitude on impact of testing on reading curriculum respectively. Table I-1-6 and Table I-1-7 indicated that the respondents' year of working in an educational setting and the year of working in the current position have no effect on their attitude on impact of testing on reading curriculum respectively. Table I-1-8 indicated that the students' grade level that the respondents' primarily work with has medium effects on their attitude on impact of testing on reading curriculum.

Again, more detailed information on the distribution of the respondents' attitude at different demographic item levels can be found in the interaction tables upon request.

Table I-1-9

**Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on reading change in your school or district? (check one)** Percent Missing: 19

**Which subject(s) (if any) do you teach on a day-to-day basis? (check all that apply)**

Reading or English	Writing	Math	Science or Biology	Government	Other subject
Chi-square test of independence (df=4)					
15.367 (p=0.004)	50.614 (p=0.000)	53.158 (p=0.000)	23.886 (p=0.000)	1.987 (p=0.738)	0.411 (p=.982)
Cohen's w effect size					
0.074	0.135	0.138	0.093	(p>0.050)	(p>0.050)
Interpretation					
Small	Small	Small	Small	Not sig.	Not sig.

**Note:** Whenever the Chi-square test of independence is retained (p>0.050), the effect size is not calculated and the notation "(p>0.050)" is listed instead.

Table I-1-9 through Table I-1-11 displays interaction between the attitude item and the last three demographic items that can have more than one option. For example, for the demographic item “Which subject(s) (if any) do you teach on a day-to-day basis? (check all that apply)”, respondents can select more than one of the following six options “Reading or English”, “Writing”, “Math”, “Science or Biology”, “Government”, and “Other subjects”. Therefore, in order to make the option levels mutually exclusive, each of the above options was treated as one of the two options in an independent item. For example, the options “Reading or English” and “Non reading and English” consist of an independent item with two mutually exclusive options; “Writing” and “Non writing” consisting of another independent item with two mutually exclusive options, and etc. Thus, the original single demographic item with six options becomes six independent demographic items. To make the derived six demographic items easy for comparison, a single table (Table I-1-9) was used to compare them side-by-side. Table I-1-9 indicated that respondents who teach reading or English, writing, math, and science or biology, have small effects on their attitude on impact of testing on reading curriculum comparing to respondents who don’t teach the subjects respectively; respondents who teach government and other subjects have no effects on their attitude on impact of testing curriculum comparing to respondents who don’t teach the subjects respectively.

Table I-1-10

**Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on reading change in your school or district? (check one)** Percent Missing: 19

**Do you work primarily with students with special needs? (check all that apply)**

No	Yes, physical disabilities	Yes, cognitive disabilities	Yes, emotional disabilities	Yes, English language learners
Chi-square test of independence (df=4)				
5.985 (p=0.200)	6.665 (p=0.155)	9.776 (p=0.044)	11.597 (p=0.021)	7.389 (p=0.117)
Cohen's w effect size				
(p>0.050)	(p>0.050)	0.059	0.065	(p>0.050)
Interpretation				
Not sig.	Not sig.	Small	Small	Not sig.

Table I-1-10 indicated that the respondents who work with students with cognitive and emotional disabilities had small effects on their attitude on the impact of testing on the reading curriculum, comparing to respondents who don't work with such students respectively. For respondents who work with ordinary students, physical disability students, and English language learners, there were no effects on their attitudes on impact of testing on reading curriculum respectively.

Table I-1-11

**Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on reading change in your school or district? (check one)** Percent Missing: 19

**With which of the state tests are you most familiar? (check the one or more most closely related to your job role)**

MSA	HSA English	HSA Algebra	HSA Biology	HSA Government	HSA in General	Alt MSA
Chi-square test of independence (df=4)						
107.531 (p=0.000)	76.579 (p=0.000)	11.150 (p=0.025)	35.278 (p=0.000)	61.469 (p=0.000)	22.493 (p=0.000)	5.641 (p=.228)
Cohen's w effect size						
<b>0.197</b>	<b>0.166</b>	0.063	0.133	0.149	0.090	(p>0.050 )
Interpretation						
Small	Small	Small	Small	Small	Small	Not sig.

**Note:** Whenever the Cohen's w effect size is equal to or greater than 0.150 (**bolded**), the full two-way contingency table is shown following.

Table I-1-11 indicated that the respondents who are familiar with MSA, HSA-English, HSA-Algebra, HSA-Biology, HSA-Government, HSA-in general have small

effects on their attitudes on impact of testing on reading curriculum, comparing to the respondents who are not familiar with those subjects respectively; the respondents who are familiar with alt-MSA have no effects on their attitude on impact of testing comparing to the respondents who are not familiar with alt-MSA. To facilitate follow-up interpretation, our rule was to provide the full two-way interactions table between the attitude item and the newly derived independent demographic item whenever the effect size index  $w$  is greater than or equal to 0.150 (**bolded**). In the Table I-1-11, there were two Cohen's  $w$  effect sizes greater than 0.150, thus additional independent interaction tables Table I-1-11-1 and Table I-1-11-2 were provided as full two-way contingency tables for interested readers to look at the distributions of the respondents' attitude under different demographic levels.

Table I-1-11-1

**Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on reading change in your school or district? (check one)** Percent Missing: 19

<b>Answer Options</b> (Cells are percentages by Columns)	<b>With which of the state tests are you most familiar? (check the one or more most closely related to your job role)</b>		
	<b>MSA</b>	<b>Not MSA</b>	<b>Total</b>
There would be much more emphasis.	6	13	9
There would be somewhat more emphasis.	8	18	12
There would be about the same emphasis.	69	55	64
There would be somewhat less emphasis.	14	11	13
There would be much less emphasis.	3	3	3
Column Counts (N's)	1779	1000	2779
<b>Inferential Information</b>			
Chi-square test of independence	107.531 (df=4, p-value=0.000)		Interpretation
Cohen's $w$ effect size	0.197		Small

Table I-1-11-2

**Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on reading change in your school or district? (check one)** Percent Missing: 19

<b>Answer Options</b> (Cells are percentages by Columns)	<b>With which of the state tests are you most familiar? (check the one or more most closely related to your job role)</b>		
	<b>HSA English</b>	<b>Not HSA English</b>	<b>Total</b>
There would be much more emphasis.	19	7	9
There would be somewhat more emphasis.	19	11	12
There would be about the same emphasis.	51	66	64

There would be somewhat less emphasis.	10	13	13
There would be much less emphasis.	2	3	3
Column Counts (N's)	340	2439	2779
<b>Inferential Information</b>			
Chi-square test of independence	76.579 (df=4, p-value=0.000)		Interpretation
Cohen's w effect size	0.166		Small

In Tables I-2-1 through I-17-11, the majority interaction effects are either not significant or small in terms of Cohen's w effect size. Therefore, only the results with medium effect size were concluded and summarized as follows.

- Respondents, who work primarily with higher-grade students, believe that without HSA and MSA, there would be more emphasis on reading curriculum (Table I-1-8).
- Respondents, who are familiar with HSA algebra, believe that without HSA and MSA, there would be more emphasis on math curriculum (Tables I-3-11 and I-3-11-1).
- Respondents, who work primarily with higher-grade students, believe that without HSA and MSA, there would be more curriculum emphasis on higher-order thinking skills (Table I-10-8).
- Respondents, who teach HSA and MSA assessed subjects (reading, writing, math, science/biology, and social studies) on a day-to-day basis, know what the tests are supposed to cover (Tables I-12-9 and I-12-9-1).
- Respondents, who teach HSA and MSA assessed subjects (reading, writing, math, science/biology, and social studies) on a day-to-day basis, find the released items helpful and there are not enough of them (Tables I-13-9 and I-13-9-2).
- Respondents, who are familiar with either MSA or HSA algebra, find the released items helpful and there are not enough of them (Tables I-13-11, I-13-11-1, and I-13-11-2).
- Respondents, who are familiar with MSA, believe that the tests always or mostly confirm what they know about their students (Tables I-15-11 and I-15-11-1).

- Respondents, who work primarily with lower grade students, believe that using the test results have an impact on helping improve their own instruction (Table I-17-8).
- Respondents, who are familiar with MSA, believe that using test results have an impact on helping improve their own instruction (Tables I-17-11 and I-17-11-1).

In general, we believe respondents feel positive about the impacts of testing on education in Maryland. In general the state’s assessments appear to support the educational and instructional activities of our respondents. However, there are a few items indicating either negative impacts of testing or that were not clear to us. We further investigated these and other issues in a series of focus groups that we used to explore the results of our study.

### **Focus Group Questions**

Focus group studies were conducted at Prince Georgia County testing office, Harford County Southampton Middle School, and the Queen Anne County central office. Eight (8) central office administrators participated in the Prince Georgia county focus group study, some of whom had been classroom math or reading teachers. Eighteen (18) math, reading or science teachers from grades 6 to 8 at Southampton Middle School participated the Harford county focus group study. Thirteen (13) teachers participated in the Queen Anne county focus group study. Each of the focus group studies lasted between 40 to 80 minutes, and the following questions were asked.

1. Some people think that the state testing program decreases teachers’ emphasis on higher-order thinking skills. Do you agree or disagree? And why? What do teachers actually do to cause such a change in emphasis?
2. Some people think that teachers spend too much time on how to take tests rather than teaching the subject matter knowledge and skills. Do you agree or disagree? And why? What do teachers actually do to teach test taking skills?
3. Some people think that the reports could be more helpful for improving teaching. Do you agree or disagree? And why? And, what do you think the State could do better in

that regard?

4. Some evidence from the survey suggests that more teachers in the lower grades feel that the State testing program has been positive than do teachers at the upper grades. Do you agree with that perception? Why do you agree or disagree?

5. How do you think the State Modified testing program has influenced the curriculum? How do you think the State testing program has influenced instruction of students eligible for Modified testing?

6. How do you think the State alternate testing program has influenced the curriculum? How do you think the State testing program has influenced instruction of students eligible for alternate testing?

7. What are some of the positive and some of the negative consequences of state testing?

### **Focus Group Data Analysis Results**

The full transcripts of the three focus group studies (Prince Georgia county, Harford county, and Queen Anne county) are provided in Appendices D, E, and F respectively. The key points of each focus group question are summarized and followed by selected, original, quotes from some participants that illustrate their remarks.

1. Some people think that the state testing program decreases teachers' emphasis on higher-order thinking skills. Do you agree or disagree? And why? What do teachers actually do to cause such a change in emphasis?

Most respondents who think the state testing program decreases teachers' emphasis on higher-order thinking skills said this was because (1) there is too much content to be taught for MSA and HSA, and there is no time for teachers and students to get into the depth of the knowledge, and (2) teachers' priority is to provide instructions for off-track students to pass the tests, rather than to provide rich guidance for well-performing students. A special education teacher from a middle school believed that, there is a big push for higher-order thinking skills in language arts. Quotes from some participants are as follows.

“I think that because there are so many indicators that sometimes people think they're supposed to teach everything, and in order to teach everything, you can't really focus on the deepest and most important and most significant thing, and so that causes sometimes folks to teach in isolation, to teach little, itty-bitty skills, and think -- and check them off on the checklist as opposed to thinking about, you know, what are the big-ticket items and, if we don't get to this little thing or that little thing, well, so be it, but we get to much deeper.”

“I think it has to do with the teachers also not understanding the content deep enough to be able to see those connections and teach it in depth.”

“I just want to say I understand from the testing side why they eliminated BCRs and ECRs from the tests. However, I think the BCRs and ECRs did lend itself to that higher order thinking. They make you just think and write it, talk mathematics, write mathematics, do mathematics. So, I mean, from a testing side, I see why it took forever for the scores to come back. However, it's, you know -- it's like a double-sided sword, because teachers now -- they don't need to know it for the test. That's not their emphasis.”

“I think it was three students were Alt and one that was Mod, and because the special ed teacher was required to do the testing for these children, she pulled one out at a time, which left two other children in my room, with me with the rest of the class, and then she would be gone. I mean, she has to do her job to make sure all of these are done by a certain date, and I would then have two severely needy children in my room in addition. And it really affected my instruction.”

“We've got some fantastic teachers working really hard in those schools, but you'll also find people who just assign and assess, and the kids do just fine, but those kids really deserve a much richer curriculum than they're getting because they're passing the test, and nobody's worried about it.”

“I never actually thought that that was the case, but I can see maybe where people might think that because there's such a list of facts and things that they must accomplish maybe, and that's why they -- like we're focusing on dumping as much content in instead of the higher level thinking skills. I'm a science teacher. I like to do a lot of labs that require kids to really think through the process, but I spoke to some other people that said, "I can't do that lab. It sounds really cool, but do you realize the MSA is only this many days away? And I haven't finished this content yet." And it's a shame. I probably don't focus on that enough, the MSA. I like the higher order thinking skills.”

“We had to make sure that all the content was covered. And if the kids asked a question that goes beyond, we could take only a little bit of time to go there, and then we'd come back, just to make sure we covered the content that's covered on our HSA.”

“I think that there's so much emphasis on getting the kids to pass and especially the special education students and the kids that sometimes struggle, that the teachers feel that they have to focus on teaching to those kids' needs, which is great, but that leaves a whole slew of kids who aren't getting a rigorous education. They are getting the middle-of-the-road bar instead of a bar that's really high, so that when they get out of high school and they go to college, they are not ready for it.”

“I think, as a special educator in middle school, there's been a big push. Teaching language arts, there's been a big push in focusing on those higher level questioning skills and strategies in the classroom, and I think that's fed into the language arts program, that that's something we actually focus really, you know, rigorously on. And you'd be surprised, how much more in the discussion where there is higher level thinking, how much, , some of the kids who aren't as outspoken, maybe even in special ed, do actually participate and feed off and can gain from that sharing from the high kids down to the low. So I actually think there is a really big emphasis, especially in the language arts program, and it might be that that's just not the program, you know, that we're all in, I think there is a big push for that.”

2. Some people think that teachers spend too much time on how to take tests rather than teaching the subject matter knowledge and skills. Do you agree or disagree? And why? What do teachers actually do to teach test taking skills?

Participants believe that it's very appropriate and important for teachers to embed test-taking strategies in their subject matter instructions, which a part of learning process. The test-taking strategies include identifying and eliminating distractors, reading over the questions to understand what is asked and to transfer the words that were taught in class. Quotes from some participants are follows.

“But I think it's embedded in part of the learning process. I don't see a focus on a lesson on test-taking skills. You know, little mini lessons once in a while, sure, but basically what I see is our teachers embedding that into their daily instruction, and it's very natural from what I see in the classrooms.”

It's just like we teach kids, you know, units on this or that or genres on this and that. They say let's teach them testing as a genre, so that you come to understand how did this test -- you know, what is in the mind of this, just like you think what's in the mind of a mystery writer when you're writing mystery, what's in the mind of a testing -- you know, somebody who writes the test. And they did try to -- there probably are two answers there that are pretty close, you know, and there probably are a couple I can get rid of, and do I have to -- you know, is this question right there on the page, or is this question something I have to infer to come up with an answer to? You know, there's a lot of test-taking strategies, and given how high stakes these tests are, I think we would be foolish not to give our kids the benefit of saying, "Yeah, we know you're really smart, and you really understand this material, but guess what? When they ask you about main idea, they're going to ask you what's the best title." Who would think that all this work we did on main idea was about what's the best title? But I need to know that that's -- you know, that the question about what I know may come in a lot of different forms.

“I think our scores would be way higher if more kids understood the actual question, and so it's almost you have to tell them to think out and try to paraphrase that wording, how they worded the question, how do you think, look at the words in there, put it together, rephrase the question, because I can't help you

once we start, you know. That, they have to learn.”

“I took two days, one for each of the two tests. We're doing standardized tests in science. Students were given a report about which questions they asked, and then I gave them their old test back and which questions they scored wrong on, and I said, "Raise your hand if you got number three wrong. Okay. Now let's figure out why we got number three wrong." And sometimes the reason was because it was a confusing question. You know, they didn't understand that they were supposed to pick the one that wasn't true, some of them, you know. But that's just a reading -- honestly, that's a reading skill that I think is important.”

“I definitely teach how to take a test because, when I went to college, I did not know how to take a test because I had always breezed through because I was a smart kid. So I stressed how to take a test, but that's when I'm going to take a test anyway, you know, "Let's do some study strategies." I teach them study strategies for every test, not just mine.”

“Well, in math, you can eliminate multiple choices. You know, you can read the questions, and a lot of times, two of them don't make any sense. You know, if you have any number sense at all, most of the time, the kids can pretty much eliminate two choices right off the bat. That's math.”

“Because some of those questions are not worded any way that I would word them -- and not on the content, and I think our scores would be way higher if more kids understood the actual question, and so it's almost you have to tell them to think out and try to paraphrase that wording, how they worded the question, how do you think, look at the words in there, put it together, rephrase the question, because I can't help you once we start, you know. That, they have to learn.”

“And for our benchmark tests, I mean, we give them the opportunity to review the results with the students and look at the item analysis and look at, you know, what was the most common answer, you know, and what was the distractor, so they do some of that, if they have time with the students to go over that test.”

“And I think it's something that we -- I mean, you know, it would be interesting to think how much time you would spend getting kids to understand the ways that things might be asked of them on a test because we know we need to do that if they're going to do well on the test, if they're going to translate their knowledge to the test, versus time they could be spending just teaching them to go deeper into the content, but, you know, I mean, you'd be nuts to not -- to not give your kids the advantage of understanding just what you said.”

3. Some people think that the reports could be more helpful for improving teaching. Do you agree or disagree? And why? And, what do you think the State could do better in that regard?

Participants think that the reports of MSA and HSA would be more helpful if they can (1) give instant results to teachers, (2) provide item or objective level results to help

instruction, (3) provide public released BCR items with example scoring, and (4) track scores of the same students longitudinally. Quotes from some participants are as follows.

“MSDE does not provide us with some score information that has any meaning. It does not go down to the indicator level. We have never seen the road map. So, when they report to us some score information by content standard, it is meaningless because we have no idea how many items are within each content score, and so we stress to the schools, "Don't use it." What can you say unless it's flat line and everybody was basic? But you have no idea. You could be looking at geometry.”

“What we do here in the County for our benchmarks is to give people instant results, and the results are given down to the objective level. So a teacher can give a test today and tomorrow can see, okay, my students are not recognizing text features. They don't know how to use a graph and informational text. That's the kind of stuff that we need from the State, and that's what I think has helped the county. That certainly helps a teacher to know, "When I walk into that room tomorrow, I know what we need to work on, and maybe I've got a pocket over here that needs to work on that, but according to my test results, I've got another pocket over here who don't know about headings," you know, something different. If we had something like that from the State, no, I don't think you'd possibly revamp everything you do the next year, but you certainly would have a road map to follow.”

“And it truly drives the instruction. So, if the State really wants us to include instruction, you have to give us the data that's useful to help drive it, and that's what I feel we're not getting from the State.”

“Also, we've been told they're getting a little bit better about this in reading because they released more full public release, you know, tests, but they also have a lot of BCR samples on the website where they commentary, but they refuse to score. So they will say what's good and bad about them, but they won't pin down to is this a 3 or a 2, and they said it's because -- I don't know -- some hocus pocus. And I'm sure from the State's level, it makes some kind of sense, but for us, it's like, "Okay. You gave me all this feedback. Tell me where you pin down the score because I'm trying to help my teachers decide where to pin down the score, and all you told me is this is good and this is bad, and now I got to guess." So it, you know -- they're right there, but they won't pin down a score on them because there weren't as many kids.”

“Because if they are weak when they are in the fifth grade, they should be looking at the same score for those students in the sixth grade, then when they go to seventh grade, then when they go to eighth grade, not, well, how did the seventh graders do last year compared to the seventh grade of this year. I really think when the State looks at scores, I think they're getting it all wrong. That's just my opinion. I think they need to look at longitudinal data.”

“I don't understand why like my sixth graders this year should be compared to the fifth graders I'm getting from Bayside. You know, we should compare the same kids' scores, not two different classes of scores.”

“I don't know if it's possible, but, in theory, with the technology as rapid as it is with data, I think it would be really nice to be able to know how the kids did before they leave us. I mean, we're in eighth

grade, and we're even now talking about what courses are they taking in high school and is there a summer readiness or is there an intervention required. And I think it would be very helpful to be able to have this more real-time data to be able to intelligently answer those questions.”

“If there was one way that you could compare those same kids, that's probably the biggest thing. Otherwise, I think the information there is helpful by categories and, you know, by skill.”

4. Some evidence from the survey suggests that more teachers in the lower grades feel that the State testing program has been positive than do teachers at the upper grades. Do you agree with that perception? Why do you agree or disagree?

Participants agree that teachers at lower grades feel more positive about the testing program than do teachers at higher grades. This is because (1) lower grade students are less argumentative, easier to motivate, and they want to please their teachers too, (2) lower grade teachers don't teach the depth of the knowledge and connections between grades, and (3) weaker students are at surface understanding at lower grades and this gap increases over time across grades and becomes a bigger and bigger problem.

Quotes from some participants are as follows.

“Looking at just on our test on FAST test, that we do the benchmark, lower grades tend to do better, and as you continue up into the other grades, they drop. Things drop off. And I don't know. I wonder where it comes from. I think in math, you know, are they using more manipulatives, are they using more hands-on, are they developing concepts differently than when the kids are older. I don't know because I'm not in those classrooms, but you definitely see third grade, fourth grade, fifth grade, and then it starts to decline. It continues to decline.”

“I think it goes back to what you said when you talked about the question would refit, and looked and said that's the same issue we have. It goes back to the depth. As you continue to grow, the problem is fractions and percents don't change how we use them -- and the depth. So, if you come in with a surface understanding of it and you continue to progress in mathematics and you can't make that connection, you're going to drop -- that's what we're struggling with in that math .”

“I think it's important for them to see what does the next grade-level test look like, what are the types of questions, or what are the expectations when they get to high school. For me, moving from elementary to middle and then working with the high school, it was like a "aha." I was like, "Oh, my goodness." You really see the connection between all of the levels”

“You're worried about a greater group of skills too. By having it in the upper grades, there's a lot of young kids who do have reading problems. There's a big gap there for them to overcome. So, you know, even with the modifications, you have a longer period to kind of cover and make up group, cue without

cuing. I mean, you have to really get out of these kids without using traditional methods in classroom. Sometimes you just got to say, "Hey, you know, you ought to think about this. Read the question." So it's a bigger period of information you got to recall too, so it's not just a reflection on me. It's a reflection on the mass."

"It makes sense to me because, being in middle school, having taught high school -- I'm middle school. To me, it just seems like this may be simple, but kids in elementary school are wanting to please their teachers, and they're just -- they want to please. They are kids. They want your approval. They want that great score. They want their name on the board. They want the apple next to it. They want all of those things."

"In elementary school, it is -- it does almost seem like it's more, you know, controllable because you've got your set of 30 kids, right, or thereabouts, and so it's easier to track, you know, 30 kids and where their skills are. In middle school, I have 110 kids, not all in special ed, but I see 110 kids through a couple language arts, math. So it's hard to get -- focus in on, you know, just the ones who made -- out of your group of 30, you might know right now five or six, and there's my focus. Well, I'd love to just have five or six and there's my focus is middle school or high school. It's not the same for us. There's just too many out there."

5. How do you think the State Modified testing program Mod-MSA/HSA has influenced the curriculum? How do you think the State testing program has influenced instruction of students eligible for Modified testing?

According to MSDE (April, 2009), Mod-MSA/HSA were built on course level content standards (end-of-course HSAs) and grade level content standards (MSAs), that incorporate variation in test delivery to meet the specific learning characteristics of the student. Many participants believe that the Mod has not changed the curriculum and expectations, but has only changed in terms of item formats. Some believe it changes teachers' instruction regarding test-taking strategies. Some other participants think the Mod is invalid and has negative influence. Quotes from some participants are as follows.

"For mathematics, as it relates to the Mod, the beauty of the MOD is still the same instruction that was expected of students prior to Mod. I think how has it addressed to change teacher's instructional strategies goes back to your question you asked about testing strategies, teaching children how to respond, giving them tools to unlock those particular questions, but instruction as far as the expectation, we use the same indicators. Nothing has changed there. It's just how the format of the test that's making teachers really get to see because at first the expectation, we thought -- teachers thought that modifying it, only

multiple choice, "Oh, this is going to be easy," but when they see how you take those BCR questions and you've done high order thinking, it's still there and to those selective responses, it leaves teachers thinking about I can't just throw away BCRs, I still have to make sure I'm getting kids to think deeper. So, for math, that's the way we see it."

