Getting Ready for the Future

A good education prepares students for life after high school—whether that is college, job training, or immediate entry into the workforce. Part of a good education is challenging students to do their best work. High standards help students learn more and develop confidence in their abilities, two things that are critical to future success.

High Standards for All

It's important to remember that high standards are necessary for all students—not just high-achieving, college-bound students. Every student needs to have strong skills if he or she is to earn a decent living in the 21st century. Whether they want to be restaurant managers, lawyers, engineers, auto mechanics, or dress designers, students will need strong skills—to read, to do math, to communicate, and to solve problems.

Students content to just get by in school—doing the minimum amount of work required to pass—could find themselves struggling to get by in life after school. Maryland wants to make sure its graduates are well prepared for the future. That’s why Maryland requires all students to pass the Maryland High School Assessments to graduate. This requirement begins with students who entered ninth grade in or after 2005.

Realistic Performance Goals

The High School Assessments are end-of-course tests in English, algebra, biology, and government. While the HSAs are more challenging than the old Maryland Functional Tests, they are still minimum skills tests. The HSAs are not college-level or even college-prep tests. For the most part, they are tenth-grade-level tests.

To learn more about the HSAs, visit www.HSAexam.org or call 1-877-HSA-EXAM.
Good News: Students Are Meeting the Challenge Now

The HSA graduation requirement doesn’t take effect until 2009, but thousands of students have already taken and passed the tests. In fact, 71% of ninth-graders have already met the HSA requirement in algebra; 80% have met it in biology; and 78% have met it in government.

In just one year, HSA scores have jumped dramatically. The pass rate for government improved from 66% in 2005 to 74% in 2006; for biology, from 58% to 68%; and for algebra/data analysis from 54% to 67%. These results include middle-schoolers and ninth-graders who must pass the HSAs to graduate, as well as older students who did not need a passing score for a diploma.

Extra Help for Students Who Need It

If a student does not pass an HSA, the school will provide him or her extra help, and the State provides online courses and curricular tools for teachers to use to support learning. After receiving the extra help and practice, the student can retake the test. The HSAs are given three times each year.

Students who do not pass a test but earn a minimum score can still graduate if they earn a combined HSA score of 1602. This allows students to offset lower performance on one test with higher performance on another test.

A Final Review in 2008

In 2008—one year before the HSA graduation requirement takes effect—the State Board will review the HSA scores, pass rates, and other data to ensure that the requirement is still a positive step toward strengthening the High School Diploma, and not an unfair hindrance to graduation.

Testing Content and Skills That Matter

The HSAs are a mix of multiple-choice questions and questions that require a written answer. The questions test the content found in the Maryland Core Learning Goals. All Maryland public high schools—and any elementary or middle schools offering high-school-level courses—are required to teach a curriculum that includes the Maryland Core Learning Goals. See the chart on the next page for a breakout of the areas tested within each HSA subject.

Higher achievement now makes a higher income possible later

By 2012, Maryland will see a 23% increase in well-paying jobs, such as computer engineers, nurses, and teachers. The more students learn in high school, the more career options they will have in life.

Sample Question: Algebra/Data Analysis

A student at West High School conducted a random survey of 200 tenth-grade students to determine their favorite season. The survey results are shown in the table below.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>TENTH-GRADE STUDENTS’ FAVORITE SEASON</th>
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<tr>
<td>Season</td>
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Reality Check: In real life, Americans read and interpret data every day—even if it’s just the factoids on CNN or the infographics in USA Today.