

Maryland Classroom

A Publication from the Maryland State Department of Education

Maryland High School Assessments & Your Students

In 2004, the State Board of Education ruled that, beginning with the class of 2009, public school students must pass the High School Assessments (HSA) to graduate. The following questions and answers explain the testing program and contain updated information on scoring and alternative testing options.

What are the Maryland High School Assessments?

The HSA are four tests—one each in algebra/data analysis, biology, government, and English.¹ The assessments contain both selected- and constructed-response questions and cover about 60% of a course's content. Each HSA takes around three-and-a-half hours to complete (including a short break mid-way through the exam). To see sample tests, visit www.MarylandPublicSchools.org and click on Testing/High School Assessment.

Do students have to pass the HSA to graduate?

Students graduating in or after 2009

Yes. Students graduating from high school in or after 2009 have to pass the HSA to graduate.

There are two ways to do this:

- Pass all four HSA. The passing scores are: algebra/data analysis, 412; government, 394; biology, 400; and English, 396.²
- OR
- Earn a minimum score on each test (see Table 1) and a combined score of at least 1602—the total of the four passing scores. This combined-score option allows students to offset lower performance on one test with higher performance on another.

Table 1

		Passing Score	Minimum Score
High School Assessments	Algebra/Data Analysis	412	402
	Biology	400	391
	Government	394	387
	English	396	386

Even if students are using the Minimum Score option, their combined score must be 1602 or higher.

Students will also be allowed to substitute passing scores on state-approved tests for passing scores on the HSA. The state has not selected acceptable substitute tests yet, but possibilities include the Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate exams.

Students graduating before 2009

No. Students graduating from high school before 2009 do not have to pass the HSA to graduate. They do, however, have to take the tests.

All students must meet the state's credit, service-learning, and attendance requirements as well as all the requirements imposed by your school system.



Do middle school students taking high-school-level courses have to pass the HSA?

Yes. Students take each HSA as they complete the course. If a child is in middle school but taking a high-school-level course (which happens most frequently with algebra), he or she will have to pass the appropriate HSA to graduate. Of course, the earlier a student takes an HSA, the more opportunities he or she has to pass it.

Do students transferring into Maryland schools have to pass the HSA?

There are two scenarios under which students transferring into a Maryland public school may be exempted from one or more HSA: 1) If the transferring student has already earned high school credit for an HSA-tested subject and the school system accepts those credits, he or she doesn't have to take the corresponding HSA. 2) If the transferring student has taken an HSA-tested subject elsewhere, and the school doesn't award credit for it but does place the student in the next sequential course, he or she doesn't have to take the corresponding HSA (e.g., a student placed in geometry upon transfer wouldn't have to take the algebra HSA).

How are the HSA scored and when are scores released?

The selected-response items are scored by machine, and each constructed-response item by at least two trained scorers. However, MSDE is studying new technology that allows for the electronic scoring of constructed-response items as well, and hopes to use it once it's proven reliable—likely within two years. Studies suggest that the new technology could eventually decrease scoring time by several weeks.

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¹ The English HSA, first administered in May 2005, is a 10th-grade-level test. It replaces the English I HSA, which students typically took in 9th grade.

² The highest possible scale score on each test is 650; the lowest is 240. For more information on how passing scores were set, see *Maryland Classroom*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (October 2003), available on www.MarylandPublicSchools.org under News Room/Publications.

www.MarylandPublicSchools.org



open

up this newsletter for a poster
showing Maryland's high school graduation requirements

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As it stands now, scoring takes about nine weeks. Once scored, the state sends students' scores to their school system, which, in turn, sends them to schools and to parents. State, school system, and school scores are posted on the Web at www.MdReportCard.org.

Can the HSA identify passing and letter-grade performance?

No. Because passing the HSA is a graduation requirement, it's critical that the tests produce the most valid and reliable information at the passing standard—which means most of the questions must be set at the difficulty level of that standard. A test designed to identify both passing and letter-grade performance would take students much more time to complete and MSDE more time to score.

Does MSDE generate scores for specific content within each subject?

Yes. MSDE began producing subtest scores ("subscores") in 2004. Subscores are a breakdown of student performance on different test sections (see Table 2). State and school system subscores are available at www.MDk12.org/data/hsa/index.asp. (Go to Analyze Data/How did students perform on specific content standards?) Students' subscores are sent to school systems and should be made available to parents upon request.

In general, scores based on many test questions are more informative than scores based on fewer questions. That means HSA subscores at the student level are less useful than those at the state or school system level. Therefore, a good analysis of a student's attainment of specific standards will include his or her performance on quizzes, unit tests, classwork, and homework.