"I like the Mod because it's still the math. I think a lot of the regular version of the test is a lot of reading, and I think that really hurts a lot of kids who have reading difficulties or kids who are not English speakers. It's difficult having so much language on a test. I think the Mod version gets down to the math, and you're proving that you can do the math. And I think that's been good."

"Huge scenario that kids get caught up in the language. I mean, half the time, like our items, I've changed kids' names because they like to use all these names that kids get caught up on pronunciations. I'm a special ed teacher, and I can recall kids. They couldn't even get past the first kid's name because they couldn't pronounce it, and what's the use of doing any more of the item. So that's been a good thing with the Mod."

"The only difference was instead of writing a BCR, you're asked to choose from appropriate responses as opposed to creating your own response, but as for the curriculum and concept, yeah, the students do need modification to their curriculum. Therefore, they need to modify MSA. Is it truly reflected in the way they are tested? No. I mean, I have to give more verbal prompts to kids who took the Mod-MSA in the everyday classroom. I can't give those verbal prompts on the MSA. Therefore, they're looking to me for a little more help than I'm allowed to give them, and when I tell them, "I'm sorry. I can read it to you," right there you see the face going, oh, crap, I can do this myself. I mean, they thought that I'm doing it for them in the classroom, but we're able to assist them more and prompt them more."

"Well, I know that -- I don't know if I can answer this, but I know that my special educator is concerned that the Mod test does not come in color, that the regular tests are in color, and that's kind of putting her disabled child at a disadvantage because you do learn a lot from color. It is visual. It is a strategy. It is a technique. So I know that, they want that."--

"The child that I had with the Mod, it forced me to then when I had to -- when I found out she was going to be responsible for Mod, I had to change, make more adaptations to my assessments and my exiting tickets to make it look like what she would be exposed to for the Mod, and then, additionally, for my three Alt, it was they were moved out of the room instead of being in the room. So the regular to me, it was more a memorization instead of application in the real classroom setting."

"I think what's wrong with the whole Mod thing is -- years ago, when it first came out, it was involved in, you know, the discussion of how it was actually going to look, and it seems like it doesn't look like the discussions that we had years ago. It seems like it is just a question, taken off or shortened up, but what it needs to look like is it needs to have those pneumonics on the side. It needs to have a prompt question. It needs to do those kinds of things as if the teachers were standing there trying to give them those cues or those prompts or those, you know, words on the side or "How do you remember that?" or "What's the little hint?" It's those things that activate their memory into what they are visualizing. Taking a

question away or doing -- that's not getting at what those kids need in order to get that answer to the forefront. So I think the whole part of when we discussed it years ago and what actually exists today isn't meeting those needs of the kids who need those extra new things. That's my biggest problem with that."

"I would say too that the Mod test influenced when some of the teachers saw it, they're like -- you know, it influenced them negatively, that the Mod test, "Oh, just take an answer away. That's how I should modify."

"I think it changed people's perception of what they thought it was going to be, but the teachers are still held accountable for the same content."

"It really changed their mind-set because they thought it was going to be low level, "Oh, it's going to be clean sweep. So we're going to put everybody in Mod," you know. But it did give them another perspective to see, and as I said, it gets straight to the mathematics, and that's not there and help teachers look at it, it's clean, it's clean. So, even in their instruction, it helps them as they are doing test-taking strategies in their instruction, how to do their -- the question type."

6. How do you think the State alternate testing program Alt-MSA has influenced the curriculum? How do you think the State testing program has influenced instruction of students eligible for alternate testing?

According to MSDE (April, 2009), Alt-MSA may include reduced coverage and/or simplification of grade-level content, based on "extended" standards and portfolio format permits variation/customization of test content for individual student. Participants think that alternate tests influenced the specialized curriculum for the good of this group of students; teachers who are teaching this group of students are forced to further develop their curriculum for these students and need staff development. They also believe the alternate tests have influenced the instruction a lot; since the instruction is more challenging, teachers can and should be more creative and be held accountable on more focused outcomes. Quotes from some participants are as follows.

"The way the Alt-MSA is developed, it's developed by very talented people, but the test is developed to meet with success, you know, and so it's showing excellent teaching skills, but I don't think it's really testing the child. I think it's showing how the teacher is able to develop a test to show that a child is able to be successful on a test."

"The alternates, I think change instruction for those students because they really were not getting reading with that. They were doing functional life skills, and because of the Federal Government and saying that all students were to be tested in those areas, putting together this assessment for students, it did change, and it did force professional development for those teachers."

“It did force our County to even provide those teachers with curriculum material which they had never used before. Over the last few years, they have written -- I can't remember what they called the other curriculum, but they had written a curriculum that would go along with the grade-level content, but, for instance, they have modified grade-level stories into summaries of the story, and they've made -- I don't know what they call that -- "board maker," and they've made books. So they have provided curriculum. So I think it has changed the way they have taught. It doesn't mean students' IEP does not still have that they are looking for on the functional skills, but they now have reading and math and potentially science agendas depending on that grade level. So I think it has changed instruction.”

“I know for me, having done Alt kids over the years, to me, it really changed the way those -- I instructed or led or guided the instruction through a pair of those kids because before having to link it to an objective, right off the, you know, MSC -- you know, you're trying to just kind of be out there and make up a -- you know, a test and somehow do it maybe outside the classroom or -- but having -- having zeroed in and having, you know, those choices and it's got to be one of these and having to think creatively, I think how can I get this kid to do plant cells, learn plant cells with the abilities that they have or disabilities that they have in a really creative way to show that they know the difference between an animal and a plant cell, for example. That kind of inspired me to get really creative and -- and help not only those kids but may be some other kids who might, you know, do the same kind of things on -- in neat different ways. I think for me, it brought the Alt kids a little bit closer to the classroom and could keep them in there, depending on, you know, the skill. To me, I just thought it was really challenging, and it made me be really more creative. I liked it.”

“I think it forces you to be very focused as well because you know that you have to demonstrate mastery in some videotape-able or written down way that that child can, indeed, do what you say they were going to be able to do, and so it holds people to a more focused outcome.”

## 7. What are some of the positive and some of the negative consequences of state testing?

Participants suggest that (1) for English language learners, more time needs to be given for them to develop the language skills, and they should be given the Mod version of math tests, (2) more integrated curriculum needs to be built in the earlier grades, (3) not using a single standard to evaluate students achievement since every ones' growth is different, (4) more real experience and problem-based learning opportunity and assessment (such as MSPAP) is needed, (5) moving the MSA/HSA testing administration to a later date to provide more time for teachers and students in preparation, (6) matching the textbooks with the state curriculum, and matching the terminology in the textbooks with the tests, and (7) there is too much load on the teachers for security issues of the tests. Quotes from some participants are as follows.

“I’ll just comment, and coming from a special ed background, accountability from day one is what we were taught in college. I mean, that was so important. Everything needs to be documented. Everything needs to be written down. You need to do things by the book. And I know that when I got into high schools and teaching, it was like people are teaching, you know, whatever. They weren’t necessarily teaching from any certain curriculum or whatever. They were teaching what they thought was, you know, social studies or math or whatever. So I think that put people a little more focused. I mean, the pacing guides that have been developed, I mean, there’s a lot of pros and cons to those, but it gives people somewhat of a road map of what needs to be covered. And the accountability piece, to some level, yeah, we should be somewhat accountable for what kids are learning. Whether these are the right tests that really measure the accountability is questionable, but I think that’s a positive thing.”

“I think the English language learner piece is really a big problem, you know, I mean, I don’t know what will happen over the next years and stuff, but the expectations, you know, on kids. I mean, the research is five to seven years it takes to develop the academic language that you need to be able to do, you know, but yet we don’t give kids anywhere near that much time.”

“I wish they’d allow the ELL students to be able to take the Mod version of the math test with the limited language. It just makes sense. The math, you’re assessing the skills in mathematics. Math is universal. You know, let them have that shot, not to have to read a paragraph about something before they can figure out what’s being asked.”

“And, really, at least in the earlier grades, if we had a more integrated curriculum, it would be much stronger for the kids, but it’s much more difficult to try -- I mean, we have a lot of reasons why we haven’t done that. It has nothing to do with the test, but still that’s another obstacle.”

“I was going to say that I wish the terminology on the test matched what I’m teaching the class. One that popped out to us that essential tendency, and I know in the one curriculum that I’m using. Kids get the essential tendency, they have no idea what it is.”

“This whole security issue, I mean, for me, our counseling department here like organizes everything. We work closely with our principal, totally time consuming. For me, it takes me away from my caseload and my teachers for at least a month. The whole security, ridiculous. I mean, I have to sit and put labels on booklets. I had to input three different codes from each booklet to see if -- seriously, can’t we get beyond this and do something that’s really going to be valuable to the kids and the teachers and reflect what we do here?”

“And is that child showing personal gains for themselves, or are we judging them by a norm standard that is way beyond what they’re capable of doing? I mean, that drives me insane. Each child grows at their own pace in their own way. Like we said before, don’t compare apples to oranges. Say this child has grown from this year to this year in this way. You know, don’t test them all the same and say, “Oh, well, we hope you all do well,” you know, because that’s just not going to happen.”

“I think it's catching up with us because, when we moved from MSPAP to MSA, because what we've lost is the opportunity to provide real experiences and real opportunities for problem-based learning because we have begun to and have incorporated into our routines as teachers getting ready for this test. And now I think the reason that we all are here could be in part because we're missing those three-dimensional, problem-based learning opportunities, and it's showing up in the very test that took them away from us as teachers. So I'm kind of in the scrap-it-and-start-over group as well.”

“Well, I know a negative for us is our HSA is May 17th. We don't get off until June 15th. So we have to finish -- and a couple of you guys mentioned -- we have to finish our content a month before we get out of school, and now we've got a month now to play with a little bit, which is nice. That's a positive, but it's also negative that we're really in a time crunch. For my -- I have two my personal kids who are in elementary school who are not in MSA yet, and their teachers were pulled for two weeks to cover MSA testing. So they had a substitute for two weeks at kindergarten and second grade level. I thought, "Oh, that's great," you know. So a substitute in a kindergarten or second grade class, I don't think is great for two full weeks.”

“And it's hard for the third graders too because I think it's a lot of pressure because they haven't seen the test they're taking it for, and then it carries a lot of weight. The county uses this, you know, to drive certain programs and certain things, and, you know, I said to somebody during MSA week because it can get frustrating -- and I have a child in the middle school who finds MSA frustrating. I think, you know, we're here for 180 days, and there's a lot of weight put on four of them.”

“I think it's good that they have a test. I mean, you need to assess if our kids in the United States can do basic skills. I think that's a good thing, but I think the test and the way it's written and some of the things we test don't necessarily amount to what our society and what our children are doing.”

“Well, I think along the same -- well, maybe the same lines, I know like with the test, it does make a good thing -- is it does make me take a step back and say what have I done, what can I do better next time. So it does -- does hold me accountable for my teaching, where, you know, in some content areas, you see teachers not really necessarily working to their highest potential, and they're doing okay. They can sit back, and their kids can just keep going along because they don't have this test. So those of us who are teaching it, we are also, in essence, being tested, which is a bad thing and a good thing, because it does make us, I think, stronger, better teachers because of it. And, you know, I talked to Gail and said, "Hey, what did you do for this?" So we're communicating between teachers to see what effective strategies people are using in certain content areas or in certain topics to help the students learn it. So, I mean, that is a good thing because it is making us be more collaborative.”

“But it also leaves you frustrated because curriculum doesn't always match up. The textbook doesn't support the State curriculum. So then, therefore, the teachers are having to use their own time in order to try and create things in order to make sure that they're hitting the level in which, you know, we are holding the kids accountable. If we are going to be looking at Federal standards, then we also need to look at textbooks that are written for Federal standards and purchasing books that hit our State curriculum

instead of purchasing -- I mean, my physics unit, I had to revamp the whole thing because there's like three -- three objectives out of all of the objectives in there. There isn't any of the objectives for some of the other strands, and I'm looking on the Internet. And I'm wondering what is everybody else doing.”

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

By examining the main and interaction effects of the total 3639 valid survey responses, it was concluded that, in general, the impact of testing is positive in emphasizing the curriculum, providing support on what the tests are supposed to cover, improving school or district's programs, providing clear and understandable reports, and confirming what teachers knew about the students. However, we do find that (1) Some respondents think that the state testing program decreases teachers' emphasis on higher-order thinking skills, (2) more teachers in the lower grades feel that the State testing program has been positive than do teachers at the upper grades, and (3) teachers spend too much time on how to take tests rather than teaching the subject matter knowledge and skills

A follow-up focus group study was conducted in three counties in Maryland to investigate more about the issues. First, respondents agree that the state testing program decreases teachers' emphasis on higher-order thinking skills to some degree, which is due to the large amount of content coverage by the state tests, and the limiting time constraints for teachers to go deeper into the knowledge and skills. Second, partly due to the accumulations of surface understanding of the contents and knowledge at lower grades, students are having greater difficulty in understanding complex concepts at higher grades; therefore more and more students fall behind at higher grades, which results in more teachers in the lower grades feeling the State testing program has been positive than do teachers at the upper grades. Third, respondents think it is appropriate for teachers to teach the test-taking strategies, which are embedded with the subject matter knowledge and skills. They believe teaching students to identify and eliminate distractors, as well as carefully reading through the question, making sense out of it, and transferring it to their own familiar phrases is an important part of the learning process and test taking.

Two other forms of the state testing program are Mod-MSA/HSA and Alt-MSA. The focus group study also collected people's perceptions on how the state Mod and Alt tests have influenced the curriculum and on how the state Mod and Alt tests have

influenced the instruction of this group of students. Most people believe that Mod-MSA/HSA keeps the same curriculum as regular MSA/HSA but just changes the item format. In terms of its influence on instruction, they think teachers' instruction on test-taking strategies are changed to make students more comfortable with the Mod item formats. A few people think that Mod-MSA/HSA is invalid and has negative impact. For the Alt-MSA, participants think that alternate tests influenced the curriculum, generally for the better, which is specialized for this group of students; teachers who are teaching this group of students are required to have professional development to understand the corresponding curriculum. They also believe the alternate tests have considerable influence on the instruction; since the instruction is more challenging, teachers can be more creative but be held accountable for more focused outcomes.

According to feedback from both survey items and focus group comments, suggestions for the state (and counties) are made in four areas: curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development.

First, the state should encourage and provide opportunity and support for educators at all levels to study the state curriculum more carefully in order to understand the curriculum much deeper. Feedback from classroom teachers indicate that too much contents and knowledge are included at each grade level in the curriculum which is pushing teachers to rush to cover all the materials in their daily instructions. One possible reason for that is teachers don't really study and understand the curriculum; therefore, for them, the contents and knowledge are isolated within and across grades. Once teachers master the curriculum and understand the connections of contents and knowledge, they will be able to handle the relative broad coverage of curriculum.

Second, the state should consider ways to provide further guidance and support for teachers' instructional activities. For one thing, as high as 86% of the respondents believe that without MSA-HSA, the content taught in the tested subjects would be different; what's more, 66% of the respondents think the state test results are used to help improve their own instruction. These results from the survey indicated that teachers' instruction is affected by the test results. Accordingly, the state should encourage teachers to update their instructions based on tests results, and teaching test-taking strategies can be very well embedded within the subject matter instruction in class, as information

processing skills for students to master. For another, the state should guide teachers' instructional activities based on teachers' understanding of the curriculum. Only 57% of the respondents believe that without MSA-HSA, there would be equal or less curricular emphasis on higher-order thinking. This may be due to teachers' surface understanding of the curriculum. Once teachers understand how the curriculum are focused and intergraded, the classroom instruction will be naturally focused and integrated. As a result of focused instructions on key content, concepts and knowledge, additional time will be allocated, and higher-order thinking skills can be naturally emphasized by teachers during instructions.

Third, the state should make the state assessment more informative to stakeholders, and provide guidance and support for districts to develop local benchmark assessments, and for teachers to develop classroom assessments. For one thing, the results from the survey and the focus group study indicated that the released items are helpful but there are not enough of them. It was suggested that more released items with scoring rubrics, instant results with item or objective level information, and scores tracking students' scores over time are highly needed. For another, to help develop the county level benchmark assessment, the state should provide guidance, suggestion and support. For example, the item formats of local assessment should be suggested by the state to be aligned with the item formats of the state assessments to make students familiar with the state assessments; the results of the county level benchmark assessments should be instant, so that teachers can be informed on the strengths and weaknesses of their students as well as the effectiveness of their teaching. Furthermore, classroom intervention and shorter formative assessments (such as quizzes) should be suggested by the state to be developed and implemented immediately by teachers to remedy the weaknesses in response time. These three hierarchical assessments should function together to foster increasing students' mastery of the state curriculum in a timely and effective manner. It is recommended that documents be developed by the state to provide detailed guidance, suggestions, and support on building the hierarchy of assessments at local districts, schools and classrooms.

Fourth, the state should provide more effective professional development for teachers. For one thing, in order to master the state curriculum and implement effective

instruction with emphasis on higher-order thinking skills, teachers need to understand the state curriculum at a much deeper level through professional development activities. For another, teachers need to have opportunity to teach or at least learn more about the demands at different grade levels, so they are exposed to the range of subject matter curriculum. In this way they should be better able to understand the connections of content and knowledge across grades. Besides that, professional development provides opportunities for teachers to communicate their teaching strategies and collaborate with others to obtain better instruction.

To close, these four components curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development need to be understood, implemented, practiced and involved by educators, and the guidance and support should be provided by the state. The common element of the four components is the deep understanding of the state curriculum, which affects the three other components. Therefore, the state and counties should focus even more on helping teachers understand the state curriculum. Beyond that, the state and counties also needs to provide guidance and support for teachers' instruction, professional development activities, as well as help developing effective county and classroom assessments to facilitate students' learning and to improve students' achievement.

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## Appendix A

### Survey on the Impacts of Maryland's Assessments

Welcome to the survey of impact of Maryland testing! This survey is part of Maryland's evaluation of these assessment programs. It is being administered by the Maryland Assessment Research Center for Education Success (MARCES) at the University of Maryland; the results will be kept anonymous and no identifying information will be shared with the State. It will take you about 10 minutes to complete the survey and we would appreciate your candid responses.

Maryland's statewide testing includes the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) given in Reading and Math in grades 3 through 8 and Science in grades 5 and 8, as well as High School Assessments (HSA) in Algebra and Data Analysis, English, Biology, and Government. All but the Government test are also used to satisfy the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, which mandates an assessment and accountability program in all states. Modified versions of the MSA and HSA assessments (Mod-MSA and Mod-HSA) are administered to some students with disabilities as required by their IEPs. Maryland also administers the Alternate Maryland School Assessment (Alt MSA) at all these levels for students whose cognitive challenges are recognized by their IEPs.

#### **PART I. Information about yourself.**

1. Do you work at school level or county level?

School level.

County level.

2. Please specify your school by name.

\_\_\_\_\_.

3. Please specify your county by name.

\_\_\_\_\_.

4. What is your highest level of education you have completed? (check one)

Less than bachelor's degree.

Bachelor's degree.

Master's degree.

Doctoral degree.

5. What is your job role (check the one best description)?

Teacher.

School-Based Administrator.

Curriculum Coordinator.

District-Based Administrator.

Not Applicable.

Other (please specify)\_\_\_\_\_.

6. Including the current year, how long have you been employed in an educational setting? (check one)

- Less than 2 years.
- 3-5 years.
- 6-10 years.
- 11-15 years.
- Over 15 years.

7. Including the current year, how long have you been employed in your current position? (check one)

- Less than 2 years.
- 3-5 years.
- 6-10 years.
- 11-15 years.
- Over 15 years.

8. Check the student grade levels that you primarily work with? (check the one most relevant)

- K-4
- 5-6
- 7-8
- 9-12
- Not applicable

9. What subjects (if any) do you teach on a day-to-day basis? (check all that apply)

- Reading or English
- Writing
- Math
- Science or Biology
- Government
- Other
- Not applicable

10. Do you work primarily with students with special needs? (check all that apply)

- No.
- Yes, physical disabilities.
- Yes, Cognitive disabilities.
- Yes, Emotional disabilities.
- Yes, English language learners.
- Not applicable.

11. With which of the state tests are you most familiar? (check the one or more most closely related to your job role)

- MSA

- HSA-English
- HSA-Algebra
- HSA-Biology
- HSA-Government
- HSA in General
- Alt-MSA
- Not Applicable

**Part II. We would like to know your reactions to several questions about the MSA- HSA tests in Maryland. Again, we would appreciate your candid responses. Please choose the most accurate response, even if none seems to fit you exactly.**

1. Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on reading change in your school or district? (check one)

- There would be much more emphasis.
- There would be somewhat more emphasis.
- There would be about the same emphasis.
- There would be somewhat less emphasis.
- There would be much less emphasis.
- No basis to judge.

2. Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on writing change in your school or district? (check one)

- There would be much more emphasis.
- There would be somewhat more emphasis.
- There would be about the same emphasis.
- There would be somewhat less emphasis.
- There would be much less emphasis.
- No basis to judge.

3. Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on math change in your school or district? (check one)

- There would be much more emphasis.
- There would be somewhat more emphasis.
- There would be about the same emphasis.
- There would be somewhat less emphasis.
- There would be much less emphasis.
- No basis to judge.

4. Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on science change in your school or district? (check one)

- There would be much more emphasis.
- There would be somewhat more emphasis.

- There would be about the same emphasis.
- There would be somewhat less emphasis.
- There would be much less emphasis.
- No basis to judge.

5. Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on social studies change in your school or district? (check one)

- There would be much more emphasis.
- There would be somewhat more emphasis.
- There would be about the same emphasis.
- There would be somewhat less emphasis.
- There would be much less emphasis.
- No basis to judge.

6. Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on physical education change in your school or district? (check one)

- There would be much more emphasis.
- There would be somewhat more emphasis.
- There would be about the same emphasis.
- There would be somewhat less emphasis.
- There would be much less emphasis.
- No basis to judge.

7. Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on the arts change in your school or district? (check one)

- There would be much more emphasis.
- There would be somewhat more emphasis.
- There would be about the same emphasis.
- There would be somewhat less emphasis.
- There would be much less emphasis.
- No basis to judge.

8. Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on other subjects not included above change in your school or district? (check one)

- There would be much more emphasis.
- There would be somewhat more emphasis.
- There would be about the same emphasis.
- There would be somewhat less emphasis.
- There would be much less emphasis.
- No basis to judge.

9. Without MSA- HSA how would the content taught in the tested subjects change in your school or district? (check one)

- Very different.
- Different.
- Just a bit different.
- Not at all different.
- No basis to judge.

10. Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on higher-order thinking change in your school or district? (check one)

- There would be much more emphasis.
- There would be somewhat more emphasis.
- There would be about the same emphasis.
- There would be somewhat less emphasis.
- There would be much less emphasis.
- No basis to judge.

11. How much time do you (or the teachers you work with) spend teaching students how to take tests in general rather than teaching about the subject matter the tests are supposed to assess? (check one)

- Far too much.
- A bit too much.
- About the right amount.
- A bit too little
- Far too little.
- Not applicable.

12. Do you know what the state tests are supposed to cover? (check one)

- No, and I do not plan on finding out.
- No, but I could probably find out what they cover.
- Yes, but only because I made an effort to find out.
- Yes, I have been told without asking what they are supposed to cover.

13. Do you find the released items helpful? (check one)

- Yes, very helpful.
- Yes, but there aren't enough of them.
- No, I looked at them and they are not helpful.
- No, I know about them but have never looked at them.
- I didn't know there were any released items.

14. Are the reports you receive about state test results clear and easy to understand? (check one)

- No, I hardly understand them at all.
- No, but with a lot of effort I can usually figure them out.
- Yes, but they could be even clearer.

- Yes, they contain just what I want to know.
- Not Applicable.

15. Do the state tests confirm what you already knew about your students (or groups of students) or are you surprised by the results? (check one)

- Virtually always confirm what I knew.
- Mostly confirm what I knew.
- Mostly I am surprised.
- I am very often surprised.
- I don't deal with the results.

16. Are the state test results used to help improve your school's (or district's) programs? (check one)

- Yes, they have a huge impact.
- Yes, but not very much impact.
- Hardly at all.
- Never.
- No basis to judge.

