

K12 ACADEMICS — STATE EDUCATION SERIES



Maryland Education Guide

A complete profile — schools, testing, graduation, accountability, school choice, teacher certification & financial aid, each in depth.



Find Your Community
2026 EDITION

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Everything about school in Maryland.

This guide profiles **Maryland's** education system in seven parts, each a two-page deep dive with the key facts, plain-English explanations, and a link to the full, regularly-updated guide online. From K12 Academics, the world's largest education resource, online since 2004.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Education Overview · State Testing · Graduation Requirements · Accountability & Report Cards · School Choice · Teacher Certification · Financial Aid

SEARCH 200+ DIRECTORIES

K-12 Schools · Colleges & Universities · Vendors · Summer Programs · International Programs · Performers

Education Overview

EDUCATION IN MARYLAND

Maryland educates roughly 870,000 public K–12 students in an unusually simple structure: exactly 24 school systems — one for each of the state's 23 counties, plus Baltimore City — overseen by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and the State Board. The largest systems, Montgomery County and Prince George's County, are...

WHO MUST ATTEND SCHOOL

- ✓ **Start age** — 5 (by September 1)
- ✓ **End of compulsory age** — 18
- ✓ **Systems** — 24 (one per county + Baltimore City)
- ✓ **Satisfying it** — Public, nonpublic, or home instruction

PRE-K & THE BLUEPRINT

Expanding early childhood education is Pillar One of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. Maryland is scaling up full-day prekindergarten for 3- and 4-year-olds — prioritizing children from families with incomes up to 300% of the federal poverty level — with a growing role for approved private and community providers (which must meet...

HOMESCHOOLING IN MARYLAND

- ✓ **Supervised by the local school system** — Notify your county school system, then have the district review a portfolio of your child's work twice a year (at the end of each semester) to...
- ✓ **Supervised by an approved umbrella** — Homeschool under a state-approved nonpublic school or organization (such as a church or private-school "umbrella"), which supervises your program...

AT A GLANCE

Compulsory	Ages 5–18
Systems	24 counties
Testing	MCAP
Diploma	21 cr + service
Choice	BOOST / limited

THE 24 SYSTEMS & CHARTERS

Maryland's 24 county-and-city school systems range from very large suburban districts to small rural ones. The largest are Montgomery County Public Schools and Prince George's County Public Schools (both among the nation's largest), followed by Baltimore County , Anne Arundel , Baltimore City , and Howard County . A notable feature...

PRIVATE & INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN MARYLAND

- ✓ **Independent schools** — Nonprofit, board-governed schools such as Gilman School , McDonogh, Bryn Mawr, and the Park School (Baltimore), and Landon, Holton-Arms, and Bullis...
- ✓ **Catholic & parochial schools** — A large network across the Archdiocese of Baltimore (the nation's oldest) and the Archdiocese of Washington — including Loyola Blakefield, Calvert...
- ✓ **Other religious schools** — Quaker (Friends), Jewish, Christian, and other faith-based schools
- ✓ **Specialty schools** — Montessori, Waldorf, and schools for specific learning needs

READ MARYLAND'S FULL EDUCATION OVERVIEW GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



State Testing

WHAT YOUR STATE TESTS

Maryland uses the MCAP (Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program) — ELA and math in grades 3–8, the MISA science test, and high-school assessments. It evolved from the older PARCC/HSA tests and is run by the Maryland State Department of Education.

WHICH TESTS, WHICH GRADES

- ✓ **MCAP ELA & Math** — English language arts and mathematics in grades 3–8
- ✓ **MISA (Science)** — Maryland Integrated Science Assessment in grades 5, 8, and once in high school
- ✓ **High-school MCAP** — Algebra I, English 10, and a Government assessment
- ✓ **Alt-MCAP** — Alternate assessment for eligible students

FORMAT & SUBJECTS

MCAP is online with multiple-choice and constructed-response items. High-school MCAPs are subject/course assessments.