Table 2

High School Assessment Subtests	
English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading and Literature: Comprehension and Interpretation • Reading and Literature: Making Connections and Evaluation • Writing: Composing • Language Usage and Conventions
Biology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills and Processes of Biology • Structure and Function of Biological Molecules • Structure and Function of Cells and Organisms • Inheritance of Traits • Mechanism of Evolutionary Change • Interdependence of Organisms in the Biosphere
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S. Government Structure, Function, and Principles • Systems of Government and U.S. Foreign Policy • Protecting Rights and Maintaining Order • Impact of Geography on Governmental Policy • Economic Principles, Institutions, and Processes
Algebra/Data Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyzing Patterns and Functions • Modeling Real-World Situations • Collecting, Organizing, and Analyzing Data • Using Data to Make Predictions

What if a student fails a test?

Students needing to retake a failed HSA can do so three times a year—during regular test administrations in January, May, and summer. Students may retake failed tests as many times as they need to pass them.

What if students are absent during testing?

Students absent during regular HSA testing must take the test on one of the scheduled make-up days. The make-up schedule is set at the same time as the regular testing schedule.

Are there any other testing options for students who may not be able to pass the HSA?

Yes. MSDE is working on different assessments for students with disabilities and others who may not be able to pass the HSA.

Alt-MSA: Students with significant cognitive disabilities who are unable to participate in regular testing take the Alternate Maryland School Assessment—or Alt-MSA—which has been administered since 2003. The Alt-MSA is tailored to each student's unique instructional needs, and students taking the test earn a Certificate of Program Completion instead of a high school diploma.

Mod-HSA: In May 2004, the U.S. Department of Education gave states permission to develop modified tests for a small number of students with disabilities who are able to make progress toward grade-level standards but not in the same timeframe as other students. The Modified HSA—or Mod-HSA—will be based on a modified version of the voluntary state curriculum (VSC). The Mod-HSA for algebra/data analysis and English should be available by spring 2007. Modified assessments for biology and government will follow. Students passing the Mod-HSA will be eligible to earn a high school diploma.

Comp-HSA: In fall 2004, a task force began exploring how the state might provide assessments for students—with and without disabilities—who have difficulty on traditional tests. While the Comparable HSA—or Comp-HSA—will be administered differently than the regular HSA, both assessments will be based on the VSC. The task force is still determining what the Comp-HSA will look like and which students will be eligible to take it. Recommendations should be issued by fall 2007. Students passing the Comp-HSA will be eligible to earn a high school diploma.

All students with disabilities—regardless of the test they take—are entitled to the same accommodations on assessments are provided during daily instruction and prescribed in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

If you have specific questions about a student's participation or accommodations on state tests, consult his or her IEP team.

How is the state helping students and teachers prepare for the HSA?

Online mini-tests MSDE is developing several online mini-tests that schools can use to identify students who need extra help in each tested subject. Teachers can then provide that help to students who need it—before they fail an HSA.

Online Courses The state is also developing online courses that you can use with students as an intervention strategy, or that students may take themselves to review tested material. Courses in algebra and government are online now, biology is slated for fall 2006, and the English course will follow. For more information on accessing and using Maryland's online courses, see *Maryland Classroom*, fall 2005, available at www.MarylandPublicSchools.org under News Room/Publications.

Maryland Governor's Academy MSDE has revamped the Governor's Academy for Teachers of Science and Mathematics to focus on all four HSA-tested subjects. Content teams and coaches participating in the eight-day, regional academies study course content, pedagogy, and related technology. Follow-up sessions reinforce the material covered in the summer academies and evaluate its use in the classroom. Download an application for the summer 2007 academies (to be posted next January on www.MarylandPublicSchools.org; click on Teachers & Principals) or ask your principal about participating.³

Public Release Test Forms Every year, MSDE releases one test form for each HSA. (Go to www.MarylandPublicSchools.org and click on Testing/High School Assessment.) There are now six test forms per subject on the site, along with answer keys.⁴ Users can take sample tests online, practice scoring written-response items, and link each test item to the Core Learning Goal, Expectation, and Indicator it measures. ■

³ The English, biology, and government academies are open to high school teachers. The algebra academy is open to middle and high school teachers.

⁴ Given the 2005 switch from a 9th-grade to a 10th-grade English assessment, the first English test form will be posted following the January 2006 HSA administration.

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Maryland Graduation Requirements

Class of 2009 & Beyond

Math: 3 credits

- 1 in algebra/data analysis
- 1 in geometry



English: 4 credits



Social Studies: 3 credits

- 1 in U.S. history
- 1 in world history
- 1 in local, state, and national government



High School Assessments:

- take the HSA in English, algebra, biology, and government and
- pass all four tests or
- earn a minimum score on each test and a combined score of at least 1602 or
- earn a passing score on approved substitute tests



Science: 3 credits

- 1 in biology
- 2 with laboratory experience in earth, life, or physical science

Maryland High School Diploma

Technology Education: 1 credit



Health: 1/2 credit

Fine Arts: 1 credit



Local Requirements:

- meet all graduation requirements imposed by your school district

Other:

- 2 credits in foreign language or
 - 2 credits in advanced technology education and
 - 3 credits in electives
- or
- 4 credits in a career & technology program and
 - 1 credit in an elective

Physical Education: 1/2 credit



Service Learning:

- complete 75 hours of student service or
- complete a locally designed program in student service approved by the State