17. Are the state test results used to help improve your own instruction? (check one)

- Yes, they have a huge impact.
- Yes, but not very much impact.
- Hardly at all.
- Never.
- Not applicable.

18. What improvements in the schools have occurred as a result of the testing program? (limited to 400 characters)

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19. What suggestions do you have for the state to improve its assessment programs? (limited to 400 characters)

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20. What unintended consequences do you see happening as a result of the state's assessment programs and what do you think could be done so they don't happen? (limited to 400 characters)

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21. Do you have other concerns about the state's assessment programs that haven't been covered? (limited to 400 characters)

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THANKS VERY MUCH FOR PROVIDING YOUR CANDID & HONEST REACTIONS.

Appendix B  
**Principal Component Analysis (PCA) of the attitude Items**

To study relationships among the attitude items on the questionnaire, PCA with Varimax rotation was first conducted using all the collected data on the 17 attitude items. Using the Kaiser-Guttman rule (Guttman, 1954; Kaiser, 1960), five components were extracted, which together explained 62% of total variance. Based on the magnitude of item loadings, an item map with the five components was created (see Table 1). The full PCA item loading matrix is available at MARCES web site (<http://www.marces.org/current.htm>).

Table 1. PCA item map

Component No.	Items with relative high loadings
1	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 10
2	6, 7, and 8
3	16, and 17
4	9, 11, 14, and 10
5	12, 13 and 15

The PCA item map and corresponding item contents were taken into considered to name each of the components. Table 2 below provides a name for each of the components, which confirms the design of the questionnaire.

Table 2. PCA component name

No.	Component Name
1	Attitude to MSA/HSA impact on curriculum of assessed subjects
2	Attitude to MSA/HSA impact on curriculum of non-assessed subjects
3	Attitude to the use of MSA/HSA results on improving program and instruction
4	Attitude to MSA/HSA impact on content taught and classroom instruction
5	Attitude to effectiveness of MSA/HSA results and usefulness of released items

It is worth mentioning that all items load on only one of the five components except item 10, which measures respondents' attitudes on the impact of MSA/HSA on curriculum higher-order thinking skills and has considerable loadings on both Component 1 and Component 4.

Appendix C  
Main Effects Tables M-1 through M-17

Table M-1.

**Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on reading change in your school or district? (check one)** Percent Missing: 18

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
There would be much more emphasis.	9	241
There would be somewhat more emphasis.	11	327
There would be about the same emphasis.	64	1783
There would be somewhat less emphasis.	13	347
There would be much less emphasis.	3	81
Total	100	2779

Table M-2.

**Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on writing change in your school or district? (check one)** Percent Missing: 18

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
There would be much more emphasis.	17	481
There would be somewhat more emphasis.	20	557
There would be about the same emphasis.	51	1414
There would be somewhat less emphasis.	10	285
There would be much less emphasis.	2	61
Total	100	2798

Table M-3.

**Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on math change in your school or district? (check one)** Percent Missing: 24

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
There would be much more emphasis.	7	187
There would be somewhat more emphasis.	9	238
There would be about the same emphasis.	69	1784
There would be somewhat less emphasis.	12	304
There would be much less emphasis.	3	67
Total	100	2580

Table M-4.

**Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on science change in your school or district? (check one)** Percent Missing: 28

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
There would be much more emphasis.	10	246
There would be somewhat more emphasis.	17	426
There would be about the same emphasis.	57	1416
There would be somewhat less emphasis.	13	314
There would be much less emphasis.	3	69
Total	100	2471

Table M-5.

**Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on social studies change in your school or district? (check one)** Percent Missing: 28

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
There would be much more emphasis.	14	350
There would be somewhat more emphasis.	22	533
There would be about the same emphasis.	53	1313
There would be somewhat less emphasis.	9	217
There would be much less emphasis.	2	54
Total	100	2467

Table M-6.

**Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on physical education change in your school or district? (check one)** Percent Missing: 33

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
There would be much more emphasis.	13	293
There would be somewhat more emphasis.	24	543
There would be about the same emphasis.	59	1356
There would be somewhat less emphasis.	3	65
There would be much less emphasis.	1	29
Total	100	2286

Table M-7.

**Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on arts change in your school or district? (check one)** Percent Missing: 28

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
There would be much more emphasis.	20	492
There would be somewhat more emphasis.	30	745
There would be about the same emphasis.	46	1119
There would be somewhat less emphasis.	3	66
There would be much less emphasis.	1	28
Total	100	2450

Table M-8.

**Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on other subjects not included above change in your school or district? (check one)** Percent Missing: 28

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
There would be much more emphasis.	15	366
There would be somewhat more emphasis.	32	794
There would be about the same emphasis.	48	1185
There would be somewhat less emphasis.	3	73
There would be much less emphasis.	1	29
Total	100	2447

Table M-9.

**Without MSA- HSA how would the content taught in the tested subjects change in your school or district? (check one)** Percent Missing: 14

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Very different.	17	484
Different.	37	1087
Just a bit different.	32	947
Not at all different.	14	412
Total	100	2930

Table M-10.

**Without MSA- HSA how would the curricular emphasis on higher-order thinking change in your school or district? (check one)** Percent Missing: 11

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
There would be much more emphasis.	18	537
There would be somewhat more emphasis.	25	764
There would be about the same emphasis.	51	1544
There would be somewhat less emphasis.	5	160
There would be much less emphasis.	1	27
Total	100	3032

Table M-11.

**How much time do you (or the teachers you work with) spend teaching students how to take tests in general rather than teaching about the subject matter the tests are supposed to assess? (check one)** Percent Missing: 11

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Far too much.	24	721
A bit too much.	35	1065
About the right amount.	31	954
A bit too little.	7	204
Far too little.	3	95
Total	100	3039

Table M-12

**Do you know what the state tests are supposed to cover? (check one)** Percent Missing: 0

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
No, and I do not plan on finding out.	4	115
No, but I could probably find out what they cover.	17	551
Yes, but only because I made an effort to find out.	27	913
Yes, I have been told without asking what they are supposed to cover.	53	1828
Total	100	3407

Table M-13.

**Do you find the released items helpful? (check one)** Percent Missing: 0

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Yes, very helpful.	30	1037
Yes, but there aren't enough of them.	38	1290
No, I looked at them and they are not helpful.	7	225
No, I know about them but have never looked at them.	8	276
I didn't know there were any released items.	17	579
Total	100	3407

Table M-14.

**Are the reports you receive about state test results clear and easy to understand? (check one)** Percent Missing: 16

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
No, I hardly understand them at all.	3	94
No, but with a lot of effort I can usually figure them out.	14	394
Yes, but they could be even clearer.	53	1542
Yes, they contain just what I want to know.	30	849
Total	100	2879

Table M-15.

**Do the state tests confirm what you already knew about your students (or groups of students) or are you surprised by the results? (check one)** Percent Missing: 0

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Virtually always confirm what I knew.	12	389
Mostly confirm what I knew.	66	2269
Mostly I am surprised.	4	125
I am very often surprised.	4	118
I don't deal with the results.	15	506
Total	100	3407

Table M-16.

**Are the state test results used to help improve your school's (or district's) programs? (check one)** Percent Missing: 14

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Yes, they have a huge impact.	52	1513
Yes, but not very much impact.	36	1064
Hardly at all.	11	308
Never.	2	43
Total	100	2928

Table M-17.

**Are the state test results used to help improve your own instruction? (check one)** Percent Missing: 26

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Yes, they have a huge impact.	34	872
Yes, but not very much impact.	42	1064
Hardly at all.	18	447
Never.	6	151
Total	100	2534

## Appendix D

### Prince George's County Focus Group Study Transcript

**LISSITZ:** Okay. I'm Bob Lissitz. I work at the University of Maryland. I'm a professor there, and I run the MARCES Center, as it's called, which has funding from the State of Maryland to do lots of studies, and this is one of them.

This is Ying Li. She's one of my graduate students, and I'll give you a chance to introduce yourselves, but, to be honest, I probably won't remember your names. For our purposes, everything is anonymous anyway, so I hope you will be candid with us.

We are going to transcribe this, and I will refer to it in a report. So it's not like what you're saying isn't going to appear somewhere, but it's not going to be attributed to you personally. All I need to do -- and I'll get a more accurate sense, but it sounds like you've got math and reading curriculum people, and I know that two of you are from the assessment -- the central of the assessment, so that probably defines pretty well what we're --

**PARTICIPANT:** And I also represent Title I.

**LISSITZ:** Oh, good. Oh, okay. Thank you. That's good to know.

I don't know if you noticed or not. We did a survey in the State of Maryland on the State assessment program. I don't know if you participated in that survey, but it was done on Survey Monkey, and we got over 3,700 people, responded across the State. And this is the follow-up phase of that effort.

Basically, the subject of that survey, if you're familiar with it, what we were interested in is HSA and MSA and the MOD and alt testing in the States, alternate testing in the State. You probably don't know that much about the alternate testing but a little bit. I might ask you some questions about that at the end.

We've got this survey, and Ying has done a huge amount of data analysis, and we have lots of results, and we have a big, huge report and a very short executive summary. And we will end up giving that to the State. Then it will go to the Federal Government as part of the sort of validation process for the State, and for -- actually for Federal testing, something like this is required, mandated by the Fed.

So that's basically what we're doing, and if you have any quick questions, you could ask me. Not about the results. We'll get your opinions about what you think about this, but just help to understand --

**PARTICIPANT:** This is towards what are they going to do with all of this in the end?

**LISSITZ:** Well, I don't know the answer to that question, really. I'm a low person on the totem pole as far as the State is concerned.

I do believe -- it's my understanding that it will go into -- we will issue a report, and it will go to the Federal Government as an indication of compliance with the way the testing is supposed to occur with No Child Left Behind, and the Fed is interested in whether States follow up on their testing at all, and that this is part of that process.

So it will be -- it will be probably a minimum of either excerpts or the whole report will go to the Fed to show that the State of Maryland is interested in teachers and --

**PARTICIPANT:** How are people aware to take this --

**LISSITZ:** I'll tell you, if you don't mind, I'd like -- I'd be happy to talk. I'll say just a couple of words, but I'd be happy to talk as long as you want to after the focus group is over.

**PARTICIPANT:** Okay.

**LISSITZ:** But what happened was every -- we selected a series of counties, almost -- I think every county except one ended up in the survey. Then we selected a series of schools that were either high or low performance or they had basic characteristics. So we tried to get a random -- it's not a random sample but essentially a random sample of schools across the State.

And then the superintendents were asked, which was a trip, and then they agreed. Nancy explained the purpose of this to a few of them, but most of them agreed readily. And then the school principals were contacted, and then the teachers within the schools were given the Web address, and they got on the Survey Monkey. It sounds like none of you did, participated in the --

**PARTICIPANT:** I did.

**LISSITZ:** You did? Okay.

So I can't explain why you were or weren't involved, but --

**PARTICIPANT:** No, I was asking personally. [Laughs.]

**LISSITZ:** No. And I'm not sensitive about it.

**PARTICIPANT:** Oh, okay.

**LISSITZ:** I don't want to spend a lot of time. Here we actually have a fair amount of time. Then the school we're doing tomorrow, we have about 50 minutes

because we have to go in at the break, you know, planning periods in order to get teachers. You all are more central staff type, so it's a little it easier.

But that's -- it was literally over 3,700 people responded in the State, which was kind of -- I was very pleased about that, frankly. I didn't realize we -- if you had asked me to guess, I would have said it would be a much lower number. But, anyway, I was real pleased about that. People obviously in the State are interested in the State testing.

By and large, I'll tell you that the results from the State testing in terms of attitudes -- and we're looking at opinions and attitudes. We're not looking at the data per se from the State testing. So this has nothing to do with that, per se.

But the people were generally positive. There were a few areas where people had some questions, and we wanted to follow up and ask about -- ask those questions, and I have a series of seven plus one for you, and we'll kind of work our way through those.

Anything else?

[No audible response.]

**LISSITZ:** We'll get started. Okay.

Well, let's see. Okay. Some people think that the State testing program decreases teacher's emphasis on higher order thinking skills. We got a little bit of feedback about that. It wasn't a strong effect but a little bit.

I wondered if you disagree or agree. When you go out into the schools, do you think that teachers have decreased their emphasis on higher order thinking skills because of the State testing program?

**PARTICIPANT:** I think it can.

And you just want anybody to speak?

**LISSITZ:** Yeah. I don't have -- I don't know any of you really, so, yeah, jump in.

**PARTICIPANT:** I think that because there are so many indicators that sometimes people think they're supposed to teach everything, and in order to teach everything, you can't really focus on the deepest and most important and most significant thing, and so that causes sometimes folks to teach in isolation, to teach little, itty-bitty skills, and think -- and check them off on the checklist as opposed to thinking about, you know, what are the big-ticket items and, if we don't get to this little thing or that little thing, well, so be it, but we get to much deeper.

So, in that sense, I think sometimes the testing piece does, in fact, dumb it down.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**LISSITZ:** Anybody else?

**PARTICIPANT:** I agree. I think a lot of times because of the testing, teachers become -- they feel like they're locked into teaching a particular skill as opposed to -- for example, if you're talking about like in mathematics, if you're talking about solving an equation and how you can extend that into dealing with like functions and patterns and dealing with graphing and that sort of thing, but sometimes you just want to teach equations, but we don't necessarily see the -- how we can make that connection across different topics.

And a lot of times, like I said, because we know on the test we're going to see it this way, so we want to teach that way, but we can really -- like you said, we can dig a lot deeper with the students on a particular topic as opposed to just teaching them in isolation almost.

**PARTICIPANT:** I think that part of that teaching in isolation, I agree with both of my colleagues. I think it has to do with the teachers also not understanding the content deep enough to be able to see those connections and teach it in depth.

**LISSITZ:** Anybody else?

**PARTICIPANT:** Do you think that because -- we still have BCRs on MSA. I mean, is there anything where regularly requests to -- how to analyze, so that they can put more thought into their BCR as opposed to -- well, I think we try to get them into strategies as to how to look for information. Would that be any -- will you consider that any higher order thinking with any of that, that they're looking at, or we're just so tuned in to do it this way?

**PARTICIPANT:** What we found when we are creating items, that for the most difficult objectives, you really need to work in BCRs. And I don't know that teachers are as comfortable or as skilled at doing that.

But I can tell you, I work on the Reading Benchmarks for the County, and trying to get the deepest level thinking and put it into a selected response item is -- well, first of all, it's wrong, which is we shouldn't be trying to do it. And we don't have BCRs in our tests.

But I think there's a correlation between the depth of thinking and do you answer A, B, C, D, or do you put something in writing, and that is a double skill, so it's challenging.

**LISSITZ:** Do you think that affects what the teachers do in that classroom?

**PARTICIPANT:** I suspect as much. Yeah, yeah.

**LISSITZ:** And do you think that this is a direct result of the testing itself, or is this something that occurred before? I don't know when we've ever had --

**PARTICIPANT:** Oh, I think everything that happens in the classroom anymore is a direct result of testing --

**PARTICIPANT:** Testing, absolutely.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- for most of our teachers. We have some veterans out there who may actually not go through the year saying, "You need to learn this for MSA," but I'll be you they are few and far between.

**PARTICIPANT:** It's so, you know, data driven, and so, when they're holding teachers responsible and schools and principals, they couldn't find anything that relates back to the data, that relates back to the test. I think as a teacher that I'm not too far removed from the classroom. We feel pressure that I have -- should at least get through these test items, and then it just becomes so overwhelming.

**PARTICIPANT:** And there's a lot of pieces. I mean, you teach. You know, we're really big into reading and comprehension strategies, but you can't directly test a comprehension strategy on the test. So it's a sell job to have people understand that you should teach this anyway because your kids -- you talk about BCRs. The kids who walk in there and think, "Oh, this is like what I do in class where we're thinking, and they want to really know what I think, and so I'm going to tell them," versus the people who haven't spent much time on that piece, which is not tested, but who -- so, therefore, their BCR is a little formula, and they think they can stick this thinking on the end of it, which never sounds like -- because it isn't. It's just sort of like this formula of kind of being, you know, stuck on the end.

The other piece -- I just want to say one other thing. The other thing is we don't test writing. We know in language arts that reading and writing are reciprocal and they belong together, and kids will know much more about reading if they are writing, but -- and we developed some really -- or gotten some really great writing, you know, pieces, but because writing isn't tested -- and I'm not really advocating to test more things, but I'm just saying that, you know, again, it's a sell job on, you know -- no, do teach the writing because, guess what, it's going to make a difference in the reading. It's all one thing, but the test rules, and so whatever is on that test -- you know, and people live or die. It's the whole -- it's the test not in isolation, but it's the test in relation to what are the standards and then what are the punitive measures that come out of the test that lead people to, you know, get into this mentality that let's just get out those test prep books and use them all year long. Maybe that's what will make it all happy.

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** I just want to say I understand from the testing side why they eliminated BCRs and ECRs from the tests. However, I think the BCRs and ECRs did lend itself to, you know, that higher order thinking. They make you just think and write it, talk mathematics, write mathematics, do mathematics. So, I mean, from a testing side, I see why it took forever for the scores to come back. However, it's, you know -- it's like a double-sided score, because teachers now -- they don't need to know it for the test. They don't. That's not their emphasis.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm. But, to your credit, you still keep those, your assessment --

**PARTICIPANT:** Yes, we do.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- because you want kids to be writing about what they know.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yes, we do. Yes, we do.

**PARTICIPANT:** We go beyond just MSA.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right. Sure.

**PARTICIPANT:** Assessment limits and all, that's the floor.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** So you teach beyond that.

**PARTICIPANT:** Sure.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**LISSITZ:** So you use that instructional material -- as instructional material?

**PARTICIPANT:** Absolutely.

**PARTICIPANT:** Absolutely. Unit assessment.

**PARTICIPANT:** And I guess one of the things which you reminded me of, which is I do think, you know, that even though we struggle to pass the test, that we have some higher schools that don't really struggle to pass the test that should be pushing their kids a whole lot further than they are, but because they get great scores on the test, they don't really feel the pressure.

And so you may find in some -- you know, and I'm not -- certainly not generalizing. We've got some fantastic teachers working really hard in those schools, but you'll also find people who just assign and assess, and the kids do just fine, but those kids

really deserve a much richer curriculum than they're getting because they're passing the test, and nobody's worried about it.

**LISSITZ:** Second question I've got is some people seem to think that teachers spend too much time on how to take tests rather than teaching the subject matter, knowledge, and skills. There were a few people in the survey who indicated that they thought test-taking skills was being emphasized.

And I'm curious. Do you agree or disagree, and what specifically -- and then, you know, talk about that. And then what specific test-taking skills did the teachers actually teach?

We're curious what people think teachers actually could do to teach test-taking skills beyond "get a good breakfast, and read every item carefully." I mean, it's a little bit -- we're curious about that.

**PARTICIPANT:** I know for some time, there were some skills that they were teaching where the students would look at questions and the responses, and they would determine which ones were not appropriate and put an X through those responses.

In fact, we had to do some retraining because they were putting X's through the --

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** -- you know, looking for the distractors, so they could eliminate. So they were being shown how to do that. I think that's probably -- the other thing is using some of the practice materials that have been vendor MSA finish lines, performance indicators which are supposed to be practicing those same skills, but, again, if they're going over them and looking at item analysis or going back, you know, "You can't go with 2, or did you erase that all the way?" I mean, some of those techniques that even as the FTC when they're reviewing books should look to see that they're -- the erasures are marked properly. I think those types of things -- I don't think when you think about testing the skills that it's more like, you know, having the SAT and practicing the SAT.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** Well, in mathematics, we embed different strategies for our test particular -- in trainings, teachers willing to learn their planning. So it's not like they're isolated where they're just teaching these strategies. As I said, it's an instructional strategy. So we do embed that in our training, which they can apply not only to a test but, I mean, all contexts, and we also --

**PARTICIPANT:** And for our benchmark tests, I mean, we give them the opportunity to review the results with the students and look at the item analysis and look at, you know, what was the most common answer, you know, and what was the distractor,

so they do some of that, if they have time with the students to go over that test. So I think that's --

**PARTICIPANT:** We encourage it.

**PARTICIPANT:** That's probably one of -- the after-test review is probably extremely valuable because it requires kids to look at distractions and why it's wrong, and then it lets the teacher take a look and say, "Ah, they're getting the concept. They're thinking of the concept this way and not this way."

**PARTICIPANT:** I think there's a good deal of brain research that information -- you know, you can learn information, but, if it's asked to you in a different way or you have to respond to it in a different format than you're used to, you may not transfer that information accurately.

So, taking what a child understands and then asking them to answer a multiple-choice question and pick the right response actually does take some additional kinds of instruction that have nothing to do with the content, and that's where, you know, a lot of people who, you know, really are definitely thinking we don't want people spending all their time preparing for a test, look at testing as a genre --

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- just like we teach kids, you know, units on this or that or genres on this and that. They say let's teach them testing as a genre, so that you come to understand how did this test -- you know, what is in the mind of this, just like you think what's in the mind of a mystery writer when you're writing mystery, what's in the mind of a testing -- you know, somebody who writes the test. And they did try to -- there probably are two answers there that are pretty close, you know, and there probably are a couple I can get rid of, and do I have to -- you know, is this question right there on the page, or is this question something I have to infer to come up with an answer to? You know, there's a lot of test-taking strategies, and given how high stakes these tests are, I think we would be foolish not to give our kids the benefit of saying, "Yeah, we know you're really smart, and you really understand this material, but guess what? When they ask you about main idea, they're going to ask you what's the best title." Who would think that all this work we did on main idea was about what's the best title? But I need to know that that's -- you know, that the question about what I know may come in a lot of different forms.

So, like you were saying, we try to embed that into --

**PARTICIPANT:** Not in isolation.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- the -- yeah, not in isolation. We try to deal with it when we're going back over the test that we do that are written here in the County, and we do do some preparation with kids.

I think that that work is often way more valuable than the test practice --

**PARTICIPANT:** Absolutely.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- that people call a "test prep," which is just doing them again and getting them wrong again or getting them right again and never really having -- or going over what was right or wrong about your answer but not really understanding, you know, in this testing format what kind of thinking you were doing or did you have to do.

**PARTICIPANT:** I think it also lends itself to how we rolled out our benchmarks this year, which are called "FAST tests."

This year, we've really honed in on the fact that that quarterly test is assessing what was to be taught, and it's also cumulative. So the next quarter looked at two quarters' worth, and I think that if we look ahead to next year, not knowing what the powers-to-be might think about how we're going to look next year, but I think that might have been more than us thinking that we're doing something that's practicing for the MSA, but that we are, you know, assessing what was to be taught, you know. I think that was maybe better in the minds of teachers to get away from this kind of MSA.

**LISSITZ:** Anything else?

**PARTICIPANT:** I was just going to say I think -- I think it really depends -- like as far as like with the -- with regard to test-taking strategies, I really think it depends on how familiar the teacher is with the test because like I remember -- like I'm not too far removed from the classroom, and I remember when I first started teaching, my students had to take the High School Assessment at the end of the year, but I didn't really know anything about the test. So I just taught the content, and so I figure, you know, I taught -- I taught -- I've taught solving equations, so I've taught probabilities, so they should be able to get the questions right on the test, but I never made the connection between what I taught in class versus what was on the exam.

And a lot of teachers, if you ask some teachers, you know, well, what's goal one, what's goal three, what is that test, what is a skill statement, you know -- but they know the content as it pertains -- they know their content, but how does that content -- how was that assessed?

And I think like Garnetta and Michelle were saying, you know, that's kind of where we're trying to make that connection, between what your -- you know, what their content is versus how that content looks on the assessment. So I really think it has to do with the teacher's familiarity with the exam.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** A lot of professional development.

**LISSITZ:** Say again?

**PARTICIPANT:** A lot of professional development to try to bridge that gap.

**LISSITZ:** It's needed, then?

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** Absolutely. And you still miss teachers when that district is so large. You still miss that part of the teachers.

**PARTICIPANT:** And I think it's something that we -- I mean, you know, it would be interesting to think how much time you would spend getting kids to understand the ways that things might be asked of them on a test because we know we need to do that if they're going to do well on the test, if they're going to translate their knowledge to the test, versus time that could be spending just teaching them to go deeper into the content, but, you know, I mean, you'd be nuts to not -- to not give your kids the advantage of understanding just what you said.