IS PASSING REQUIRED TO GRADUATE?

Maryland requires students to take the high-school MCAP assessments (Algebra I, English 10, Government), and results are used within the graduation framework; students who don't meet the standard have additional options. Districts also set credit requirements — confirm the current policy with your school.



AT A GLANCE

System	MCAP
Grades 3–8	ELA & Math
Science	MISA gr 5, 8, HS
High school	Algebra I, English 10, Governmen...
Grad requirement?	Take HS MCAP tests
Format	Online

HOW IT'S SCORED

MCAP reports performance levels; the high-school assessments report whether students meet the college-and-career-ready standard.

TESTING WINDOWS

MCAP is given in a spring window (with additional high-school windows tied to courses).

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Practice tests & released items** — MSDE provides practice tests matching the online format
- ✓ **Course-aligned review** — The Algebra I, English 10, and Government tests follow those courses

PARTICIPATION & OPTING OUT

Students in tested grades and courses participate. Ask your district about make-up windows.

READ MARYLAND'S FULL STATE TESTING GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Graduation Requirements

AT A GLANCE

Maryland requires a state minimum of 21 credits , participation in state MCAP assessments , and a distinctive student service-learning requirement. Districts (Maryland has 24) often require more.

CREDIT & COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Maryland's 21-credit minimum includes 4 English, 3 math (including algebra and geometry content), 3 science, 3 social studies, 1 fine arts, 1 PE, 0.5 health, 1 technology education, and electives (with a world-language or advanced-tech/CTE requirement). Districts set higher totals.

TESTING TO GRADUATE

Students take the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) tests. Historically Maryland has required students to take (and meet a standard or use a Bridge/alternative for) these assessments — the exact rules have been in transition, so confirm the current requirement with your district.

DIPLOMA TYPES & HONORS

Maryland issues a standard diploma, with the Seal of Biliteracy and honors options available.



AT A GLANCE

Credits	21 (state minimum)
Assessments	MCAP (take; alternatives if not...
Distinctive	75 hours of service-learning
Districts	Often require more
Confirm with	Your district

ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS

A Bridge Plan / alternative lets students who don't meet an assessment standard demonstrate proficiency another way.

OTHER REQUIREMENTS

Maryland famously requires 75 hours of student service-learning (community service) to graduate — a distinctive statewide requirement. Confirm how your district structures it.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **How many credits does Maryland require?** — The state sets a minimum, but your district may require more — confirm locally.
- ✓ **Does Maryland require a test to graduate?** — Students take MCAP assessments; requirements have been transitioning — plus 75 hours of service-learning are required.
- ✓ **Are there different diploma types?** — Yes — plus honors designations and seals; see the diplomas section.
- ✓ **What if my student is behind on credits?** — Talk to the counselor about credit recovery and alternative pathways.
- ✓ **Where do I confirm the exact requirements?** — Your school counselor, district, and the state department of education.

READ MARYLAND'S FULL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Accountability & Report Cards

AT A GLANCE

Maryland rates schools with star ratings (from 1 to 5 stars) on the Maryland School Report Card , based on a points system across multiple measures.

HOW THIS STATE RATES SCHOOLS

Maryland calculates a percentage of possible points across academic achievement, growth, English-learner progress, graduation, and school quality/student success (like attendance, access to a well-rounded curriculum, and school climate), then converts it to a star rating (1–5) . More stars mean stronger performance.

WHAT GETS MEASURED

- ✓ **Academic achievement** — How students score on state tests (proficiency in reading/ELA and math)
- ✓ **Academic growth / progress** — How much students improve year to year — not just where they land
- ✓ **Graduation rate** — For high schools (the 4-year cohort rate)
- ✓ **English-learner progress** — How English learners are progressing toward proficiency
- ✓ **School quality / student success** — An extra indicator — often attendance/chronic absenteeism, college/career readiness, or similar

FINDING & READING THE REPORT CARD

Look up any school on the Maryland School Report Card (reportcard.msde.maryland.gov) . Review the points breakdown (especially growth and school-quality measures) and the trend, not just the stars.