Like, you know, they might not be asking you about, you know, the answer. They might be asking you about the -- you know, the -- it might be the thing --

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** You know what I mean, that all that --

**PARTICIPANT:** That's what I'm saying. As teachers, you're trying to figure out how they're going to ask the question as well.

**PARTICIPANT:** That's right. That's right.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**LISSITZ:** Thanks.

**PARTICIPANT:** I think some teachers struggle with -- I can speak for elementary level, because I have never taught middle school or high school, but at the elementary level, I think some teachers struggle with -- they have the MSA Finish Lines. So they know, you know, what those questions look like. They have given the MSA. So they're aware of, you know, how the questions are on the MSA.

Plus, we have the FAST test, which, you know -- which helps us, and some teachers struggle with how can I cover -- I have to cover all this stuff versus I have to teach these kids, so they can be lifelong learners, so I have to teach the way children learn, which sometimes is opposite or in opposing perspective to what the test offers.

Am I making sense?

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** Because we also --

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, exactly.

**PARTICIPANT:** And a lot of teachers that I find that I work with really -- a lot of them don't understand how children learn. So they are trying to teach, you know, the different nuances of the questions on the tests and such, and then, when the kids come back and they don't know what you thought you taught, you know --

**LISSITZ:** Is that a good thing or a bad --

**PARTICIPANT:** Just for me, I don't like it.

**PARTICIPANT:** I think that's interesting when we get the scores back, and the scores don't come back until June. You know, we're always interested in, you know -- usually, the picture they see is just the scores from the school, and principals will give them the individual scores if they want them. I mean, we always are interested in trying to provide, quote/unquote, "a feeder report," you know, based on what the enrollment is going to look like in September.

But, you know, some of the strength of that is that they really need to see their own school's scores for their teachers because how do you make changes --

**PARTICIPANT:** Absolutely.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- for next year, or how do you look at this? And, you know, sometimes this is not this kid, but this is their score, and how unfortunate sometimes that the score sticks with that kid, and it's not really representative.

**LISSITZ:** That was actually morphing into my next question, which is fine. We have to finish at twelve, but otherwise I don't have a time limit, if we can finish earlier.

And the question was some people think the State test reports could be more helpful for improving teaching and understanding how their students are doing. Do you agree or disagree?

**PARTICIPANT:** Agree.

**LISSITZ:** So it's back to what you're talking about. When these reports come back to the schools, could they be made more -- do you have either general comments or specific suggestions? How do you think the State could do a better job? And some of it's done by the County. I don't mean to put it all on the State.

**PARTICIPANT:** We want a road map.

**PARTICIPANT:** Repeat the question for --

**PARTICIPANT:** I'm sorry. What was the original question?

**LISSITZ:** Well, it's just some people think that State test reports could be more helpful for improving teaching and to understand how their students are doing. Do you agree, disagree? Why? And what do you think the State or the County for that matter -- but this is really a State report. What do you think the State could do to make reporting more useful for you all?

**PARTICIPANT:** MSDE does not provide us with some score information that has any meaning. It does not go down to the indicator level. We have never seen the road map.

So, when they report to us some score information by content standard, it is meaningless because we have no idea how many items are within each content score, and so we stress to the schools, "Don't use it." What can you say unless it's flat line and everybody was basic? But you have no idea. You could be looking at geometry.

**PARTICIPANT:** What about geometry?

**PARTICIPANT:** Well -- and it could have been two items --

**PARTICIPANT:** Exactly.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right, right.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- on a test.

**PARTICIPANT:** Exactly.

**PARTICIPANT:** A computation is like that broad.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yes. So we have been pressing for that, and we have not been successful in getting it.

And, in fact, when they first started reporting subscores, we pressed for them to take off the cut score because at the subscore level, the cut score is not appropriate for that.

Now, they took it off for a while on the website, and I believe it's now back, you know, so -- but it's -- it gives a false sense then.

**PARTICIPANT:** And also there's no delineation between the score on the BCR and the score on the SR. There's no sense of how much the SRs count versus how much the BCRs count. The whole way that whole, you know, standard setting is done is so arcane that, you know -- and I know it's all psychometrically, whatever, but it -- you know, it doesn't help us at all because you have no idea whether, you know, you should be emphasizing the BCRs more or how much did they count. You have no sense beyond the -- even with the false information at the standard level, you have no idea lower than that on to -- I mean, you know, informational text is a big area.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** You know, which part of informational text is it that we're struggling or that we're not struggling, we have no idea about that.

So we really get nothing that's useful that I can see of what we get back, except whether they passed or they were benched or they failed.

**PARTICIPANT:** What we do here in the County for our benchmarks is to give people instant results, and the results are given down to the objective level. So a teacher can give a test today and tomorrow can see, okay, my students are not recognizing text features. They don't know how to use a graph and informational text. That's the kind of stuff that we need from the State, and that's what I think has helped the county. That certainly helps a teacher to know, "When I walk into that room tomorrow, I know what we need to work on, and maybe I've got a pocket over here that needs to work on that, but according to my test results, I've got another pocket over here who don't know about headings," you know, something different.

If we had something like that from the State, no, I don't think you'd possibly revamp everything you do the next year, but you certainly would have a road map to follow.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm. And it helps to drive the -- it truly drives the instruction. So, if the State really wants us to include instruction, you have to give us the data that's useful to help drive it, and that's what I feel we're not getting from the State.

**PARTICIPANT:** Also, we've been told they're getting a little bit better about this in reading because they released more full public release, you know, tests, but they also have a lot of BCR samples on the website where they commentary, but they refuse to score. So they will say what's good and bad about them, but they won't pin down to is this a 3 or a 2, and they said it's because -- I don't know -- some hocus pocus.

And I'm sure from the State's level, it makes some kind of sense, but for us, it's like, "Okay. You gave me all this feedback. Tell me where you pin down the score because I'm trying to help my teachers decide where to pin down the score, and all you told me is this is good and this is bad, and now I got to guess." So it, you know -- they're right there, but they won't pin down a score on them because they weren't -- there weren't as many kids, there weren't -- this is, they weren't that, and --

**PARTICIPANT:** And I think also the fact that the scoring needs to go in -- people are scoring, and, you know, we never get an idea as to was it good scoring or not. I mean, we can imagine what they should be doing based on what we used to do with BCRs and train people and, you know, two people score, but the third person that didn't, do some retraining, if somebody started to go, were we off to the side, you know. So we can imagine, but we're not children. We only get -- we never get the test scores back. It is a laborious process. A parent requests to see both, and I've been involved with that where I actually had to sit with parents, and they had to get the test and sit with them. And that was sort of interesting because that was the first time I sat with them that they gave -- whether these were field test items, whether they were an item -- so that was interesting because we do have to consider that in each of those tests, there are --

**PARTICIPANT:** That's true.

**LISSITZ:** Any other responses?

**PARTICIPANT:** I just think it's so -- I mean, this is just so interesting. On one hand, you know, we want the kids to learn and be, you know -- to learn in depth, and we want our teachers to be teaching them how to find patterns and relationships because that's what math is about, you know, so that they can be able to connect this to that, you know.

There was a -- a teacher gave the student something about 3 over 5 and in the context of a problem and what -- what percentage of the class, you know, three-fifths of the class did this and what percentage was that, and, you know, some of the kids didn't even know how to find the percentage.

You're looking like you understand.

**PARTICIPANT:** We're a high school.

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** And then another kid -- and I'm driving with my kid, and I ask him. I said -- I asked him that same problem. He said -- he's in the back. He said, "Well, I would just multiply by 20." So like I think that kids need to learn in depth like that, so it doesn't matter where they're tested, how they're tested, what the question is. If they know it in depth, they should -- so that's why I have -- I struggle with this testing versus -- because, like we're saying, this data is driving instructions. Teachers are

concerned that their kids, quote/unquote, "even though you can't pass the test," pass the test. That's what drives them.

I need to cover my curriculum items, so that the kids can pass the test. Yet our kids can't retain one year to the other because they're not learning relationships, not learning in depth. Everything is surface.

So I really struggle with both sides. I understand the logic of it all, but I still have internal struggles about it.

**PARTICIPANT:** And wouldn't it be nice if that kid said, "Well, I don't know how to find it, but I know it's more than half"?

**PARTICIPANT:** Exactly.

**PARTICIPANT:** If there was some results -- because I see kids taking that test and using their little calculator and finding that it's, you know, 600 percent and not having a clue that that makes no sense whatsoever.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right, right, right.

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** They have no concept of number sense, of relationships, of patterns.

**PARTICIPANT:** But that's what gets thrown aside because they're trying to teach this and then this and then this and then this.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** Except in the really great teacher's class. They do it anyway, and they integrate it all.

**PARTICIPANT:** Or the kids who are going to learn where teachers throw a book at them, it's just --

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** I'm sorry.

**PARTICIPANT:** I think this kind of goes back to your first question about thinking individual --

**PARTICIPANT:** Yes.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**LISSITZ:** And that's partly because of the nature of the feedback that the State gives the --

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**LISSITZ:** Okay. Let's see.

**PARTICIPANT:** We should pilot a No Test Zone until the teachers learn how to relearn and teach appropriately and give the content and everything and see what happens.

**PARTICIPANT:** Well, you know, I'm sort of wondering about the feedback from the State. I know they got their security measures and stuff, but what Jenay [ph] said earlier about how totally helpful it is to be able to look at, you know -- a lot of the -- you know, why kids did, like looking at it, you could figure out what their conceptions were by knowing which distractor they chose, you know. A lot of that, I mean, there ought to be some way without violating test security that teachers could have some time to look at what their kids did after the test and get a better understanding of what that would mean in terms of what -- even to use the test, you know, for all its flaws, even to use what's positive about knowing that in some kind of instructional, but because it's all so totally hush-hush, can't ever look at it, can't ever think about it, can't ever talk about it, then you really completely eliminate any usefulness it might have for a teacher. You can't even talk to anybody about that.

**LISSITZ:** Thank you. That's interesting. Anything else, anybody?

[No audible response.]

**LISSITZ:** The next question, there's some evidence from the survey that suggests that more teachers in the lower grade levels, presumably the elementary grades, feel the State testing program has been positive than do teachers at the upper grades. In other words, it's a little bit of evidence, not 100 percent, but -- or anywhere near that, but a little bit of evidence that the lower grade teachers are more positive towards the test than teachers in the upper grades.

Do you agree? I know it's a little hard for you because most of you -- you either work with elementary or you work with secondary. Most of you don't work with both, I guess, but do you feel from your conversations that that's true, that that's a real phenomenon? You know, do you agree or disagree with that?

**PARTICIPANT:** I agree because I think our children get tired of taking tests. They get resentful, and, frankly, I wouldn't want to be a tenth grader in Maryland because I will have been in tests since I was a third grader, and over the years, after a while, you really do get tired of hearing, "You need to learn this for the test. This is going to be very

important for the test." And when the children are negative, I think it has an impact on teachers.

I also think that if we have a rigorous pacing guide that doesn't take into account students who aren't getting concepts, it's like the older they get, the behinder they get. That's not really good, and that doesn't make for -- that stresses out the children. It stresses out the teacher. So I'm generalizing, but I don't think those things happen.

**PARTICIPANT:** I think too the difference between elementary and middle and high, you know, when we talk about high school, we talk about the HSA, and because they can take the assessments as opposed to MSA -- I mean, it's one I feel that maybe together it's concentration, but it's done and it's over with, where we know what we're getting from some high schools as far as "You want me to sit again?" "Yeah, you can sign me up for it, but I may not show up." I think some of that too because --

**PARTICIPANT:** That attitude has changed in the high school because -- passing the test was at some point important because that meant graduation, but now with ABP projects, kids blow the test off in many ways. I guess got to take it twice and fail it twice, and I can start ABP.

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** I think that goes to what you're saying, the attitude.

**PARTICIPANT:** That's the attitude.

**PARTICIPANT:** And that gets frustrating to the classroom teacher.

**PARTICIPANT:** Well, as a teacher, and then I'm a geometry teacher. I have -- half my kids didn't pass the HSA, and then the principal keeps seeing -- "Well, what are you going to do with these kids?" And then ABP project, that affects -- we have an ABP boot camp. That affects every teacher in the --

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** So I do feel as a secondary teacher, it is not a positive experience when -- not that it should be a positive experience when students don't pass, but it becomes another thing on my list of things I have to do.

**PARTICIPANT:** More pressure on the teachers.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** Looking at just on our test on FAST test, that we do the benchmark, lower grades tend to do better, and as you continue up into the other grades, they drop. Things drop off.

And I don't know. I wonder where it comes from. I think in math, you know, are they using more manipulatives, are they using more hands-on, are they developing concepts differently than when the kids are older. I don't know because I'm not in those classrooms, but you definitely see third grade, fourth grade, fifth grade, and then it starts to decline. It continues to decline.

**PARTICIPANT:** You know what, I think it goes back to what you said and what you said, when you talked about the question would refit, and looked and said that's the same issue we have. It goes back to the depth.

As you continue to grow, the problem is fractions and percents don't change how we use them -- and the depth. So, if you come in with a surface understanding of it and you continue to progress in mathematics and you can't make that connection, you're going to -- that's what we're struggling with in that math because you look at a score. Well, what grade is that? Oh, this kid has it. Oh, the kid has it. But then when you go to look at --

**PARTICIPANT:** Just had the probability.

**PARTICIPANT:** Exactly. Now you're applying to -- you're taking the equation and applying it to geometry, you're taking the equation, you're applying it here to form this, and the kid is like, "Whoa!" And that's the piece of it.

I'm not saying that the test is not valid at an early age. It's just the depth continues to grow as they're growing up, and the connections have to be made, and because it's surface --

**PARTICIPANT:** That is connected to the test because, you know, you can pass the test in third or fourth grade by knowing it on a surface level.

That's what I was saying earlier about --

**PARTICIPANT:** With reading.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- people get away with --

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- you know, I've taught them and they can pass the test, but the conceptual knowledge isn't really there, and so then, when you need that in order to get into whether it's higher level math or higher level comprehension, it's not there, and then it's frustrating for the kids, and it's like, "Well, I did find an elementary school," because, you know, I mean, I have to work in a cross-elementary and middle, and I see so much how, you know, what is sometimes done in elementary, it should be more conceptual.

But then you look at the breadth. That goes back to the other question about the breadth of indicators. If you're going to ask an elementary school to teach everything, then I'm going to teach it all --

**PARTICIPANT:** On the surface.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- on the surface.

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** But, like Michelle said, the depth aspects of how the kids are scoring later, I agree with that because I think a part of it is that the teacher content, which brings in -- if you're asking the teacher all these, which affects it, but if you understand how to make those connections like you were saying earlier, then you can look at fractions, decimal percents, and see the relationships --

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- and teach it and when you're doing a circle graph, like you can --

**PARTICIPANT:** Absolutely.

**PARTICIPANT:** So, if the teacher understood the content, they would be able -- I can't tell you how many rooms I've walked into and teachers are telling kids 1 is a prime number or -- or --

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** -- and other like types of misconceptions, and they'll argue down to the ground when you try to -- because they themselves don't understand. They don't have the content.

So, therefore, it affects the depth that they're going to teach because they're just going to teach here because that's what they know, and they're going to teach how they know.

**PARTICIPANT:** We have the content.

**PARTICIPANT:** Just don't know how to teach it.

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** They know how to teach what they know.

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** I think the other thing is that kindergarten, first, second grades, they're like, "Oh, I don't have to teach them the test." So, you know, they have -- they're kicking their legs up and hooah-ing because they don't feel like they -- a lot of them don't feel like they have to teach to the test.

**PARTICIPANT:** So they can be more creative.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah. Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** I think going back to your question about lower level teachers feel more positive, I think another thing I would like the State to do is I think it's important you have to know where you're going or where the children are going.

So, me just being in to see my test, I think it's important for them to see what does the next grade-level test look like, what are the type of questions, or what are the expectations when they get to high school. For me, moving from elementary to middle and then working with the high school, it was like a "aha." I was like, "Oh, my goodness." You really see the connection between all of the levels --

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- and I think sometimes in elementary, you're just driving that vehicle. You don't know where the car is going. So it would be nice if the State was -- if your teachers were able to see, especially for MSA.

I mean, they're giving us more -- they just gave us this year on the website a practice test, sample questions, but for high school, HSA, I can get tons and tons and tons of items.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yep.

**PARTICIPANT:** I mean, it's just so much that I'm like, okay, what does this look like. I can find five -- what do you call them again? What is that?

**PARTICIPANT:** Public release.

**PARTICIPANT:** Public release. I can find this indicator, and I can say, "Well, what does this look like?" I can find seven or eight different questions --

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- that address that for middle -- elementary or, you know, middle school, you don't have that.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** So it's still surface.

**PARTICIPANT:** And the State would say, you know, their item bank is not rich enough --

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- at MSA which is why we don't have this --

**PARTICIPANT:** Yes.

**PARTICIPANT:** And based on how we're going with Race to the Top, we may not be doing any more development with those items for the next few years, so --

**PARTICIPANT:** I pulled a few, and they were really helpful for clarifications and the samples. What do they call them?

**PARTICIPANT:** Public release.

**PARTICIPANT:** But they were few and far between. They're not for every indicator.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** I will say for HSA that ever indicator --

**PARTICIPANT:** It's beautiful. It's got tons of stuff. It's beautiful.

**PARTICIPANT:** I think it's harder for MSA on the State websites as far as navigating and finding what you're looking for. I mean, there is some richness there, but you have to know how to get to it.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yes, yes.

**PARTICIPANT:** And it is much easier on the HSA side particularly because they have they have their own HSAexam.org now. So you can go there. That's right there.

**PARTICIPANT:** I mean, I think the State's tool kit in reading has been quite good. I mean, the clarification --

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** But I totally agree with you about the difference between HSA, the number of items that they released and the -- you know, the volume of -- which really helps you a lot because seeing how they've asked one question and one indicator doesn't tell you -- you know, I mean, you need to see at least three, four. You know, we need way more.

And I want to say too, I mean, I've been to so many State meetings, and there's always a reason. I mean, they're not just doing it to be crowbars or something, you know, but the problem is the reasons all have to do with how the test is created and how the test is this and how the test is that. It's like none of the -- you know, nothing has to do with instruction, which the test is supposed to be -- it's not just supposed to be finding out. It should be helping us move forward in instruction. So it feels cart before the horse.

I mean, it's always a good reason in relation to when you hear where they are. You know, I mean, looking back, you said they said this and this, and they'll say, "Oh, we did that because of this," because of the way the number of items, because of the way we score, because, because, because. But then you have to stop and think, so why are we constructing a test within those parameters that is messing with instruction instead of supporting.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** I don't work for MSA.

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** Are you glad you came?

**LISSITZ:** Oh, no, I really am. This is really quite interesting.

**PARTICIPANT:** And I don't want -- you know, it's not like they're just, you know --

**LISSITZ:** I'm not representing MSDE. I'm not arguing with you. There's some things you're talking about, I know a little bit about, but it's, you know, I'm really interested in what you think. That's why we're here.

**PARTICIPANT:** But, I mean, I think it's important.

**LISSITZ:** And they've asked me to come here. They know you're going to actually tell me what you think, and that's good.

**PARTICIPANT:** And I think the other thing is that, you know, they have now done this -- you know, our emphasis of way back was elementary level, then we changed to MSA, and the emphasis wasn't really on the high school. I mean, there were the functional tests, but that was it.

But now it's not even really as much AYP the high school as what's the grade rate and because last year, you know -- and with Nancy saying only 11 kids across the State did graduate because of -- but that's where I think --

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** They had to murder the rest. It was ugly.

**PARTICIPANT:** But I think also some of the strength of what's out there in information for HSA is because of knowing that this grade rate and we're going to refigure it was becoming so important. So, you know, their emphasis is where it shifted as to how much was that the elementary and what they need to do because of this.

**LISSITZ:** Let me ask another question. How do you think the State modified testing program has influenced the curriculum, or has it, the State modified testing? And, related to that, has it influenced instruction of students eligible for modified testing? But let's first -- if we can look at the curriculum side.

**PARTICIPANT:** For mathematics, as it relates to the Mod, the beautiful of the MOD is still the same instruction that was expected of students prior to Mod. I think how has it addressed to change teacher's instructional strategies goes back to your question you asked about testing strategies, teaching children how to respond, giving them tools to unlock those particular questions, but instruction as far as the expectation, we use the same indicators. Nothing has changed there. It's just how the format of the test that's making teachers really get to see because at first the expectation, we thought -- teachers thought that modifying it, only multiple choice, "Oh, this is going to be easy," but when they say how you take those BCR questions and you've done high order thinking, it's still there and to those selective responses, it leaves teachers thinking about I can't just throw away BCRs, I still have to make sure I'm getting kids to think deeper. So, for math, that's the way we see it.

**PARTICIPANT:** I like the Mod because it's still the math. I think a lot of the regular version of the test is a lot of reading, and I think that really hurts a lot of kids who have reading difficulties or kids who are not English speakers. It's difficult having so much language on a test.

I think the Mod version gets down to the math, and you're proving that you can do the math. And I think that's been good.

I would like to have more information on how they're doing it, these tests. I mean, every time I open the samples, I unlock something new, but there's still stuff out there. It's like, wow, if they give us some sort of -- you know, some guidelines on the way that they're doing it, that would be very helpful.

**PARTICIPANT:** You mean actually creating the types of questions used and --

**PARTICIPANT:** Well, just like when you're talking about how they incorporated the higher order thinking skills into --

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- or the BCR stuff into the SRs.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** We get maybe one sample per grade.

And I know --

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- we have to really spend time --

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- looking at that, and that's something we have to do on our tests down the road but those type -- that type of information.

But the language issue, I think is the biggest. The language is wiped out. We don't have to have this --

**PARTICIPANT:** It's so clean.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- huge scenario that kids get caught up in the language and can't -- I mean, half the time, like our items, I've changed kids' names because they like to use all these names that kids get caught up on pronunciations.

I'm a special ed teacher, and I can recall kids. They couldn't even get past the first kid's name because they couldn't pronounce it, and what's the use of doing any more of the item. [Laughs.] So that's been a good thing with the Mod.

**PARTICIPANT:** I think to people -- when we talk about Mod and Mod eligibility for students, you know, originally they thought that they would be modifying the curriculum, so they would be using different grade-level content, and I think that was also coming back to, you know, it's modified, but it is still grade-level content.

**LISSITZ:** Interesting. Anything else about that?

[No audible response.]

**LISSITZ:** The next question is -- you may not have an opinion about this, and that's fine. I don't actually have a sense of whether any of you work with students or situations -- teachers who are working with alternate testing or are they impacted by alternate testing, and I'm curious about if you do, do you think that the alternate testing has influenced -- same kind of questions. Has the alternate testing influenced instruction? Do you think it's influenced the curriculum, you know?

**PARTICIPANT:** When you say alternate, you mean like the ABT?

**PARTICIPANT:** He's talking about alternate.

**PARTICIPANT:** Okay, I'm sorry.

**LISSITZ:** It's the 1 percent, 2 percent kind of thing.

**PARTICIPANT:** The alternates, I think change instruction for those students because they really were not getting reading with that. They were doing functional life skills, and because of the Federal Government and saying that all students were to be tested in those areas, putting together this assessment for students, it did change, and it did force PD for those teachers.

**LISSITZ:** PD?

**PARTICIPANT:** Professional development.

**LISSITZ:** Oh.

**PARTICIPANT:** It did force our County to even provide those teachers with curriculum material which they had never used before.

Over the last few years, they have written -- I can't remember what they called the other curriculum, but they had written a curriculum that would go along with the grade-level content, but, for instance, they have modified grade-level stories into summaries of the story, and they've made -- I don't know what they call that -- "board maker," and they've made books. So they have provided curriculum. So I think it has changed the way they have taught. It doesn't mean students' IEP does not still have that they are looking on the functional skills, but they now have reading and math and potentially science agendas depending on that grade level. So it has -- I think it has changed instruction.

**LISSITZ:** For the better, it sounds like.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yes.

**LISSITZ:** Do you all agree?

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** Now, that's not to say that it might not go up and bend a little, you know, I mean, in terms of how many things. They --

**PARTICIPANT:** We know that there is a -- well, to revise but to review all assessments, and we don't know what we have, and that's -- to get some feedback from teachers and counties as far as perhaps how invasive the assessment is over time, are you assessing only or are you teaching.

And that's always a balance. I mean, part of it is this is a portfolio assessment that begins in September and ends in March, and if you have a teacher that schedules it correctly and it's part of the instruction, then it's just a no-brainer. But, if you have the teachers -- and that goes back to training -- that, "Oh, it's January, and I haven't done anything for this," you know, it's the planning, and it's the oversight and, you know, administration looking at it, and that's important whether or not it goes through that.

**PARTICIPANT:** When we say -- I know I speak for myself when I say positive. I'm always thinking instruction. So that's why when I say it's positive, because I'm thinking instruction has changed.

**LISSITZ:** But you didn't feel that the Mod affected the actual instruction too much?

**PARTICIPANT:** The Mod? Yeah. Yeah. I think it -- I think it changed people's perception of what they thought it was going to be, but the teachers still -- the teachers are still held accountable for the same content.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** It really changed their mind-set because they thought it was going to be low level, "Oh, it's going to be clean sweep. So we're going to put everybody in Mod," you know. But it did give them another perspective to see, and as I said, it gets straight to the mathematics, and that's not there and help teachers look at it, it's clean, it's clean.

So, even in their instruction, it helps them as they are doing test-taking strategies in their instruction, how to do their -- the question type.

**LISSITZ:** Thank you.

One last question, just a sort of general question. If you had some comments that you wanted to share, positive or some of the negative consequences of State testing or big-picture kind of questions, some good things, some bad things, whatever you --

**PARTICIPANT:** Well, I can -- I'll just comment, and coming from a special ed background, accountability from day one is what we were taught in college. I mean, that was so important. Everything needs to be documented. Everything needs to be written down. You need to do things by the book.

And I know that when I got into high schools and teaching, it was like people are teaching, you know, whatever. They weren't necessarily teaching from any certain curriculum or whatever. They were teaching what they thought was, you know, social studies or math or whatever. So I think that put people a little more focused.

I mean, the pacing guides that have been developed, I mean, there's a lot of pros and cons to those, but it gives people somewhat of a road map of what needs to be covered.

And the accountability piece, to some level, yeah, we should be somewhat accountable for what kids are learning. Whether these are the right tests that really measure the accountability is questionable, but I think that's a positive thing.

**PARTICIPANT:** Well, I think in our country, we've strengthened that in the last several years, and when you think about the fact that no county had to follow the voluntary State curriculum but, yet, indeed, if that's what we're being assessed on, we revamped how we were doing things. Now, of course, it's not voluntary.

I mean, I think that strengthened everything that we were doing. I mean, I remember when I came into the County. You know, we didn't necessarily have books, or school by school, they were using different rating series.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** You know, so how we've also structured and tried to come back to make our instruction and our curriculum stronger.

**PARTICIPANT:** I think that's provided equity because some schools would have the old version of everything, and other schools had newer versions, and now everybody's got the same. And special ed also, they have the same materials.

**PARTICIPANT:** And particularly in our County with the teaching training appraisal --

**PARTICIPANT:** Oh.

**PARTICIPANT:** Between January in MSA, how we can get the change in the schools. You know, that's helping.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**LISSITZ:** How is it helping? Can you just say a little bit?

**PARTICIPANT:** Which they were saying the equity, the accountability --

**LISSITZ:** Oh, I see.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- and the curriculum documents. If a kid needs to suddenly go to the other end, you're somewhere in the same vicinity.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** When I came in the district, I had [inaudible], I believe it was called, and I may have taught geometry in January and I teach it across. The other end of the district hadn't taught geometry.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** So the kid moved there. I'm like I missed all that.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** And, in fact, we have County-issued textbooks as far as what we're using.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, exactly.

**PARTICIPANT:** And there needs to be more latitude as far as what --

**LISSITZ:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** I think the English language learner piece is really a big problem, you know, that -- I mean, I don't know what will happen over the next years and stuff, but the expectations, you know, on kids. I mean, the research is five to seven years it takes to develop the academic language that you need to be able to do, you know, and then -- but yet we don't give kids anywhere near that much time.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** So there -- you know, there are a number of schools with very high English language learner populations that always get sanctioned, you know, and turnover and do this and od that, when, in fact, you know, there is some logical reason why their scores may not look like other scores.

Now, we have some -- people have done fantastically well. I mean, you know -- I mean, I guess there's a plus side to it in that -- there's certain a plus side to it with the whole subgroup issue of like not just looking at schools globally but looking at subgroups,

and I think that has helped to, you know, drive more like, "Oh, yeah. Well, they're English language learners. I'll just sit them off in the corner for a few years until they learn English." I mean, that doesn't happen anymore, you know, as much because, you know, there's a sense that just the same, the accountability thing that Ann was talking about.

But I think -- and I know, you know, I mean, we have some schools that are just doing phenomenal things with their English language learners, but, you know, that's happening when you've got a great principal, great teachers, great, you know --

**PARTICIPANT:** No turnover in staff.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, stable staff, really hard-working people putting -- you know, when you've got absolute top of the line going on, and the notion that that's going to be everywhere, you know, is unfortunately not too much the entire reality.

But I know people, I think, do feel quite frustrated by the idea that, you know -- and you watch the kids take the tests sometimes, and, you know, they're doing the very best that they can, but if they don't read the language, there is a limit to how you're going to do -- you know, even on the math. No, it doesn't. --

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- and -- but certainly on the reading test.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** So it -- I would like to see some changes in how English language learners are dealt with as a whole.

**PARTICIPANT:** And we know that over time, they change the accountability program to our advantage. It was -- I mean, one of the big changes was that now the AYP group for ELL includes those students who had actually two years. So that held on someone.

But the other thing is that we always talk about AYPs, but I think you have [inaudible] office here. You know, we get a double hit. It may not be at the school level but at the County level as far as whether we made the AMAO target, you know, as far as whether our students are progressing in English proficiency. You know, that's doesn't -- you know, that's sort of like a double whammy when you have to tell parents if we're not making that target, which the last couple years we haven't.

**PARTICIPANT:** I wish they'd allow the ELL students to be able to take the Mod version of the math test with the limited language. It just makes sense. The math, you're assessing the skills in mathematics. Math is universal. You know, let them have

that shot, not to have to read a paragraph about something before they can figure out what's being asked.

**PARTICIPANT:** And we know -- I think that in some States, they offer their testing in their language.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** Texas does that.

**PARTICIPANT:** In the mathematics?

**PARTICIPANT:** Because then you really can't tell what the child knows.

**PARTICIPANT:** Because you're really trying to see if the kid understands the mathematics.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** Overall, it's a little fuzzy some of the times when I'm on the ground, in the situation, what the point is of the MSA. I understand the logic with we need the data to drive instruction, we need the accountability piece, but then when I get in a situation where a teacher says, "But if I teach it that way, is it going to be on the test like that?" it gets a little fuzzy for me, you know.

I think there are definitely positive pieces. You asked for overall reaction.

**LISSITZ:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** I think there's definitely all the positives that we've talked about here, but I think that in the mix of it, we lose a lot too. I think our kids get tested a lot and maybe made -- some of them may be immune to it, especially the ones that don't have the support at home that says we value education. So what, you know, and if the teachers are guided by -- the outcome is "I want this percent of students to be proficient," yet they don't understand and the next year they can't even remember what the -- how this applies to my life with a real value of what I'm learning, you know, learning for the sake of learning and the depth of it.

Maybe I'm just philosophical, but I just -- you know, that's how it gets fuzzy for me.

**PARTICIPANT:** Along with that, I feel like the arts have really gotten [inaudible]. Social studies has totally gotten just [inaudible], you know --

**PARTICIPANT:** That would be my next.

**PARTICIPANT:** You know, it's -- science is now on the rise because it's tested, but, you know, the --

**PARTICIPANT:** The tested area, they kind of go under the radar.

**PARTICIPANT:** Doesn't even get --

**PARTICIPANT:** They may be all over the place, but that's not the focus.

**PARTICIPANT:** And interesting enough --

**PARTICIPANT:** The value.

**PARTICIPANT:** I think "value" is a very key word because sometimes an art teacher, the art teacher or social studies teacher [inaudible], "But do you really still value what I do and how what I bring to the table impact math and reading?" I don't know if that's really been --

**PARTICIPANT:** And, really, at least in the earlier grades, if we had a more integrated curriculum, it would be much stronger for the kids, but it's much more difficult to try -- I mean, we have a lot of reasons why we haven't done that. It has nothing to do with the test, but still that's another obstacle because, you know --

**PARTICIPANT:** Everything in isolation.

**PARTICIPANT:** Everything's in isolation.

**PARTICIPANT:** And then pretty soon you ask them to merge their thoughts to answering this question. The SR what?

**PARTICIPANT:** See, that's why I think even if you go back to [inaudible] more integrated as far as what was covered, and you saw it in the relationship and the writing piece is there, and, you know, those higher order thinkings, you know. That life [inaudible] learner becomes -- they had to sit with somebody and work together to do something, even though they went back and had to write individually, you know. That -- you know, there were some pluses to that.

**PARTICIPANT:** It aligns to what the IFO is telling us to do, you know, socialize intelligence [inaudible] taught, you know, the clear expectation, all of it. There are many more. We only focus on the four, but it really directly aligns to that, what you're saying.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah. I think the question I still have is, is the assessment really driving instruction. That's my question, and the other is, well, is the assessment driving the assessment, the data -- I don't know. I really don't know that piece of it when you think about MSA.

I felt personally when we did it this time, I felt that it -- I felt that it was really driving instruction. I did.

**PARTICIPANT:** Or, are you saying, Michelle, like you felt like that -- you could honestly --

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- tailor your curriculum to miss that because --

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- because you felt you were going the way you wanted to go?

**PARTICIPANT:** Yes.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, right.

**PARTICIPANT:** It was connected to my beliefs.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right, right, right.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right. Because now we feel like -- you know, like a lot of the work, the comprehension work you've been doing is really, really important. It's where we're seeing in many cases where people are really good, some of our best results on MSA, but you can't make the direct link, you know, because you're teaching kind of -- you're not doing what you're saying that -- you know, you're not going in there and saying this is how to teach to the test. That's not what we're doing.

**PARTICIPANT:** But we're teaching in MSPAP, but we're tested MSA.

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** Is that what it says?

**PARTICIPANT:** Like we're teaching that way, more that way, that MSPAP way.

**PARTICIPANT:** We know that's more right way to teach.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** You get more interaction with that piece as opposed to bringing them in, in another county where the third grade parents were required to attend BCR night with their students, and if they couldn't make it, they were to make an appointment with the teacher, to another school where the third graders had their scores so far for their county test reviewed and had to sign the contract with the principal as to what their projected proficiency level would be on the MSA. I mean, some of these things, it's like --

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

[Laughter.]

**LISSITZ:** Anything else?

**PARTICIPANT:** I think, to kind of go back to what Martha was saying -- I think we kind of deal with -- it's your professional responsibility versus your personal philosophy, and a lot of times our -- you know, they kind of conflict with one another. I think all of us as educators, we want to -- we want to make sure our kids, our children learn, you know, and they're able to kind of go in depth and make those connections.

However, sometimes our professional responsibility is to make sure they know X, Y, and Z for this test given on this date. So a lot of times, we kind of deal with that. I think it's that struggle that kind of goes on, and it really just depends on -- you know, you try to -- try to match the two together to get the best product that you can get, but a lot of times, that professional responsibility ends up weighing out because those who don't necessarily -- aren't necessarily in the classroom with you every day are applying pressure to you to make sure, you know, we need you to -- okay, how many of your students are going to pass this test.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** So now I know, okay, I got to -- I am a professional now -- but I know, you know, Johnny in the back doesn't necessarily know exactly what's going on. You know, I really want to work with them and, you know, take the time to do it, but I can't because I know as a professional, you know, this is my job. You know, I recognize that if I don't produce the results that they're looking for, now somebody is coming to look at me.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** So I think it -- I think testing, I guess -- like I said, it has a positive aspect, like I say, in the sense that there is that accountability piece, but I think at the same token, because we're trying to test so much and all at once, I think it kind of

weighs on how you might feel, you know, personally with regard to how we instruct students.

**PARTICIPANT:** You know, I think it probably goes back to it would be nice if we could always have that balance, but that's, I think, the struggle.

**PARTICIPANT:** Well -- and it's not about growth. It's about did they hit this standard or didn't they hit this standard. So, you know, that's where people try to do crazy stuff to get a child who, you know, is -- I mean, if I've got this, you know, fifth grader who is reading at a second-grade level, if I could get them up a year and a half this year and a year and a half next year, you know, I get them -- I could probably get that kid on track, but because in third grade -- you know, fifth grade, I'm supposed to get them to fifth grade because, if I don't get them to pass, they fail, you know, and so the sense of process with children is not really looked at in a very realistic way. It's all about yes or no, and that's not -- like you said, you see your responsibility to --

So then, you know, we have all this stuff about, you know, deal with the kids who are at the cusp, don't even both with the ones that are way beyond --

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yes.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- because they're not going to pass anyway. I mean, you get into all that kind of beat-the-system stuff.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** And, you know, that's what people sit around talking about, you know, these are the five kids we need to pass the test, so those are the five kids that are going to eat lunch with the principal because those are the five kids who will need to pass.

**PARTICIPANT:** Push over.

**PARTICIPANT:** Forget those --

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** It's true.

**PARTICIPANT:** At my son's school, they -- he came home and said, "I had a meeting today with a teacher," who he didn't know her, who she was, but he knew her name because -- "and she had made me sign something that said I would work on some goals in order for my scores to go up next year." And this is a kid who scored advanced in reading and math. I was hot. I was hot.

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** I sent an e-mail. I'm taking a few --

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** I sent an e-mail the next morning because they identified him based on some benchmark that maybe he dropped in to go and meet for a goal-setting meeting? Don't ever do that again. Call me first.

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** So those are the kind of antics, so that the school looks good, you forget about the kids.

**PARTICIPANT:** That's right.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** And then a lot of times, you don't have parents who really know what's going on, you know, to say, "How was your day? Did anything happen that was different?"

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** "Did anything happen that made you happy today?" They just say, "How's your day?" "Okay." And they don't know what's going on, so that they can tackle some of these issues --

**PARTICIPANT:** Sure.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- you know, that will affect their kids in the long run.

**PARTICIPANT:** Well, what about the parent who chooses the school because their MSA scores look great, and they think their kids are getting topnotch instruction?

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** What about that parent? So it's false representation for parents as well.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** And that also goes back to school choice.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** I mean, the parents that elect to move a kid out of the school because they had made an AYP -- to another school where they might be subjecting the kid to an hour bus ride, and they're in that other school for, quote/unquote, "instruction," but where's all that other piece?

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** Their after-school activities, the camaraderie with other people, building relationships.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** And, you know, when we had those informational meetings, is it that the teachers are not doing good instruction at these schools that are not making it? I mean, really. To say to a parent, "I'm going to move a child," well, is that really the right message?

**LISSITZ:** Thank you very much.

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** Thank you.

**PARTICIPANT:** We know it's not you, but --

**LISSITZ:** Also, you need to -- I mean, I've said this before, but I'll reiterate. The State has asked me to do this.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**LISSITZ:** I mean, they're not hiding from you.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**LISSITZ:** Thank you very much.

**PARTICIPANT:** And that's what I meant when I said, you know, we know they have their reasons, like, you know, when they year all this stuff, I hope they don't say, "Well, it's because of this sense because of" -- you know what I mean? Because we know that that all is there. The problem is that doesn't really answer the question that they've got their modus operandi. It just doesn't.

**LISSITZ:** We're done tape-recording.

Appendix E  
**Harford County Focus Group Transcript**

**LISSITZ:** [In progress] -- the State, MSA, HSA, all [inaudible], but there were some indications that there's some things that could be made better. I've been actually sent to do this study by the State. So you can say whatever you want. They sent me here. They expect to get feedback from you, whatever your actual opinions are. So you can feel free to say -- you can say good things --

[Interruption of announcement made on loud speaker.]

**LISSITZ:** The world, I left it a few years ago.

Anyway, you can say whatever you want, and we're going to tape-record. The tape recording will be transcribed. Then we'll summarize from your remarks.

We have three other schools at least that we're meeting with, with some folks from P.G. County yesterday, in fact. I'm going to organize two more focus groups. Normally, we sit in a circle and all that, but it's probably a little easier if only one person talks at a time, but if you can't control yourself, you might jump in and say something else, fine. This is not one of your classrooms. You don't have to raise your hand. You can just start talking.

Let's see. Any questions about what I'm doing here and why I'm here? Is everybody copasetic?

[No audible response.]

**LISSITZ:** Okay. Let me just start off. We only have about -- I think we have to leave at about five minutes of two. Is that right? So I'm going to rush through a little bit.

I would ask you if you have something to say but it's already been said, you don't need to say it again. That's okay. But if you have a new thing to say or put a wrinkle on something that was said -- I have basically seven questions with one extra one right here that I'm going to add in.

Okay. Some people think that the State testing program decreases teacher's emphasis on higher order thinking skills. That's a criticism that we've gotten. When I make a general statement based on the survey, it doesn't mean everybody in the survey thinks that, but, anyway, like all surveys, some people agree, some people don't.

So I'm kind of curious about what you think about the impact of the State testing on -- the emphasis by teachers on higher order thinking skills. Do you agree, or do you not? And if you agree, what do you think teachers do to increase the emphasis on higher order thinking?

**PARTICIPANT:** Does the test decrease our teaching for higher order --

**LISSITZ:** There's some people in the survey. It's not a huge number, but there were some people who raised this question, having the State testing program, MSA, HSA, is actually causing teachers to decrease the emphasis on higher order thinking.

**PARTICIPANT:** I never actually thought that that was the case, but I can see maybe where people might think that because there's such a list of facts and things that they must accomplish maybe, and that's why they -- like we're focusing on dumping as much content in instead of the higher level thinking skills.

I know personally, I like to do -- I'm a science teacher. I like to do a lot of labs that require kids to really think through the process, but I spoke to some other people that said, "I can't do that lab. It sounds really cool, but do you realize the MSA is only this many days away? And I haven't finished this content yet." And it's a shame. I probably don't focus on that enough, the MSA. I like the higher order thinking skills.

**PARTICIPANT:** I would agree. I think -- I'm a math teacher, and there's a lot of [inaudible].

**LISSITZ:** Is there something you do as a direct response to the State [inaudible]?

**PARTICIPANT:** There is, yes. I mean, there's a lot of, you know, pressure that you have to cover and a lot of curriculum before the test or --

**LISSITZ:** Anybody else?

**PARTICIPANT:** For science, it's not only you have to cover so much curriculum. You also have to review sixth and seventh grade curriculum for the science MSA because it's three years of stuff. So -- and the kids who have been two years out, they can't expect them to remember [inaudible] when they had it in sixth grade. So you've got that other pressure. So you not only have to get through your curriculum. You also have to kind of review what they learned back in sixth and seventh grade.

But I have never felt like anybody told me stop with the higher order thinking skills. Nobody has ever said that to me. It's not like there's been a higher-up saying, "You've got to cut that out."

**PARTICIPANT:** They don't say that, but they say [inaudible].

**PARTICIPANT:** Well, on the contrary, at least in my discipline, that's not what I'm hearing from my higher-ups. They like us to do quality instruction. They want us to -- although they show us what words to use in our objective, their higher-level thinking skills and everything like that. So I just think there's a lot of pressure on people because they're worried about the way the scores reflect on them, and so they put it on themselves.

**LISSITZ:** Some people think that teachers spend too much time on how to take tests rather than teaching the subject matter, knowledge, and skills. Do you agree or disagree? And if you agree, what do teachers actually do as they think to teach testing skills independent of learning material? Anybody?

**PARTICIPANT:** [Inaudible.]

**LISSITZ:** Tell me in your own words.

**PARTICIPANT:** Well, [inaudible].

**LISSITZ:** But is that the same [inaudible]? A couple people have said in their remarks that the tests are making us teach testing skills. I mean, do you teach test-taking skills?

**PARTICIPANT:** Absolutely.

**PARTICIPANT:** Sure.

**PARTICIPANT:** But I think it's embedded in part of the learning process. I don't see a focus on a lesson on test-taking skills. You know, little mini lessons once in a while, sure, but basically what I see is our teachers embedding that into their daily instruction, and it's very natural from what I see in the classrooms.

**PARTICIPANT:** But they have a drill in math every day in seventh and eighth grade specifically targeted, learning how to fill those bubble things in for the math MSA. That's a unique skill set that is only in place for the MSA.

**PARTICIPANT:** But it's embedded in their daily lesson is what I was saying, Joanne.

**PARTICIPANT:** Because of that. Otherwise we would never teach it.

**PARTICIPANT:** I don't know, because that's part of life in general with testing, not just testing but evaluating kids.

**PARTICIPANT:** Now, we're talking about the specific grid for that.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right. Oh, okay.

**PARTICIPANT:** How to fill in that math grid.

**PARTICIPANT:** That there's no negative answers. You can't use a mixed number.

**PARTICIPANT:** They don't call them "multiple choice questions" anymore.

**PARTICIPANT:** No, that's right.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, they keep changing the terminology.

[Simultaneous speaking.]

**LISSITZ:** Do you think -- does anybody think -- I don't mean to put anybody on the spit here. Does anybody think that you spend a lot of time on natural testing skills?

**PARTICIPANT:** I took two days, one for each of the two tests. We're doing standardized tests in science. We took -- the students were given a report about which questions they asked, and then I gave them their old test back and which questions they scored wrong on -- excuse me -- and I said, "Raise your hand if you got number three wrong. Okay. Now let's figure out why we got number three wrong." And we would -- sometimes the reason was because it was a confusing question. You know, they didn't understand that they were supposed to pick the one that wasn't true, some of them, you know. So that's -- but that's just a reading -- honestly, that's a reading skill that I think is important.

**PARTICIPANT:** I was going to say that I have to take a lot of time to learn how to write BCRs. I was told by the principal that the math BCR scores are not good, and [inaudible]. Rather than focusing on the skills that the BCR covers, this is how you write the [inaudible].

**PARTICIPANT:** Good point. I agree.

**LISSITZ:** Anybody else?

**PARTICIPANT:** I think for us also, ruling on answers, determining the answer, teaching them how to rule on an answer and which ones are logical and which ones are not logical. Part of that is just the thinking process [inaudible], but it's just, you know, which one of these would be acceptable, because usually one of those is [inaudible], so teaching them how to decipher a language [inaudible] how to [inaudible]. They will have the actual number up there, and we're trying to [inaudible].

**PARTICIPANT:** I think what Ryan is -- sorry -- what he just said --

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** That's all right. My name is okay [inaudible].

[Simultaneous speaking.]

**PARTICIPANT:** And that's something [inaudible] analysis, what did you get wrong, why did you get this wrong, you know, kind of having them kind of just follow their own learning process there, and also I will say testing BCRs and BCRs.

I spent more time than ever grading BCRs [inaudible], and I kind of feel like that's kind of taking the place of [inaudible] lessons [inaudible] kind of like [inaudible] hours of just going through BCR, BCR.

**PARTICIPANT:** Me personally, [inaudible] with the different keys of highlighting and stripping the answers from the choices. You know, you get kind -- you don't put those in there, but there's some discrepancy and there's instructions that you can't highlight. There was discrepancy what you can underline and what you can't underline. One book said you can, and [inaudible]. So you try to teach those things about [inaudible] information and how do you get [inaudible] you know aren't necessarily -- on a normal test, you would cross out the letter D. Another says you can't do that because if you have a line going through letter D, it might get scored inaccurately. So you teach them, but then you have differences in the actual testing, normal test versus MSA [inaudible].

**PARTICIPANT:** I think it's a shame with the test sometimes too is there's not enough room for the kids to response. We taught them to write these lengthy answers, and they're squeezing stuff in, in a font, like 2 type of format because they are running out of space, and they still have thoughts to get out.

I mean, I understand the theory of, you know, don't write outside the box. Well, the boxes have to be bigger. They have to give these kids a chance to express themselves. If they want to express themselves, they have to have the room to do so.

**LISSITZ:** That's good. We're going to make a list of -- we're going to start summarizing conversations. Part of it will be a series of recommendations to the State. I don't control any of this. So, if you don't see any big changes, don't call me at the office and tell me how come there's been no change, but that kind of comment is very helpful. Thank you.

Anything else on this? Yes.