AT A GLANCE

Format	Star ratings (1–5)
Based on	A points/percentile system
Tool	Maryland School Report Card
Look up at	reportcard.msde.maryland.gov

HOW FAMILIES SHOULD USE RATINGS

- ✓ **Read it in context** — A school's score reflects its students' circumstances too, not only its quality
- ✓ **Look at growth, not just scores** — Growth shows how much a school moves students — often more telling than raw proficiency
- ✓ **Check the trend** — Is the school improving over time?
- ✓ **Look past the summary** — Dig into the underlying data (subgroups, attendance, readiness)
- ✓ **Then visit** — Data raises questions; a visit answers them (see our guide on evaluating a school)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **How does Maryland rate schools?** — Maryland assigns star ratings (1–5) based on a points system across several measures.
- ✓ **What do the ratings measure?** — Test scores, growth, graduation rate, English-learner progress, and a school-quality indicator.
- ✓ **Where do I look up my school?** — On the state's official report-card portal (see below).
- ✓ **Should I choose a school by its rating alone?** — No — use it as a starting point, weigh growth and context, and visit.
- ✓ **What are CSI and TSI?** — Federal labels for schools flagged for Comprehensive or Targeted Support and Improvement.

READ MARYLAND'S FULL ACCOUNTABILITY & REPORT CARDS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



School Choice

AT A GLANCE

Maryland has the BOOST program (Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today) — a scholarship/voucher for low-income students to attend participating private schools — plus a public charter sector.

THIS STATE'S CHOICE PROGRAMS

BOOST provides scholarships to income-eligible students (generally those eligible for free/reduced-price meals) to help pay private-school tuition. It is income-limited (not universal), with funding set by the state budget. Maryland does not currently have a broad ESA or universal voucher.

ELIGIBILITY

BOOST is for lower-income students (typically free/reduced-price-meal eligible), with priority for continuing students. Confirm current income limits and priorities.

APPLYING

Apply through the Maryland State Department of Education's BOOST program. Watch the application window and confirm requirements.



AT A GLANCE

Program	BOOST scholarship
Type	Voucher/scholarship (Income-liml...
For	Lower-income students
Plus	Public charters
Confirm with	The state program

PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE, TOO

- ✓ **Open enrollment / transfers** — Attend a public school outside your zone, where allowed (see our finding-your-school guide)
- ✓ **Charter schools** — Tuition-free public schools of choice (where available)
- ✓ **Magnet schools** — Tuition-free public schools with a specialized focus
- ✓ **Homeschooling** — Legal in all 50 states (rules vary)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **Does Maryland have a private-school-choice program?** — Yes (limited) — Maryland has the BOOST scholarship for lower-income students.
- ✓ **What's the difference between an ESA and a voucher?** — A voucher pays a private school directly; an ESA is a flexible parent-managed account for many approved expenses.
- ✓ **What is a tax-credit scholarship?** — Donors get a tax credit for giving to organizations that fund private-school scholarships.
- ✓ **Is there public school choice too?** — Yes — open enrollment, charters, and magnets (plus homeschooling).
- ✓ **Where do I confirm the details?** — On the official state program site (see below).

READ MARYLAND'S FULL SCHOOL CHOICE GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Teacher Certification

HOW LICENSURE WORKS HERE

Maryland certifies teachers through the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) . You complete an approved program, pass the required Praxis exams, and earn a Standard Professional Certificate .