**PARTICIPANT:** This is kind of talking about what "he" --

**LISSITZ:** That's okay. The names aren't going to appear anywhere.

**PARTICIPANT:** About the difference between what you generally teach to do, like a strategy to help someone [inaudible] MSA. Similarly, when I take off the State website of sample answers and I have to analyze [inaudible], okay, here's the reading, this is a 3, why is it a 3, [inaudible], and I'm like I know [inaudible], but that is the [inaudible].

I guess I have a problem with -- I know [inaudible], but I teach my students [inaudible], and that always comes up -- I'm sorry.

**PARTICIPANT:** I think it's great because the bottom line you're not really teaching to the test. You're teaching good writing skills.

**PARTICIPANT:** And the test doesn't even test writing skills at all.

**PARTICIPANT:** No.

**PARTICIPANT:** Reading comprehension.

**PARTICIPANT:** You demonstrate that you really understood.

**PARTICIPANT:** So you could comprehend, but maybe you're not good at putting your thoughts in writing and a good sentence structure, grammatically correct, and then their BCR might be [inaudible].

**PARTICIPANT:** It's interesting how the kids pick up on it, [inaudible]. Disclaimer, you know, so --

**LISSITZ:** Anybody else?

[No audible response.]

**LISSITZ:** Some people think that the State test reports could be more helpful for improving teachers to understand how their students are doing. Do you agree or disagree with that, and if so, why?

The nature of the feedback we've gotten [inaudible] is it helpful [inaudible].

**PARTICIPANT:** I feel like when the scores come back and the children [inaudible], I kind of [inaudible] MSA scores, every year was comparing apples to oranges because my seventh graders took it the following year [inaudible]. I think they should be looking at their scores longitudinally throughout the year. I don't know if that's answering your question.

**LISSITZ:** It's relevant.

**PARTICIPANT:** Because if they are weak when they are in the fifth grade, they should be looking at the same score for those students in the sixth grade, then when they go to seventh grade, then when they go to eighth grade, not, well, how did the seventh graders do last year compared to the seventh grade of this year. You're [inaudible] kids, and I think -- I really think when the State looks at scores, I think they're getting it all wrong. That's just my opinion. I think they need to look at longitudinal, so --

**LISSITZ:** That's part of my question is what could the State do better next time. Your answer is one of the things -- you're saying tracking across [inaudible].

**PARTICIPANT:** The same group.

**LISSITZ:** The same group.

**PARTICIPANT:** It's also unfair to schools that have a lot of transient populations. We've got kids who have come in this year in the eighth grade who have been in the building a week before this test was given, and now we're going to get knocked? Because these kids are coming in from other schools and maybe schools before that point. We just have no idea what they're doing. So it's not a direct reflection on us as a whole. And that's kind of a shame to have it that way.

There's been several this year that we've had come in that just -- they're going to lower our scores.

**PARTICIPANT:** With the technology the way it is, you know, you assign a student a number. It's not that hard to match that number up with their fifth grade, as long as it's the same number, you know, with how they did prior. Then you get -- you know, I might have a group of students that were taught by seven other different science teachers, and I get to track their thing and see how well they improved from year to year, and then in my class, maybe they did really horrible, they had no improvement. And I would say, "Well, wow! It must be me." I have nothing to compare to. There's a big average.

**LISSITZ:** I am going to bite my tongue and not respond because we have such a limited amount of time. You know the State is working on that [inaudible] State at all. So that's one suggestion. Do you have another suggestion?

**PARTICIPANT:** I don't know if it's possible, but, in theory, with the technology as rapid as it is with data, I think it would be really nice to be able to know how the kids did before they leave us. I mean, we're in eighth grade, and we're even now talking about what courses are they taking in high school and is there a summer readiness or is there an intervention required. And I think it would be very helpful to be able to have this more real-time data to be able to intelligently answer those questions.

**LISSITZ:** Anything else? Any other suggestions?

**PARTICIPANT:** [Inaudible.]

**LISSITZ:** Tell me what you mean.

**PARTICIPANT:** Well, during the sixth grade, [inaudible] sixth grade [inaudible]. You know what I mean? So [inaudible].

**PARTICIPANT:** [Inaudible] snow, why was it such a big deal? I don't understand. We had to bump our school year dates. Why couldn't the MSA be bumped? I guess it all had to be [inaudible]. I don't know. I just thought that was odd that so much emphasis would be placed on [inaudible] everybody kind of up in arms [inaudible].

**PARTICIPANT:** Plus all the two-hour delays, plus early dismissal.

**PARTICIPANT:** And field trips.

**PARTICIPANT:** And everything else, yeah.

**LISSITZ:** How about the data that you do [inaudible]?

**PARTICIPANT:** I know in some States -- and I have thought about this, though. In some States, they test at the beginning of the school year for their State assessment to see what kind of retention happened over the summer and kind of gets more of a baseline data at the beginning of every school year, so you kind of see what you are able to keep and whether or not the kids truly learned and retained what they've learned. And I kind of like that attitude towards it instead of seeing if you jammed enough into them in the school year for them to be successful or the spring testing.

To actually see if they've retained what you taught them, I think would be good data for a lot of teachers to have.

**PARTICIPANT:** When we give tests, when we bring tests, we [inaudible] analysis to see whether [inaudible]. With the MSA feedback, we don't get that necessarily. We like to compare [inaudible] MSA if [inaudible] statistics, is that true with [inaudible] unify whatever it is to see if there's a comparison there, or if they did really well in the classroom and the curriculum, you know, [inaudible] MSA. There's no real comparison between skills and the skill sets that are really [inaudible].

**PARTICIPANT:** If they're trying to make teachers accountable to this test or from this test, I don't know that given at the beginning of the school year, you will see that accountability. Therefore, I'm not sure the beginning of the year is a good choice, although I think it would be wonderful to be over with and, therefore --

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** Here's a little comment. I also thought it was a little bit odd that we had daylight savings time, and research does show that statistically there are more heart attacks for older individuals after the time change because it's a big stress on the body.

And I noticed in front of my classroom as I looked around, there were a lot of sleepy eyes out there, and I just kind of wanted to point that out. I think States picking the time to give a test, maybe not put it around daylight savings time for these kids.

**LISSITZ:** Anything else? Anything else about this feedback? How the data could be better or --

**PARTICIPANT:** I had something with the math this year, but [inaudible] on the test wasn't even part of the curriculum or grade that I was working on. It was like more advanced. So [inaudible].

**LISSITZ:** Any other advice?

**PARTICIPANT:** I did have [inaudible] during the math portion. As they were sitting there with their test booklet and their ruler and their compass and their protractor and their [inaudible] on a little desk like this, but then their Tootsie Rolls and their lead falling out of their pencils.

**PARTICIPANT:** And their scrap paper.

**PARTICIPANT:** And scrap paper.

**PARTICIPANT:** Graph paper.

**PARTICIPANT:** Graph paper.

**PARTICIPANT:** I was so shocked at how many [inaudible] not intentionally. I don't know about you guys, but it seemed like every two seconds, something was going down the [inaudible], you know. But that's a lot of material to have on a little -- anybody else would have a big desk and lay everything out.

**LISSITZ:** Anybody else?

[No audible response.]

**LISSITZ:** Okay. Let me move on. There is some evidence from the survey that suggests that the people or teachers who made lower grades feel that the State testing is more positive than did teachers from the upper grades, so a little more preference or favor of the testing from lower grades. You guys are in between, I guess, but do you have an opinion about why people [inaudible]? Can you explain to me why you think that the lower-grade teachers would be more -- slightly more favorable?

Yes, go ahead.

**PARTICIPANT:** I kind of think it goes back to your first question. If you look at the development of intellect in the elementary grades, recall is a beautiful thing. And when kids get it, we're, you know, handing out stickers and, you know, having parades and really excited about that.

We're trying to go too higher order thinking in middle school, and just like you said in the words of your first question, if we are pressing as a faculty for kids to really think and think deeply and they are developing those skills and that is where they are getting their academic kudos, this test is a flashback to a different kind of -- do you see what I'm saying?

And those skills are things that as grown-ups our brain has learned to flip in and out of, but not so much the case with adolescents and preadolescents. So, when we take the time to talk about recall of skills, here is a circle, and we'd like to know what its area is, and guess what, all the charts are covered with newspaper, so it's got to come from your brain, that's different than what a lot of the business is and should be in the middle school curriculum. And I'll bet that's a component of the answer.

**PARTICIPANT:** [Inaudible] say elementary schools might only have, what, 25 students to worry about? And I have 112, and there's probably, what, 15 percent of them in special education? I have to worry about a lot more students.

**PARTICIPANT:** You're worried about a greater group of skills too. By having it in the upper grades, there's a lot of young kids who do [inaudible] and do have reading problems. There's a big gap there for them to overcome. So, you know, even with the modifications, it's [inaudible] forming your thoughts, you know, you have a longer period to kind of cover and make up group, cue without cuing. I mean, you have to really get out of these kids without, you know, using traditional methods in [inaudible] classroom [inaudible] those kind of things. Sometimes you just got to say, "Hey, you know, you ought to think about this. Read the question." You know, I even [inaudible]. What do you do, you know? So it's a bigger period of information you got to recall too, so it's not just a reflection on me. It's a reflection on the mass.

**PARTICIPANT:** I read your question a little bit differently than you did. As a former elementary school teacher -- and I used to [inaudible] -- I would look at that, and it was like [inaudible], literally.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah. I was going to say that too.

**PARTICIPANT:** I would sit back and be like this is the best we ever --

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** I wasn't planning because I would teach every subject all day, and I'd be happy [inaudible] test scores, walk around, you know, and it was literally like a [inaudible] because, seriously, that's the mentality of [inaudible].

**PARTICIPANT:** Huge chunk of time you don't have to plan. I remember that too.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah. I [inaudible] elementary school too. What I remember [inaudible]. The kids didn't know what they didn't know, some of them, but they would take the test, and then, "How did you feel?" "I did great. I did" -- and [inaudible].

But now they know that they don't know, and that can be very disheartening, and it's really hard to keep with -- I have a lot of kids with a lot of needs in my room, and it's really hard to keep them really trying their best because they get so disgusted because they can't do it, and so it's hard to --

**PARTICIPANT:** But I also think the attitude of the student [inaudible].

**PARTICIPANT:** Yes.

**PARTICIPANT:** In elementary, [inaudible].

**PARTICIPANT:** [Inaudible.]

**PARTICIPANT:** Yes.

**PARTICIPANT:** [Inaudible.]

**PARTICIPANT:** Our eighth graders have taken this how many times now since they were in third grade? So they're tired of it.

**PARTICIPANT:** Some of these kids would come in there, and they'll write [inaudible] every day. [Inaudible.] There are kids who come in there filthy dirty and smelling, and, you know, the [inaudible].

I was [inaudible], and they never blamed me [inaudible].

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** I like that point.

**PARTICIPANT:** We also could have been -- and I feel like I wouldn't be representing students if I didn't say this. By the time you get to grading, you know that S-T-O-P means you're not supposed to turn the page, and "boom" means that you are allowed to turn the page. And only are we done with having the read that at each session and show it in a white style -- like if we're asking the kids to come to school with breakfast and sit down and be ready to take a test and we read the Iliad in its original Greek to them in terms of how long the instructions are for session after session, we've lost kids' attention. It's gone. It's gone.

And it's funny to us, like the Goldfish poem is funny to us, because we get to talk to each other. Like the children are really trying, and I do work with children that have attention issues, and I see them really trying to honor the testing conditions that we ask

them to, but I feel like the best time that they have to give us is show with directions that they have consistently heard for five sessions of math and five sessions of reading every year since grade one. And I think we get it at some level, and maybe somebody ought to look.

**PARTICIPANT:** That's true.

**PARTICIPANT:** And the Goldfish poem.

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** You don't know what we're talking about, do you?

**PARTICIPANT:** The Goldfish poem that doesn't rhyme. So already we're inharmonious.

**PARTICIPANT:** You had something, and then me and then you.

**PARTICIPANT:** Okay. I think another thing that's an interesting perspective, as we are sitting here in a middle school setting, with these young lads and lasses in separated classrooms for English and science and math and that evil stepchild, social studies -- in elementary school, they're all in one confined location, and it blends as the day goes long. I know they have separated periods, but they blend.

Here, we're separated, and when the kids come in to take this test and they look at this test and they say, "Math?" -- they say, "English?" Then eventually they say, "Science?" It's showing them a really negative part to social studies.

**PARTICIPANT:** That's true.

**PARTICIPANT:** We're not tested, and I am asked to go above and beyond my classroom anyhow for social studies. Then I get these dumb-ass tests from the County that make absolutely no sense that are only doing nothing but collecting data for data purposes with BCRs and ECRs that are so damn long that you don't have the time to get back to doing quality lesson plans because you're grading these long ECR and BCRs.

And then it comes around to the point you're doing MSA, and you are not even in the fold. You're sending a mixed message to these kids that is detrimental to the country, period, end of statement.

And Jay Leno and all those guys have all the fun they want at night time about people not being able to answer basic questions about our government and our society, but we're doing this because the tests do not reflect what we need to have done in an educational setting day in and day out.

Wow! I need a drink.

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** I'm talking about water. What are you guys thinking about? Oh, my goodness.

**PARTICIPANT:** And that was our department.

**PARTICIPANT:** Coming from elementary school, same thing, Title 1 school. And everything in elementary school from at least the time that I started 17 years ago was geared towards stuff. All right. We'll [inaudible]. It was geared towards, you know, like he said, the MSPAP, and setting up your assessments.

I mean, I remember being pulled out of class and having, you know, a substitute so that you could sit and analyze the data through all these rubrics and scoring tools, and that's what your testing was. It was giving, you know, the students exactly what they were going to get in the format of the test.

Now, came to middle school because, A, science and social studies was pushed aside a lot in elementary school to fit in the math and the language arts curriculum, and what amazes me was then you lose all this content.

Yeah, okay. Fine. You may be graded on those things, but the tests may focus on content that you couldn't get to because science and social studies, who cares?

And then, you know, now it's coming -- I thought, well, middle school is great. You can design your own test, the way you like it, be creative, do your own thing. Now it's filtering in. No, this is what you have to do. You have to teach it this way and you have to test this way because this is what the test looks like. Fine, I understand they have to be assessed, and I need to be assessed. Great. I'm not afraid of that. But don't take away creativity in the process. Don't tell me, "Well, this is how you have to design your tests, and I don't trust you to do it, so now we're going to do it for you. And it has to be done at this date and this date and this date, and you have to be here at this date." That's what I hated about elementary school. I don't want to be told that in middle school.

I get I have a curriculum I have to get through, and I manage, but I don't want them interpreting for me exactly -- you take out the creativity, you take out the fun, and then they just kind of like, "Okay, here we go again," you know. It bothers me.

**PARTICIPANT:** And I'm not sure if that's -- I mean, I know part of it is -- we're talking about it being test driven, but I think that the discrepancy here is I think a lot of that is Harford County Public Schools-driven. I don't think that's MSDE-driven.

**PARTICIPANT:** Well, Baltimore County is way past that point now. That's why I'm not in Baltimore County anymore because I wasn't allowed to make my own tests or make my own lesson plans. They gave me a script that -- and you could -- it was

an open-space school at my school. So you could actually sit in one classroom and hear the teacher next to him saying the same thing, a couple-second delay. Crazy. Get me out of there.

**PARTICIPANT:** Then all creativity is lost, and that bothers me.

**PARTICIPANT:** Just a final thought on your why the middle school kids are not as joyful about testing.

**PARTICIPANT:** It's the teachers who aren't.

**PARTICIPANT:** Okay. And while -- what happens with the kids happens with the teachers.

I could sum it up briefly in one word and just say "hormones" or I could say "anxiety" and, you know, emotional caves and high points and low points. And our kids know. It's like Girl A said earlier, they know that this is important. They know that this is a big deal.

I work with students that have life anxiety, and when we say to them, "Eat a good breakfast because the next four days in a row, we're going to be doing testing," you know, we can cheer-lead as much as we want, but, at the end of the booklet, that's not a representation of that student because their anxiety and their emotions got in the way of their ability to articulate what they know. And that worries me for children.

**PARTICIPANT:** I was very anxious this year for my own students. I truly was. I mean, they -- I wanted to make sure they had exactly the healthy accommodations that they needed, and it took four adults in that room to do that, and I probably could have used two or three more. I mean, those kids, I wanted them to give me their best. I wanted them to know they could do their best, and you know what? That gave me extreme anxiety.

I don't think I've ever in all my years been that anxious because I know what they're capable of doing, but, like you said, either, you know, they don't believe in themselves or they just are having a bad day -- I mean, we had one throw up later in the day. Well, was that because of testing, or is that just because they had the stomach flu? I don't know, but --

**PARTICIPANT:** There's always the threat of not making AYP hanging over your head for every year too.

**PARTICIPANT:** Exactly.

**LISSITZ:** A little more comments.

**PARTICIPANT:** Well, it also gets back to what our law enforcement officer said. The circumstances behind the kids who are being tested in school, the 14 years I have been here, it has changed dramatically. The needs have changed dramatically in this region, and it's unfair to evaluate us and even the kids to what they're coming from.

**PARTICIPANT:** And that is only one piece.

**PARTICIPANT:** We're in a great school.

**PARTICIPANT:** It's only one piece of the kids and one piece of the -- I mean, there's so much more beyond the MSA at our school, our teachers, our kids, and it's just unfair to be judged on it.

**PARTICIPANT:** But everything stops with MSA.

**PARTICIPANT:** I know.

**PARTICIPANT:** Even if a child has a --

**PARTICIPANT:** Believe me, I know.

**PARTICIPANT:** I feel like I stopped for two weeks one time.

**LISSITZ:** We have five minutes.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, exactly.

**LISSITZ:** Let me change the subject and move. How do you think the State modified testing program, the Mod-MSA, how do you think that's influenced curriculum? Has it at all?

**PARTICIPANT:** Yes.

**PARTICIPANT:** Modified MSA?

**PARTICIPANT:** As far as intervention?

**PARTICIPANT:** I mean, I've taught the Mod-MSA, and the questions very closely [inaudible]. I read both. I'm a human reader, so --

**PARTICIPANT:** That's crazy.

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** Exactly. That's what it means, instead of a computer.

**PARTICIPANT:** Anyway, some of the questions, the selection [inaudible]. As for the curriculum, I think it gives us the [inaudible], you know. The only difference was instead of writing a BCR, you're asked to choose from appropriate responses as opposed to creating your own response, but as for the curriculum and concept, yeah, the students do need modification to their curriculum. Therefore, they need to modify MSA. Is it truly reflected in the way they are tested? No. I mean, I have to give more verbal prompts to kids who took the Mod-MSA in the everyday classroom. I can't give those verbal prompts on the MSA. Therefore, they're looking to me for a little more help than I'm allowed to give them, and when I tell them, "I'm sorry. I can read it to you," right there you see the face going, oh, crap, I can do this myself. I mean, they thought that I'm doing it for them in the classroom, but I'm able -- we're able to assist them more and prompt them more, so --

**PARTICIPANT:** Read word things.

**PARTICIPANT:** Has it affected? You know, I might, you know, lesson the language or rephrase it in a classroom. I can't do that on MSA.

**PARTICIPANT:** There's no BCRs on Mod, right?

**PARTICIPANT:** No. But there are -- there's some response that they have to select. You read the -- I read a selection. They have to choose an appropriate answer.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right. Modified version is necessary, but it's not necessarily appropriate the way it is now.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right. It means [inaudible].

[Simultaneous speaking.]

**PARTICIPANT:** Or get more modifications in the classroom than they get on the Mod-MSA, if that answers your question. I'm able to have a little more freedom in me phrasing, restating. I'm glad they eliminated that for you. After all, they gave them three choices, but if I'm able to read it to you sometimes, I might even rephrase it to you, so you'll know what that word means, juxtaposition, you know, you still have 33-percent chance of getting it right, but if I can explain to you what a juxtaposition is, maybe, you know, you eliminate that answer too, so --

**LISSITZ:** Related to that, do you think the Mod testing program influence the instruction itself?

**PARTICIPANT:** The Mod program?

**LISSITZ:** Yeah, the Mod testing --

**PARTICIPANT:** No.

**PARTICIPANT:** Not yet. We're only two years --

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- into Mod.

**PARTICIPANT:** The curriculum for them, we do that anyway. You know what I mean? And we meet the kids on their educational level, so --

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** You know, unfortunately, the test doesn't necessarily reflect the amount of modifications we provide in the classroom.

**PARTICIPANT:** And we do jump through hoops to get all of the stuff in writing to support a candidate that we think is eligible for Mod-MSA, but, again, I think the caliber of work that's done in this school -- we eyeball the kids that seem like they're the most academically fragile anyway. So, I mean, it's extra papers to shuffle or whatever, but I don't think as it pertains to what happens in the classroom -- I haven't seen that it really changes. It's just the behind-the-scenes stuff.

**LISSITZ:** [Inaudible.]

**PARTICIPANT:** I don't think it's testing the child. I think it's testing the teacher.

**LISSITZ:** Could you or somebody else say a little bit more about that?

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** Go ahead, Justine -- oh, no, that's right. She's not --

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** You may use her name.

**PARTICIPANT:** I'll tell her.

**PARTICIPANT:** The way the Alt-MSA is developed, it's developed by very talented people, but the test is developed to meet with success, you know, and so it's showing excellent teaching skills, but I don't think it's really testing the child. I think it's showing how the teacher is able to develop a test to show that a child is able to be successful on a test.

**LISSITZ:** Does anybody else have a comment?

[No audible response.]

**LISSITZ:** One last question.

**PARTICIPANT:** We have like two minutes.

**LISSITZ:** Three minutes. Three minutes is good.

Are there any specific positive or negative consequences of the State testing program that you'd like to make? Just a general question. Any general reactions?

**PARTICIPANT:** [Inaudible.]

[Interruption of announcement made on loud speaker.]

**PARTICIPANT:** I was going to say that I wish the terminology on the test matched what I'm teaching the class. One that popped out to us that [inaudible] tendency, and I know in the one curriculum that I'm using, the data [inaudible]. Kids get the [inaudible] essential tendency, they have no idea what [inaudible]. They don't know [inaudible].

There was one kind of question that kept popping up on the [inaudible]. It was [inaudible] angular triangles, and kids, you know -- that's not part of our curriculum. We don't teach [inaudible].

[Interruption of announcement made on loud speaker.]

**PARTICIPANT:** That is not the correct pronunciation of her name.

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** What about all the paper? I don't like that there's so much paper. You can get a hernia carrying your testing materials back to the classroom. I mean, it's paper, heavy.

**PARTICIPANT:** It's not green. You're right.

**PARTICIPANT:** The science MSA is online. That's nice.

**PARTICIPANT:** The whole thing is just too time consuming. It's too time consuming.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** This whole security issue, I mean, for me, our counseling department here like organizes everything. We work closely with our principal, totally time consuming. For me, it takes me away from my caseload and my teachers for at least a month. The whole security, ridiculous. I mean, I have to sit and put labels on booklets. I had to input three different codes from each booklet to see if -- seriously, can't we get beyond this and do something that's really going to be valuable to the kids and the teachers and reflect what we do here? I mean, that's --

**PARTICIPANT:** A lot of money being spent.

**PARTICIPANT:** Amen.

**PARTICIPANT:** A lot of money being spent, and the data in many cases isn't correct because --

**PARTICIPANT:** And it's only --

**PARTICIPANT:** -- of all the things we mentioned.

**PARTICIPANT:** It's only one part of the child --

**PARTICIPANT:** Or one day.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- or one part of the teacher that it's reflecting whatever. It's one part. Even for placement, when I use it for placement for the kids the next year, I look at all these other test scores, the SRI and everything else, the teacher recommendations, the child's personality, their family issues, and you got to look at the whole child. That's what we're taught going through school and grade school and everything. It's the whole child. It's not a test. You know, you don't look at the child through a test, so --

**PARTICIPANT:** [Inaudible] they can't tell, you know, which kid is from sixth grade, seventh grade, [inaudible] for the test.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** You know, a parent died or --

**PARTICIPANT:** Exactly.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- a parent had cancer or, you know --

**PARTICIPANT:** He's in Iraq.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** Exactly. And is that child showing personal gains for themselves, or are we judging them by a norm standard that is way beyond what they're capable of doing? I mean, that drives me insane.

Each child grows at their own pace in their own way. Like we said before, don't compare apples to oranges. Say this child has grown from this year to this year in this way. You know, don't test them all the same and say, "Oh, well, we hope you all do well," you know, because that's just not going to happen. That's not.

**PARTICIPANT:** I think it's catching up with us because, when we moved from MSPAP to MSA, we all went -- because what we've lost is the opportunity to provide real experiences and real opportunities for problem-based learning because we have begun to and have incorporated into our routines as teachers getting ready for this test.

And now I think the reason that we all are here could be in part because we're missing those three-dimensional, problem-based learning opportunities, and it's showing up in the very test that took them away from us as teachers. So I'm kind of in the scrap-it-and-start-over group as well.

**LISSITZ:** Do you want to take the last words?

**PARTICIPANT:** Well, I was just going to say that you -- do you want everybody to be in a certain place, but not everybody is deciding [inaudible]?

**PARTICIPANT:** There you go.

**PARTICIPANT:** [Inaudible] teachers -- everybody is different, and you can't expect everybody to do the same test, the same questions.

**PARTICIPANT:** Unrealistic.

**PARTICIPANT:** It is.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm. Well, I don't think the test is designed to measure students.

**PARTICIPANT:** No.

**PARTICIPANT:** I don't think it ever was designed to measure students.

**PARTICIPANT:** It's grading the school and the teachers.

**PARTICIPANT:** And their parents know it.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**LISSITZ:** Thank you. I will let you go, or I'll get another announcement.

[Laughter.]

**LISSITZ:** Thank you very much.

Appendix F

**Queen Anne's County Focus Group Transcript**

**LISSITZ:** I will try to keep track of the time. We have to leave at 10 minutes to 4:00 because they have another big deal going on in here.

I am Dr. Lissitz, Bob Lissitz. This is Ying Li, one of my graduate students.

**PARTICIPANT:** Hello.

**LISSITZ:** Pardon me?

**PARTICIPANT:** Ying said hello.

[Laughter.]

**LISSITZ:** Thank you, Ying.

I won't take the time for you to introduce yourselves. I'm sorry. Whatever you say is going to be anonymous anyway, and I'll be honest with you, I won't remember your names after a short period of time.

I am employed by the -- actually, I am employed by the University of Maryland. I run a center there, and the State of Maryland wants to get some feedback on the HSA and MSA -- Alt, Mod, regular, all of that.

So I don't know. Is there anybody here from special ed? Okay, cool. I've got some questions specifically for you, but you can chime in on anything. It's fine.

I have a series of questions. You just talk. Because this is not a particularly good tape recorder, if you could try to pretty much talk one at a time -- I don't think you need to raise your hand or anything, but if you could try to do that.

And let's see. This is from a survey that you all did not participate in. The way we did the sampling in the State of Maryland, by coincidence, one county didn't end up in the study. It has nothing to do with the fact that I live in Queen Anne County. It's just the way it worked out in the sampling, and so we wanted to do a focus group somewhere where you hadn't seen the surveys.

So about 3,700 teachers have responded to a survey, and we have that data. We have analyzed that. Not "we" actually. Ying analyzed that, and we have some follow-up questions to ask you.

So, like I said, I am not evaluating anything that you say. The State actually wants feedback. They are not dictating it to any certain kind of feedback. They just want

to know what you think about things, and the general topic, as I said, is the HSA, MSA, the Alt, the Mod, and the regular kind of testing, and there will probably be some big changes coming up in the next few years, but this is going to be part of a report that will go to the Federal Government. It has to do with consequences of testing and that kind of stuff, and the Fed likes that kind of thing. And the State has hired me to put together some of that.

You can come in. I am going to go ahead and start. Just take a seat, sign in.

Any questions about that, my preamble?

Okay. I am going to read some of this. Some people think that the State testing program --

We're on, right?

**PARTICIPANT:** Yes.

[Laughter.]

**LISSITZ:** -- decreases teacher's emphasis on higher order thinking skills. Okay? So it's a question about higher order thinking skills. Some people think the testing program actually decreases your encouragement of that in the way you would teach. Do you agree, disagree? Why?

And I am interested in if you think that that is the case, then what do people do to actually change the emphasis on higher versus lower order thinking?

**PARTICIPANT:** I'll go.

**LISSITZ:** Go ahead.

**PARTICIPANT:** I think that that's true. I think that there's so much emphasis on getting the kids to pass and especially the special education students and the kids that sometimes struggle, that the teachers feel that they have to focus on teaching to those kids' needs, which is great, but that leaves a whole slew of kids who aren't getting a rigorous education. They are getting the middle-of-the-road bar instead of a bar that's really high, so that when they get out of high school and they go to college, they are not ready for it.

**PARTICIPANT:** I think on the contrary, as a special educator in middle school, there's been a big push. Teaching language arts, there's been a big push in focusing on those higher level questioning skills and strategies in the classroom, and I think that's fed into the language arts program, that that's something we actually focus really, you know, rigorously on.

And you'd be surprised, you know, how much more in the discussion where there is higher level thinking, how much, you know, some of the kids who aren't as outspoken, maybe even in special ed, do actually participate and feed off and can gain from that sharing from the high kids down to the low.

So I actually think there is a really big emphasis, especially in the language arts program, and it might be that that's just not the program, you know, that we're all in, but I kind of -- I think there is a big push for that.

**PARTICIPANT:** I'm going to fall right in the middle, between you two ladies.

**LISSITZ:** Are you a regular ed teacher?

**PARTICIPANT:** I'm a regular ed elementary teacher.

And I think for too many years, especially with our special ed children and our kids that were maybe just on the cusp of making proficient, we kept looking for formulas. We kept looking for ways that we could teach them to achieve proficient on the test.

I do believe that in this county, we've finally gotten the message that there isn't a formula, and I think once we got that message, we started leaning a little bit more toward the higher level thinking and hoping that some of that trickles down to -- to the other level of students. I think that we still are missing a lot. I surely do.

**LISSITZ:** Anybody else want to jump in?

**PARTICIPANT:** I know in my classroom at the beginning of the year, I was fortunate to win a Dream Classroom Makeover, and then what happened was they put a lot of children in my class with exceptional needs.

And then on paper, it was that I was going to have all this help, but then when it actually came in the classroom, it wasn't. So what ended up happening was I wasn't able to pull my needs groups, and, you know, the higher level thinking skills wasn't able to be modeled because of the fact of all the needs that were in the room.

In addition, I had -- I think it was three students were Alt and one that was Mod, and because the special ed teacher was required to do the testing for these children, she pulled one out at a time, which left two other children in my room, which me with the rest of the class, and then she would be gone. I mean, she has to do her job to make sure all of these are done by a certain date, and I would then have two severely needy children in my room in addition. And it really affected my instruction.

So, you know, it applied, and also from what I was hearing from the special ed teacher was it's repertoire of going over that specific skill, so that the child remembers what the skill is, instead of actually application.

So, to me, sometimes I think in certain respects with those children, it is not beneficial because they are just learning through repetition.

**PARTICIPANT:** I don't know if this is the right place to come in on that, but, you know, for those Alt kids, because I had Alt kids too, it's almost as if, you know, you've taken -- it depends on too maybe the experience and the comfortableness of the special educator in the content of where they are -- language arts, math, whatever -- because, you know, you want that kind of true co-teaching to exist, and you want that to be real comfortable. So you've got that feed off of everybody in the room, and then you don't want to -- how do I say it? You don't want to, you know, lose that specialist in working with an Alt kid to just try to get them to remember some rote skills.

This is where we need like some training with our pairs to kind of take the skill, work with it, and then Alt test when that child is ready. So it's almost like, you know, staffing, training. That kind of thing if it were put in the right place, you know, could work, but sometimes it's not all laid out that easily, and we end up with not enough people -- not enough people who know what they're doing and people who, you know -- it's kind of hard, and you lose that rigor.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

Well, I'm teaching to the State curriculum when I am teaching for the test, and I think the State curriculum has a lot of rigor in it and --

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- I know my kids are very challenged by it. So I really can't say that --

**LISSITZ:** Are you a regular ed?

**PARTICIPANT:** I am a third grade teacher, yeah.

My children are very challenged. I mean some of them more than -- I mean inference and drawing conclusions and even in the math skills, I think, are very high level because I'm teaching to that State curriculum which supposedly, if we teach to that, we are teaching per MSA, so I really don't have a problem with the higher level.

**PARTICIPANT:** I think what I saw with that -- and I agree with you, it is very rigorous. But particularly in the math area, not so much as to language arts, you can teach to the State curriculum and not use as many word problems or one- or two-, three-step problems that I did see showing up more and more each year going to MSA.

And so, you know, then -- and I started changing gradually to present the multiplication in a word problem, rather than just the digits. And I guess that's where my kids were having trouble.

**PARTICIPANT:** Do you do everyday math?

**PARTICIPANT:** Oh, yes.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah? I mean, it seems to me we have a lot of work problems in there. I mean, I don't know. I just -- I think they're very challenged.

**PARTICIPANT:** We actually went through and made many, many more.

**PARTICIPANT:** Well, we do BCRs. We'll take math box questions and turn them into BCRs, and I'll do that almost every day. So maybe that's the sort of thing you're talking about.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** Can I add? Once I had those needs addressed in my room, what I did on every paper that I have, I put the assessment limit from the voluntary State curriculum on the bottom of each paper, and in this way, I know exactly what I'm being held accountable to.

So I find it very helpful, but then, additionally, I have the kids apply it to everyday life of where would they see that in society, and it's really beneficial because the kids actually get to be the teacher, and they then get to make up problems with model responses for the rest of the kids to solve.

**PARTICIPANT:** I think I'm going -- I'm on a different level. I'm high school, so I'm teaching from HSA, not MSA.

This fall, I've taught three sections of honors biology. The rigor was there, but I was limited in how much I could extend beyond our curriculum because I had limited time to teach the content, and --

**PARTICIPANT:** That's the problem.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- we had to make sure that all the content was covered. And if the kids asked a question that goes beyond, we could take only a little bit of time to go there, and then we'd come back, just to make sure we covered the content that's covered on our HSA.

Even though it was an honors bio class versus a regular bio or, you know, year-long bio, we still have to cover the exact same content. I tried to go a little bit above, but time restraint was there, and you just don't have the time to do it because of testing, where it would have been nice to extend, but you just don't have the time to spend there.

**PARTICIPANT:** That's very true, yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** Because you are in that time limit to cover that, you have got to modify for the special ed, you know, to make sure you get that in. You know, they are going to take longer to master that, whether you modify everything to get that same point across.

**PARTICIPANT:** What really, though, if I am hearing you correctly -- it goes back to the curriculum. The test does test the curriculum, but maybe the curriculum is too broad at each grade level or maybe part of it shouldn't be tested for that.

We find the same thing. You know, you feel like some days you're not teaching -- or some weeks you're not teaching for mastery, and you know you've got to move on, even though you have six children who haven't mastered that skill.

**LISSITZ:** I am going to move you to the second question now. Thank you.

Some people think that teachers spend too much time on how to take tests rather than teaching the subject matter, knowledge, and skills, and we wondered if you agree or disagree, why, and if you could tell us what teachers actually do, if they do teach literally on how to take tests. I'm not talking about teaching the material that's on the test, but some people have said, "Well, we spend time teaching how to take tests," and we're curious what you do, if you believe that.

**PARTICIPANT:** I definitely teach how to take a test because, when I went to college, I did not know how to take a test because I had always breezed through because I was a smart kid. So I stressed how to take a test, but that's when I'm going to take a test anyway, you know, "Let's do some study strategies." I teach them study strategies for every test, not just mine.

**PARTICIPANT:** I teach my kids test-taking strategies as well, but I always have the lower level students in my class too. And I think those -- the higher level kids, they know how to take a test. They're smart. They can figure that out. They learned it in third grade. I think middle school.

And so the lower level kids, they need test-taking strategies because they struggle with taking tests. They have a lot of anxiety when it comes to tests, and they just need -- they do need to learn the test-taking strategies, but that's just part.

Like we're teaching the curriculum along with the testing. It is not like we're just -- like in my math class, I'm not just teaching test-taking strategies. I usually do it on a warm-up. You know, sometimes the warm-ups are multiple-choice questions, which goes along with the MSA, so we work on the test-taking strategies along with the curriculum that they are learning.

**LISSITZ:** Can you just give me -- anyone -- give me an example of a test-taking strategy? I'm just trying to get a feel for it.

**PARTICIPANT:** Well, in math, you can eliminate multiple choices. You know, you can read the questions, and a lot of times, two of them don't make any sense. You know, if you have any number sense at all, most of the time, the kids can pretty much eliminate two choices right off the bat. That's math.

**PARTICIPANT:** Reading the questions before you read the text and then going back.

**PARTICIPANT:** Using visual imagery and acrostics.

**PARTICIPANT:** I make them write. I make them remember to think. Like we were doing haploid and diploid cells. I got tenth grade, but I've got the year-long really low, you know. Three-quarters of my kids are special ed in that class, and most of the time, I don't have a special educator in with me. She's busy doing other things, and I don't have anyone in there with me.

And we were doing that today, and I knew I was going to quiz them on it at the end. So I was talking about haploid and half and diploid and -- just trying to give them just cues. And then, when I gave them the quiz, I walked around to see how many people -- because like when they do amitosis, they'll write, you know, "P-mat" [ph] on the thing. I've told them to write on it. Anything can be thrown away and shredded, just write on it, if that's what's going to help. They highlight. They write. They eliminate. They do the same thing.

And then I walked around today, and I had maybe four or five of them, and they're the ones I know, I could predict, would be successful on it anyhow, but, you know, I look around to see if they're doing that. I walk around, and I'll see haploid to, you know, half, and, you know, things like that. So I just try to get them to remember it. Anytime I see a question relating to what we learned, write down whatever we said about it.

**PARTICIPANT:** I think something that's really important is the format of MSA because the format of what they see [inaudible] can be very different wording, so taking strategies and giving them choices, especially if there are distractors in there, and to check their work. Even if they, you know, double-check it, even if the answer is not there, they maybe will see it and think, oh, I'm right, but it's a distractor, which I teach third grade as well.

But I think the format of MSA was different to what they're usually seeing. That throws them off a bit. They are focusing on a slightly different-looking document from what they're used to seeing.

**PARTICIPANT:** And at the high school level, it's different because most of our unit tests quarterly, mid-term finals, or exactly --

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- format exactly the same.

**PARTICIPANT:** And we've written them, so they will be that way. So we do take that stress level away from them.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right. But, like in third grade --

**PARTICIPANT:** Right, mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- the unit tests that we receive are an addition problem, and they fault it.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** There's no -- there's nothing to choose from. It's just work and solve.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** And see, with elementary, when you give them multiple choice, like in math, if you don't talk to them about it, they won't even work the problem. I mean, it's just like, "Oh, yeah, that looks good." You know, I mean --

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- they won't work it. You have to -- I mean, I can't tell you how many times you have to say that, "Do not do that. Work the problem. Then see if your answer is there." Little things like that, they don't --

**PARTICIPANT:** And to work it out rather than try to do it because the tests, I think, are timed fairly enough. The children don't seem to run out of time ordinarily. So they're timed, but they're not used to -- they just see something that looks, like you said, good enough --

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- or close, and they don't -- they might be off by -- the templates might be off by one and that -- because they didn't carry because they can't carry in their head, and so that is a strategy that's really important for them to do with the right formula.

**PARTICIPANT:** I really think some of what -- I agree are test-taking strategies, but I also -- with my kids, we talk about this problem-solving, any kind of problem. So I don't look at it as much as teaching them how to take a test as how to attack something that they're not sure how to get to the end with. So we call it "problem-solving."

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah. Because some of those questions are not worded any way that I would word them --

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- and I find that across the board with any teacher, any trade, and it's almost as if they're being tested on how to read the question --

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yes.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- and not on the content, and I think our scores would be way higher if more kids understood the actual question, and so it's almost you have to tell them to think out and try to paraphrase that wording, how they worded the question, how do you think, look at the words in there, put it together, rephrase the question, because I can't help you once we start, you know. That, they have to learn.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right. The math test often -- I've had lower groups in the past, and the math test for a lot of them becomes a reading test.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yes.

**PARTICIPANT:** Absolutely.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yes.

**PARTICIPANT:** And it's not a thinking test. It's not a fair assessment because, instead of just adding, you know, two triple-digit numbers, they're reading about how Juan had a bake sale and sold this, and then kids who aren't strong readers but might be great in math --

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- you know, after the third sentence about the bake sale, you've lost them. So they are struggling with the reading aspect, but they have to read it to see how to solve it.

**PARTICIPANT:** And to add to that, we just had this specialist for autism at our school, and the last question, from what I understood correct -- if I understood it correctly, on a select response question, they will pick every time because their memory will be the

last two, and they'll repeat whatever the last thing was. So is that an accurate assessment of their understanding if --

**PARTICIPANT:** [Inaudible.]

**PARTICIPANT:** Exactly.

**LISSITZ:** Let me change topics a little bit. Some people think that the State testing reports could be more helpful for improving teacher [inaudible]. You know, the testing reports don't come to you with information that would be helpful for your teaching. Do you agree or disagree, and if you agree, what do you think the State could do better?

**PARTICIPANT:** You're assessing teachers, how to make them better? Is that what the question is?

**LISSITZ:** The question is you get these State reports based on MSA, say, and they come to you, they come to the principal. I think the teachers see them. Right now they're a certain format. Could they be improved, changed in some way, so that you would find more information in there that would be helpful to you as teachers?

**PARTICIPANT:** Absolutely.

**LISSITZ:** Give me some example of what do you think could be changed.

**PARTICIPANT:** The one thing that I don't like is we're always comparing like the sixth grade I had this year to the sixth grade I had the year after, and it's not the same children.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** And it doesn't make any sense. I don't understand why like my sixth graders this year should be compared to the fifth graders I'm getting from Bayside. You know, we should compare the same kids' scores, not two different classes of scores, you know, and that's --

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah. Like what we do [inaudible], we go back [inaudible].

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah. But the way it's reported, it's always comparing like, oh, how did your sixth grade do this year to how did they do last year --

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- and they're trying to see the difference, and they're different students, so --

**PARTICIPANT:** We do that too, and you actually have to, you know, get it up on two different computer --

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- screens if you want it, if you want to look at that easily, because you can't do it all on the same. So you get the seventh grade teachers to pull up seventh grade, and sixth grade -- and then you run in -- you know, you're kind of like this.

So, if there was one way that you could compare those same kids, that's probably the biggest thing. Otherwise, I think the information there is helpful by categories and, you know, by skill. That's -- that's really -- that's really good.

**PARTICIPANT:** You don't get it by skill. You get it by -- for instance, math, you get it by strand --

**PARTICIPANT:** Strand.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- which is not anywhere near accurate enough.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** You want to make actual decisions to inform instruction. We need to know what's exact indicators the kids are being tested on and --

**PARTICIPANT:** And what place --

[Simultaneous speaking.]

**PARTICIPANT:** I'd like the questions.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

[Simultaneous speaking.]

**PARTICIPANT:** [In progress] -- on specifically, how it was tested, and what it looked like.

**PARTICIPANT:** If it was asked in the negative, I'd like to know that --

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- because I could look for a trend to see, oh, well, that's what my kids are really having trouble with [inaudible].

**PARTICIPANT:** They're trying to protect their tests. I understand that, but at the same time, we are actually using this data to form instruction. We got to know exactly --

**PARTICIPANT:** I agree.

[Simultaneous speaking.]

**PARTICIPANT:** [In progress] -- tested with.

**PARTICIPANT:** And we have the ability to do that with the quarterlies.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yes.

**PARTICIPANT:** And the quarterlies can go through --

**PARTICIPANT:** Absolutely.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- because we still have it in our hand to say, okay, what is question 7. You know, a third of my class did poorly on that. What does question 7 look like?

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** And you can see if it's a question problem, if it's a teaching problem, if it's a student misunderstanding problem, and so that, I think, is a good -- I know that like Rob said, you want to protect the test and all that, but as far as -- the objective is totally different from what the problem may look like and how it was --

**PARTICIPANT:** [Inaudible] sometimes the questions don't quite address what they think it is addressing, and that's happened on a regular basis. I mean, if you ask the kids to interpret [inaudible]-ability and you ask them to answer in the form of a decimal, I'm not sure what you're asking them to assess or whether actually it would be the probability question or a decimal [inaudible] fraction or a decimal. So that information is also helpful.

**PARTICIPANT:** Well -- or maybe for teachers who have been teaching -- and again, I'm high school, so high school assessment, teaching the same content year after

year, is there a way they can take like my specific data and say not bring it up by kid but say year after year, this is where your students have been weaker, so that that would actually show me.

Obviously, it's not -- if it's consistent for me, I am the only consistent thing from year to year to year. Maybe there's something I need to change when I teach that unit. I mean, you can do that, but for HSA data, it's coming in per kids, and realistically, when we're seeing it on Performance Matters, it's not as easy for us to see from year to year to year.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right, I agree. It's not easy.

**PARTICIPANT:** We can do it, but if it could be provided, it would be much more useful because we don't have a lot of time, free time to be able to look and say, "Well, let me see where I was weak," while I'm trying to grade 90 papers and everything else, because, you know, that would be useful if that's what you're looking for in terms of this question.

**LISSITZ:** That kind of advice is what the State wants from you.

**PARTICIPANT:** I've actually done that, and what I noticed the trends -- because of the Performance Matters -- was my informational text was much weaker than my literary text, and what it came down to, when I look at the program, that our curriculum is [inaudible] which is then, therefore, mainly literary text, which then the kids are not getting any exposure, so -- to the informational text.

So what I started doing was infusing my science in my reading block, so that this way I then could do informational text, and I had dramatic improvement in my -- my scores the next year. I mean, I had almost all of them advance, and it was huge, but I also had the liberty at elementary that I could infuse it, which gave me more time with reading and with science.

And this year, our grade level decided we were going to split science and reading, which then I feel that my informational text again is going to suffer because I'm splitting up my subjects.

**PARTICIPANT:** And it is different at the high school level because, by the time we get our data, our kids have moved on to the next class.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** We don't still have them. So it's not like, oh, we can look at them. Once they have moved on, I can't see their data.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** I can't see how they did or how I did with them.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** I just know who passed, who failed.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** That's it.

And, you know, even that doesn't -- you know, we really can't at the high school level access it once the kids have passed for less. We can see how he did at the school and we can see, you know, where he might have struggled, but that doesn't tell me in my class as a teacher where did I do -- where did I do my kids wrong.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** [Inaudible] at the elementary level.

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** [Inaudible] but I'm serious. Do you do day-to-day at the high school?

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** Like we have a lot of in-service days, and that's exactly what we do.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yes.

**PARTICIPANT:** We look for trends.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** We look for, you know, the areas that we need to be improving at teaching, and it's all --

**PARTICIPANT:** But is that from MSA or the quarterlies?

**PARTICIPANT:** Both.

**PARTICIPANT:** Both.

**PARTICIPANT:** We start the year from the MSA and from [inaudible], and it's -- we pull it out by strand. We go -- we go as far as we can, but, yeah, the question would really be nice if we could do that as well, but --

**PARTICIPANT:** The only --

**PARTICIPANT:** -- that drives our instruction.

**PARTICIPANT:** We do it by our quarterlies, but I'd like to see from our HSAs. Ours, I don't know if it's as accessible.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** Because I don't know how you all get your data, but ours doesn't seem that --

**PARTICIPANT:** Uh-uh.

**PARTICIPANT:** As user friendly.

**PARTICIPANT:** It's not as discreet as it really needs to be --

**PARTICIPANT:** It's not.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- to help inform instruction. It would really --

**LISSITZ:** What do you mean by "discreet"?

**PARTICIPANT:** Specific.

**LISSITZ:** Detail it down?

**PARTICIPANT:** Detail. So we know, okay, it's a life science and it's cycles of animals or it's, you know, whatever it is, if it's informational text, is it inferences, is it main ideas, informational text, is it text features, what is it that we really need to hammer harder and work with students more on.

**PARTICIPANT:** Well, again, it comes down to, you know, if it's -- you can't compare one year to one year of students, but if I can --

[Simultaneous speaking.]

**PARTICIPANT:** But your own personal trends --

**PARTICIPANT:** -- see year after year --

**PARTICIPANT:** Your own personal trends --

**PARTICIPANT:** -- the same thing they're struggling with, and obviously --

**PARTICIPANT:** Then you can fix that.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- I'm not hitting something hard enough or covering it well enough for --

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- the students to understand it, and [inaudible].