WHICH TESTS THIS STATE USES

- ✓ **Praxis Core** — Basic skills — or satisfied with qualifying SAT/ACT/GRE scores
- ✓ **Praxis Subject Assessments** — Content test(s) for your certification area
- ✓ **Reading** — Reading-instruction requirements apply for elementary/reading/special-education candidates
- ✓ **Note** — A teaching performance component may apply through your program — confirm current requirements

WHAT YOU NEED TO GET LICENSED

- ✓ **A bachelor's degree** — From an accredited college or university
- ✓ **A state-approved teacher-preparation program** — Completed at a college or through an approved alternative route
- ✓ **Student teaching / clinical practice** — Supervised classroom experience
- ✓ **Pass the required exams** — See the exams section above
- ✓ **A background check** — Fingerprint-based criminal background check
- ✓ **Apply to the state** — Submit your application and documents to the licensing agency



AT A GLANCE

Agency	Maryland State Dept. of Educatio...
Basic skills	Praxis Core (or qualifying score...
Content	Praxis Subject Assessments
Certificate	Standard Professional

OTHER PATHS INTO TEACHING

Most states offer alternative routes for career-changers and those with a degree in another field. In Maryland, these typically let you start teaching while completing licensure requirements — through district or university alternative-certification programs, residencies, or emergency/provisional permits. Requirements (and the exams) are...

RECIPROCITY & OUT-OF-STATE LICENSES

- ✓ **Interstate agreements** — Most states participate in the NASDTEC Interstate Agreement, which eases (but doesn't guarantee) recognition of an out-of-state license
- ✓ **You may still owe exams** — States often require you to meet their own testing (or coursework) requirements, sometimes within a grace period
- ✓ **Check both states** — Confirm the specific steps with Marylands agency and your current state

READ MARYLAND'S FULL TEACHER CERTIFICATION GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Financial Aid

THE STATE AID PICTURE

Maryland administers state aid through the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) , including need-based grants, a near-free community-college program, and scholarships awarded through state legislators.

NEED-BASED STATE GRANTS

- ✓ **Howard P. Rawlings Guaranteed Access (GA) Grant** — A large need-based grant for the highest-need Maryland students meeting income and GPA requirements.
- ✓ **Howard P. Rawlings Educational Assistance (EA) Grant** — A broader need-based grant for Maryland residents.
- ✓ **Senatorial & Delegate Scholarships** — Awarded through Maryland state legislators — apply via your senator/delegate.

PROMISE & FREE-COLLEGE PROGRAMS

The Maryland Community College Promise Scholarship is a last-dollar award that can make community college tuition-free for eligible residents in approved programs.

COLLEGE SAVINGS (529 PLAN)

Maryland's Maryland 529 plan offers a state income tax deduction for contributions.

DEADLINES & TIMING

State deadlines are typically much earlier than the federal FAFSA deadline , and some aid is first-come, first-served until funds run out. File the FAFSA as soon as it opens (in the fall) and confirm the state's specific priority date.

AT A GLANCE

Need-based	Rawlings GA & EA Grants
Community college	MD Community College Promise
Legislative	Senatorial & Delegate Scholarshl...
529 plan	Maryland 529
Agency	MHEC

APPLYING & THE STATE AGENCY

- ✓ **File the FAFSA early** — It's the trigger for state grants and many scholarships
- ✓ **Register with Maryland Higher Education Commission** — Create the state agency's student account to track and claim awards
- ✓ **Confirm your details** — Verify residency, GPA, and enrollment as required
- ✓ **Meet any extra requirements** — Some programs need a separate form, GPA, or service commitment
- ✓ **Reapply every year** — State aid is awarded annually

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **How do I get Maryland state aid?** — File the FAFSA (and any state form) by the deadline; Maryland Higher Education Commission administers the programs.
- ✓ **Is it need-based or merit?** — Both — Maryland offers need-based grants and merit scholarships.
- ✓ **Are the deadlines earlier than federal?** — Usually yes — file early, as some aid is first-come.
- ✓ **Can I use it out of state?** — Most Maryland aid is for in-state schools; check each program.
- ✓ **Does this list private scholarships?** — No — this guide covers official state programs only.

READ MARYLAND'S FULL FINANCIAL AID GUIDE
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