**PARTICIPANT:** You have to be careful because we felt it happen too. We did that, so that we started hammering a particular area, and guess what?

**PARTICIPANT:** The other ones --

**PARTICIPANT:** Next year, another area [inaudible].

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** You know, you're going to rob from one area to pay the other, no matter what.

**PARTICIPANT:** That's true.

**PARTICIPANT:** And I think that's my biggest complaint is just to sheer amount --

**PARTICIPANT:** It is. It's a lot.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- [inaudible].

**PARTICIPANT:** I'd rather do fewer stuff well.

**PARTICIPANT:** And -- exactly.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** Especially with those basic math skills.

**PARTICIPANT:** Thank you.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** The [inaudible] --

[Simultaneous speaking.]

**PARTICIPANT:** Again, that's a curriculum issue.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** Rather than the assessment.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** And more of that should be on the test. I mean, I know in the third grade test, it's loaded with tables and charts. This is a math test, tables and charts and graphs, and you might implement addition, but there's no just plain old, flat-out addition problems or subtraction problems. You know, they're more basic items, and they're just not being tested on that. Two or three multiplication problems on the whole test, but it's, you know, dozens of these graphs and tables.

**PARTICIPANT:** Well, they'll have the answers. Like all the choices, it's sensory overload.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** I look at them and go, "Whoa," you know.

**PARTICIPANT:** To choose from, yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** I think it's just more hope for, you know, continued progress in reading, but in math -- because I teach those, and I've been in reading way longer than in math. However, math, it just seems like -- especially with my special ed kids, there is so much in math new every year and so much time needed to drill, like the old-fashioned just drill, practice 20 of these problems. Whereas, in reading, you know, it's the same concept. You're still talking theme. You're still talking the big idea. You're still talking how to make inferences. You're just doing it for year after year after year, but in math, it is a whole new, you know, kind of dataset. It's a whole new thing every year, and yet [inaudible], but there's always something new to practice. It doesn't seem like there's enough time to really get that math on board. So, to me, it just seems like we have way more hope in reading.

**PARTICIPANT:** We're trying to teach a whole curriculum in, you know -- from September to March. You know what I mean? And it's a whole year that you're trying to teach.

And with the high kids, yeah, you might be able to do it, but what happens to the low kids? They just -- they get lost. They get lost, and they get lost, and they get frustrated, and they get frustrated, and they don't care. Then you've got the motivation. You got to re-motivate them. You know, it's just this whole [inaudible] cycle with the low kids, and I deal with it every day.

**PARTICIPANT:** You know, we talk about [inaudible].

[Simultaneous speaking.]

**PARTICIPANT:** When we get the reports back, they're always like the [inaudible] so many percentages, especially when it's so many percentages -- the minorities, so many percentages.

You know, if we're going to use our day-to-days, I'd like to see, okay, out of the foreign kids, you know, what the [inaudible].

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, I know it.

**PARTICIPANT:** You know, what are the objectives if they're missing, you know, the minorities, what are the objectives if they're missing the special ed, what are the ones that we need zero in, and those are the things that make our day-to-days more worthwhile than looking at the data and saying 11 percent didn't pass.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** And that's how we're doing with our day-to-days really but not looking how are we going to go and master that objective or that, you know, part of the curriculum.

**PARTICIPANT:** Or the time to pull those kids to working [inaudible].

[Simultaneous speaking.]

**PARTICIPANT:** Time to pull them in.

And that, I think, if we look at more like that, then maybe, you know, county-wide, we can also be driven to do more with our data as far as, you know, funding programs after school or whatever.

So I think we can do more with the data than we're doing.

**PARTICIPANT:** We do exactly that, but I am in probably the smallest school population here. I'm at Churchill. We're smaller than [inaudible], but we --

**PARTICIPANT:** Probably about the same.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- [inaudible] get it down to the child at what objectives they need and then what the tutor needs to work with [inaudible].

[Simultaneous speaking.]

**PARTICIPANT:** But the State could be more specific.

**PARTICIPANT:** You're right. It's not based on their data.

**PARTICIPANT:** No.

**PARTICIPANT:** I actually created goal sheets because in my graduate program, we did -- you know, holding the kids accountable, and what happened was that I found that the kids weren't caring. Like they didn't -- if they learned what they needed to brush up on -- I called it the polishing cloth -- then they would be more interested and take accountability.

And what I did was from the Performance Matters, created goal sheets with each standard of each -- what they were missing from third and fourth grade, so that this way, I could meet them from where they were and bring them up. And it make a dramatic improvement.

During independent practice, I would pull those needs groups based on those State standards, and those kids, the confidence level, most of the kids say they hated math at the beginning of the year, and that's their favorite subject now, but the main thing is I talked to performance matters because I -- I took the time to make those goal sheets, but not everybody has that time. And I'm expecting I'm not going to be able to have that time.

So they said that they were working on making some type of a template that you could hit Print and each one of your children's goal sheets will be able to come out, so that this way, you can then have the child accountable, check off when they met with you, the date.

And I have examples of it here. I didn't know if you'd want to see it, but as far as this way, they would be able to then --

**PARTICIPANT:** [Inaudible.]

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, a lot easier.

**PARTICIPANT:** Once again, we're back to curriculum [inaudible].

**PARTICIPANT:** Correct. Mm-hmm. Yep.

**PARTICIPANT:** And time.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yep, exactly.

**LISSITZ:** My focus is really on the HSA, MSA, but the ideas you have, maybe they could be folded into the MSA, HSA reports. I don't know. No promises. I'm just --

**PARTICIPANT:** Well, it's all interconnected. It has to be. It should be included. It's all interconnected.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** You can't look at one and not look at the other.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**LISSITZ:** Let me change to another question. There's some evidence in the survey that suggests that teachers in the lower grades feel that the State testing program is more positive than do teachers in the upper grades. So some evidence that lower grades -- teachers -- I don't want to say "lower grade teachers" -- teachers teaching lower grades are more happy about the State testing than -- than teachers from the upper grades. Does that make any sense to you?

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**LISSITZ:** Tell me why. Help me understand that data.

**PARTICIPANT:** I mean, it makes sense to me because, being in middle school, having taught high school -- I'm middle school. To me, it just seems like this may be simple, but kids in elementary school are wanting to please their teachers, and they're just -- they want to please. They are kids. They want your approval. They want that great score. They want their name on the board. They want the apple next to it. They want all of those things.

In middle school, you know, it doesn't -- you know, credits don't count.

**PARTICIPANT:** But you see that going -- because in sixth grade they do care.

**PARTICIPANT:** They do care.

**PARTICIPANT:** And then seventh grade, it gets less, and in eighth grade, it's like whatever.

**PARTICIPANT:** Well, we'll do it in ninth grade when it really counts. You know what I mean? It's that --

**PARTICIPANT:** Mentality.

**PARTICIPANT:** Well, it's just part of growing up. It's just the whole mentality of it all, and so it -- you know, you can't get them to buy in as easily. I mean, it takes -- it takes a great teacher, and you can, but -- but it's just more difficult. They're not there to please. They'll please, you know, Sally, the cute girl in red sitting next door to them or something.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah. And you also have the fact that the gaps are bigger as you get older, and so, therefore, it becomes more negative.

**PARTICIPANT:** I think at the elementary level, though, it's hard to motivate some kids because we don't see the scores when we have those kids, and so I can't even tell my 22 students, "Wow! You did a great job." I just say, you know, "Do your best. You did a good job taking the test," but I don't see them the next year, not to be able to say, you know, "Congratulations." You can't give them that input because of the time frame of the return of the scores.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah. And I think --

**PARTICIPANT:** It's really hard to -- and they'll say -- kids will raise their hand and say, "Is this going to be on the report card?" And as soon as you say no, well, they're like, "Okay. Well, what's the" -- and then you say, "Well, it's used to decide if you go to enrichment. It's used to decide if you might need interventions of some sort," but that's so far away. Fourth grade is, you know, a million years away when you're sitting there the first week of March. So it's really hard to motivate some students who aren't those ones who -- you know, they don't care. They just -- they look at it and say, "You're not ever going to tell me how I did on this," and --

**PARTICIPANT:** And the fact that they have to wait so long to get the results. Because I can get my students really hyped and ready and like excited about it actually, but then when I have to like "Miss Willie" [ph] -- I mean, this one little girl last year, "Miss Willie, Miss Willie, have you got the scores back, the MSA scores back?" She bugged me every day, you know. She was so hyped up. She wanted those scores, and I'm like, "No, baby. No, baby," you know, "I'll call you over the summer when I can," you know, "as soon as I find out." And so she -- you know, it kind of put -- their excitement -- her excitement kind of waned. You know what I mean? And that's -- you can't. You got to keep that roll. We need those scores back sooner.

**PARTICIPANT:** Is your question popularity of the teachers, though? Was that teacher --

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, it was about teachers.

**PARTICIPANT:** I mean, I think part of it in high school level is that you have -- it's a smaller impact. I mean, there's four subjects that are tested. It's not like there's a lot of other stuff going on in the feeders, to some extent. The HSA kind of messes up your curriculum a little bit. I mean, that's one of the unpopularitys, I think, in the high school level, if that's what you're getting at.

**LISSITZ:** Yeah. Well, I'm not -- I don't know what I'm getting at or the reason.

**PARTICIPANT:** Oh, okay.

**PARTICIPANT:** You also --

**LISSITZ:** But I wanted to focus on how you all as teachers react and do you think other teachers in the earlier grades -- do you agree that they like -- they're more comfortable with their testing.

And what you said has implications for that.

[Simultaneous speaking.]

**PARTICIPANT:** [In progress] a lot of complaining when we're giving MSA.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** Nobody gets their results the year they have the kids. Nobody gets that. So that doesn't change.

I do see a huge difference in -- when the test doesn't count for the high school kids. I mean, that was a major change when they -- they are focused. So, on that other part of your question, they're much more focused because it does count for them.

**PARTICIPANT:** And having that pressure that you have to pass them in order to graduate --

**PARTICIPANT:** Exactly.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- I can't imagine that pressure on the kids and the teachers, and so you're going to have that negative impact because that has a very high accountability.

**PARTICIPANT:** And I think it's a positive on the kids as it is on the teacher.

**PARTICIPANT:** In elementary school, it is -- it does almost seem like it's more, you know, controllable because you've got your set of 30 kids, right, or thereabouts, and so it's easier to track, you know, 30 kids and where their skills are. In middle school, I have 110 kids, not all in special ed, but I see 110 kids through a couple language arts, math. So it's hard to get -- focus in on, you know, just the ones who made -- out of your group of 30, you might know right now five or six, and there's my focus. Well, I'd love to just have five or six and there's my focus is middle school or high school. It's not the same for us. There's just too many out there.

**PARTICIPANT:** And for the high school, I agree with that because last semester, as an example, I had 90 students, and you can't -- granted, I had the upper level students. So I didn't have many special ed kids. I had a few but not many. So I didn't have that much of a worry in terms of them passing, but it was harder to focus them all as a group.

And in terms of the curriculum, why, you know, the upper levels, they're in biology now, and it's like you want to be able to take that time when a kid has a really neat question to be able to say, "Okay. Well, let's go off on that track for -- in a day or two," but you just don't have the time really to do that.

**LISSITZ:** I need to move beyond --

**PARTICIPANT:** When we get content, you don't get to.

**LISSITZ:** I didn't mean to interrupt you.

**PARTICIPANT:** That's okay.

**LISSITZ:** I'm watching the clock on my left. I am watching you all on my right.

Let me change to another question, then. How do you think the State modified testing program has influenced the curriculum? Has it, the Mod program?

**PARTICIPANT:** Well, I know that -- I don't know if I can answer this, but I know that my special educator is concerned that the Mod test does not come in color, that the regular tests are in color, and that's kind of putting her disabled child at a disadvantage because you do learn a lot from color. It is visual. It is a strategy. It is a technique. So I know that that -- they want that, so --

**LISSITZ:** Does it influence the curriculum, though?

**PARTICIPANT:** It's going to influence that kid's test score, so --

**LISSITZ:** No. But I'm trying to focus in on --

**PARTICIPANT:** No, it can't influence the curriculum.

**LISSITZ:** -- curriculum, and then -- and then the next question --

**PARTICIPANT:** But I -- I just felt --

**LISSITZ:** -- following up --

**PARTICIPANT:** -- I had to say that.

**PARTICIPANT:** This dictates more on how we write IEBs. In other words, okay, you know, you just know that you didn't pass it this time. You got to do the Mod. If you didn't pass it that time, you get the Mod-plus. If you didn't do Mod-plus, then you get the bridge. And it's more driven on what test you're taking as opposed to what we're actually going to teach.

**PARTICIPANT:** And all the Mod does [inaudible] exact curriculum, but --

**PARTICIPANT:** Exactly.

**PARTICIPANT:** [Inaudible.] No, the Mod program does not. It does not influence the curriculum at this point.

**PARTICIPANT:** The Alt does, though. The Alt does because then the Alt --

[Simultaneous speaking.]

**PARTICIPANT:** Right. You choose --

**LISSITZ:** You think it does, then?

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, because you choose the indicators that are going to be tested and how it's going to be shown. So that does dictate the curriculum that that child is going to learn.

**PARTICIPANT:** Exactly.

**PARTICIPANT:** But that's an alternative [inaudible].

**PARTICIPANT:** Exactly, I know. I did say "Alt."

**LISSITZ:** I'm interested in the Alt also, though.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** The child that I had with the Mod, it forced me to then when I had to -- when I found out she was going to be responsible for Mod, I had to change, make more adaptations to my assessments and my exiting tickets to make it look like what she would be exposed to for the Mod, and then, additionally, for my three Alt, it was they were moved out of the room instead of being in the room. So the regular to me, it was more a memorization instead of application in the real classroom setting, so --

**PARTICIPANT:** And a Mod, as you say, for bio just takes away [inaudible].

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

[Simultaneous speaking.]

**PARTICIPANT:** And some of the kids that are taught in the year-long classes, they unfortunately probably will never pass the bio HSA, and we could do dances on tables. We could do anything, but they just -- they really, truly struggle with learning, and the Mod has not changed the curriculum, and it hasn't helped them at all.

**PARTICIPANT:** And I told my kids today, I said, "I am so -- I hate the fact that biology is on Monday," because I can't get my year-long kids to remember from day to day or nine o'clock to 10:45, let alone Friday to Monday.

And I told them when we take the HSA, it's out of my hands. I can't give you review time. I said we have to start that thing. We have to time in, time out, and, you know -- and they just -- even that doesn't motivate them. They know they've got Plan B to fall back on, and they just -- that's it.

**PARTICIPANT:** I think what's wrong with the whole Mod thing is -- years ago, when it first came out, it was involved in, you know, the discussion of how it was actually going to look, and it seems like it doesn't look like the discussions that we had years ago. It seems like it is just a question, taken off or shortened up, but what it needs to look like is it needs to have those pneumonics on the side. It needs to have a prompt question. It needs to do those kinds of things as if the teachers were standing there trying to give them those cues or those prompts or those, you know, words on the side or "How do you remember that?" or "What's the little hint?" It's those things that activate their memory into what they are visualizing.

Taking a question away or doing -- that's not getting at what those kids need in order to get that answer to the forefront. So I think the whole part of when we discussed it years ago and what actually exists today isn't meeting those needs of the kids who need those extra new things. That's my biggest problem with that.

**PARTICIPANT:** I would agree.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** I would say too that the Mod test influenced when some of the teachers saw it, they're like -- you know, it influenced them negatively, that the Mod test, "Oh, just take an answer away. That's how I should modify."

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** So that's --

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** And that's horrible.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** Most of them do that.

[Simultaneous speaking.]

**PARTICIPANT:** Framing the answers with things that good modifications are, you know, getting those -- it's none of that --

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- unfortunately. It's just so frustrating to me, and it's none of that.

**PARTICIPANT:** No scaffolding. It's just taking your choice out.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah. Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** And, unfortunately, our students are being tested, at least again HSA -- it's just multiple-choice questions, period.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

[Simultaneous speaking.]

**PARTICIPANT:** So you're not having various types of questioning, and --

[Simultaneous speaking.]

**PARTICIPANT:** Well, from what I understood from the child that I have who took Mod for the first time, because there were no BCRs made a dramatic improvement

because they didn't have to explain their answers, and also the child did have RE-2 [ph], so, but the -- without the BCRs, she did much better, math as well.

**PARTICIPANT:** Really?

**PARTICIPANT:** Yep.

**PARTICIPANT:** I like the math.

**LISSITZ:** How about in terms of the Alternate testing, the same kind of questions? Has the Alt testing changed instruction or the curriculum at all for you?

**PARTICIPANT:** I know for -- for me, having done Alt kids over the years, to me, it really changed the way those -- I instructed or led or guided the instruction through a pair of those kids because before having to link it to an objective, right off the, you know, MSC -- you know, you're trying to just kind of be out there and make up a -- you know, a test and somehow do it maybe outside the classroom or -- but having -- having zeroed in and having, you know, those choices and it's got to be one of these and having to think creatively, I think how can I get this kid to do plant cells, learn plant cells with the abilities that they have or disabilities that they have in a really creative way to show that they know the difference between an animal and a plant cell, for example. That kind of inspired me to get really creative and -- and help not only those kids but may be some other kids who might, you know -- you know, do the same kind of things on -- in neat different ways.

I think for me, it brought the Alt kids a little bit closer to the classroom and could keep them in there, depending on, you know, the skill. To me, I just thought it was really challenging, and it made me be really more creative and how [inaudible]. I liked it.

**PARTICIPANT:** I think it forces you to be very focused as well because you know that you have to demonstrate mastery in some videotape-able or written down way that that child can, indeed, do what you say they were going to be able to do, and so it holds people to a more focused outcome.

**LISSITZ:** We have about four minutes. So I'll hit you with my closing question now. What are some of the positive and negative consequences of State testing as it relates to the MSA, HSA, Alt, Mod, regular testing? What do you think the positive and negative consequences of State testing have been?

**PARTICIPANT:** For the children?

**LISSITZ:** For you, the children.

**PARTICIPANT:** Well, I know a negative for us is our HSA is May 17th. We don't get off until June 15th. So we have to finish -- and a couple of you guys mentioned -- we have to finish our content a month before we get out of school, and now

we've got a month now to play with a little bit, which is nice. That's a positive, but it's also negative that we're really in a time crunch.

For my -- I have two kids who are -- my personal kids who are in elementary school who are not in MSA yet, and their teachers were pulled for two weeks to cover MSA testing. So they had a substitute for two weeks at kindergarten and second grade level. I thought, "Oh, that's great," you know. So a substitute in a kindergarten or second grade class, I don't think is great for two full weeks.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** I think we also feel that there's some underlying thing that is so tied to MSA that we all feel this incredible pressure that we have to perform.

You know, I talked about how we can narrow it down to one child, but God help you if you're the teacher that has that one child, you know. They better move because everybody knows he's been identified, and this is what you were going to do. So I think a negative is that it is we do feel a lot of pressure to perform and to get the kids to perform.

**PARTICIPANT:** And that gets put off onto the children too, which is a very negative thing. So, I mean, like you said, they ask a question, you can't -- "I'm sorry. We have to move on," and I agree with you. It's a time issue. There's so many things you want to do that you can't do. It takes away the flexibility in the classroom.

**PARTICIPANT:** But again, I go back to is it not just being a time issue. It's not the assessment. It's the amount of curriculum that we're trying to assess, and we don't know what's going to be on the assessment.

**PARTICIPANT:** I know. Trying to do everything. Yep.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right. And like you said, May 17th, we have it in March.

**PARTICIPANT:** In March.

**PARTICIPANT:** And it's hard for the third graders too because I think it's a lot of pressure because they haven't seen the test they're taking it for, and then it carries a lot of weight. The county uses this, you know, to drive certain programs and certain things, and, you know, I said to somebody during MSA week because it can get frustrating -- and I have a child in the middle school who finds MSA frustrating. I think, you know, we're here for 180 days, and there's a lot of weight put on four of them.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** And we're doing things those other 176 days that also matter.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yes.

**PARTICIPANT:** I think that -- I think it's good that they have a test. I mean, you need to assess if our kids in the United States can do basic skills. I think that's a good thing, but I think the test and the way it's written and some of the things we test don't necessarily amount to what our society and what our children are doing.

**PARTICIPANT:** It almost appears like it should be. It should be why can't the MSA be given, you know, in quarters, like we give our quarterlies, okay? So you've got the, you know, MSA quarter --

[Laughter.]

**PARTICIPANT:** Do you know how much MSAs cost?

**PARTICIPANT:** We do need to be assessing what they retain, and I think that's the reason we give it once a year.

**PARTICIPANT:** But it should be at the end of the year, not in the middle of the year, not in the beginning of May. It should be at the end of May. That way, we have two weeks at least of trying to make up.

**PARTICIPANT:** We're not using it for that specific group of children anyway.

**PARTICIPANT:** Right.

[Simultaneous speaking.]

**PARTICIPANT:** [In progress] -- data been cramming into their heads for those two weeks before the test that I -- I can tell you now that if I ask my kids the same questions that they had on MSA today --

**PARTICIPANT:** You don't think they'd [inaudible]?

**PARTICIPANT:** No, they wouldn't do nearly as well today because it's like, oh, for two weeks -- because when you're eight years old, I'm sorry, you remember what you did last week, not what you did three months ago because you haven't -- psychologically, you have to be exposed to something like seven to nine times to internalize it. So --

**PARTICIPANT:** I agree.

**PARTICIPANT:** The problem is there's too much curriculum to do that seven to nine times.

**PARTICIPANT:** It's impossible.

**PARTICIPANT:** But then, you know, I guess the question that I really want to ask somebody, especially as we're reading in the paper about the Race to the Top and how we're going to come up with a better test, our evaluation will be tied to the percentage of students that get there. Are we going to go back more to a nationalized standardized test? So, you know, that's --

**PARTICIPANT:** Well, I think along the same -- well, maybe the same lines, I know like with the test, it does make a good thing -- is it does make me take a step back and say what have I done, what can I do better next time. So it does -- does hold me accountable for my teaching, where, you know, in some content areas, you see teachers not really necessarily working to their highest potential, and they're doing okay. They can sit back, and their kids can just keep going along because they don't have this test [inaudible]. So those of us who are teaching it, we are also, in essence, being tested, which is a bad thing and a good thing, because it does make us, I think, stronger, better teachers because of it.

And, you know, I talked to Gail and said, "Hey, what did you do for this?" So we're communicating between teachers to see what effective strategies people are using in certain content areas or in certain topics to help the students learn it. So, I mean, that is a good thing because it is making us be more --

**PARTICIPANT:** Collaborative.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- open, if you will, or transparent as they want us to be as teachers, where before we weren't. We were hidden in our little classroom, doing our own thing, and nobody knew really what we were doing back there, but it shows a little bit on the test, to some degree. To some degree, it doesn't necessarily show.

**PARTICIPANT:** Oh, I think it does show because you can improve.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah. I mean, that's the good thing, that it does make us have to take a step back and say, "Where can I do better as a teacher?"

**PARTICIPANT:** But it also leaves you frustrated because curriculum doesn't always match up. The textbook doesn't support the State curriculum. So then, therefore, the teachers are having to use their own time in order to try and create things in order to make sure that they're hitting the level in which, you know, we are holding the kids accountable.

If we are going to be looking at Federal standards, then we also need to look at textbooks that are written for Federal standards and purchasing books that hit our State curriculum instead of purchasing -- I mean, my physics unit, I had to revamp the whole thing because there's like three -- three objectives out of all of the objectives in there. There isn't any of the objectives for some of the other strands, and I'm looking on the Internet. And I'm wondering what is everybody else doing. You know what I mean?

[Laughter.]

[Simultaneous speaking.]

**PARTICIPANT:** Oh, there will be.

**PARTICIPANT:** For the MSA, are they -- you know, and another negative, though, is that some of the county's best teachers are given the -- continually, year after year, you're given the students who struggle the most.

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** Because they know they are going to work their butts off, and they might still not be successful because --

**PARTICIPANT:** Mm-hmm.

**PARTICIPANT:** -- let's face it, we can do everything we want, but they're not going to pass, and they're not going to show successful scores. So it is frustrating for strong teachers to continually be getting low. They might be changing what they're doing year after year, semester after semester, but they're still having -- struggling with the low students because they are the lowest of the low students that just really need to learn a skill. They need to be learning a skill, so that they can have a future.