



Nancy S. Grasmick  
State Superintendent of Schools

200 West Baltimore Street, Baltimore, MD 21201 410-767-0100 410-333-6442 TTY/TDD

**To:** Parents, community groups  
**From:** Nancy S. Grasmick  
State Superintendent of Schools  
**cc:** Local Superintendents of Schools, Local Assistant Superintendents of Instruction,  
Local Public Information Officers, Local Accountability Coordinators  
**Date:** February 25, 2004  
**Subject:** Status Update on the New Diploma Proposal

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**What is the status of Maryland's new proposal to link the High School Assessments to the Maryland High School Diploma?**

At its February 24 meeting, the Maryland State Board of Education approved for publication in the *Maryland Register* a new proposal for tying students' performance on the High School Assessments (HSA) to the Maryland High School Diploma, beginning with students entering grade nine in the fall of 2005. Publishing the proposal will initiate a public comment period and public hearings where citizens can offer feedback. If we need to make significant changes to the proposal as a result of the comments we receive, we will withdraw and rewrite it and resubmit it to the State Board with the changes. The Board would then republish it and again seek public comment. The earliest that the Board could enact the proposal would be June 2004.

**Tentative Timeline**

Maryland Register Issue Date:	April 16, 2004
Hearing:	May 25-26
30 Day Open Comment Period Ends:	May 25, 2004
State Board Vote to Adopt:	June 15-16

**What did Maryland's original diploma proposal provide for?**

The original proposal presented to the State Board in December 2003 included a tiered diploma system based on students' HSA performance. This proposal was designed to encourage discussion about how the decade-old High School Assessment program should be tied to graduation. Since then, my staff and I have met with more than 30 community and professional groups to hear their comments on the initial proposal and

their ideas on how it might be changed. By and large, the groups we talked to did not support offering students different kinds of diplomas based on their HSA performance and suggested some alternate ideas. Considering all of the input from the many Marylanders who engaged in discussions with us, we significantly revised the proposal.

### **How is the new diploma proposal different?**

The new proposal again suggests tying the High School Assessments to the Maryland High School diploma beginning with students entering ninth grade in the fall of 2005, however, there are significant improvements over the December proposal. We are first suggesting a single Maryland High School Diploma that should be the goal for all students enrolled in school. The proposal also outlines how some students with an Individualized Education Program could attain a Certificate of Program Completion. The proposal also provides high school completion routes for students no longer in high school who are in GED and External High School programs. The attached chart, "Proposed Maryland High School Completion Policy," summarizes the new proposal.

### **If the State Board agrees in June to enact changes in the graduation requirements, how will the Maryland State Department of Education monitor the effects of the changes?**

**The new proposal calls for us to closely examine the results of the High School Assessments in 2008**—one year before the high school graduating class of 2009 enters their senior year. This will provide the State Board of Education with a close look at the passing rates on the tests and estimates of the number of students who would graduate on time under the new requirements. Because the High School Assessments are generally ninth-grade tests, most students will have up to ten times to retake any tests they fail to pass the first time. When the State Board examines the testing results and passing rates in 2008, they may find that adjustments to the requirements may be necessary. We will particularly monitor the progress of students receiving special education services who are seeking the Maryland High School diploma to ensure that they are making satisfactory progress.

### **According to the new proposal, exactly how would a student earn a Maryland High School Diploma, Certificate of Program Completion, or Diploma by Examination?**

Below and on the accompanying chart, you'll find an overview of the proposed requirements for earning: 1) a Maryland High School Diploma; 2) a Certificate of Program Completion; and 3) a Diploma by Examination.

#### **1) Maryland High School Diploma**

For high school students who complete state and local graduation credit and program requirements and who achieve one of the two options below:

- **Passing Score Option:** Students take and pass all four HSA (English I, Algebra/Data Analysis, Government, and Biology).
  - Students may substitute passing scores on one or more state-approved substitute assessments (for example, Advanced Placement, SAT II, International Baccalaureate) for a passing score on an HSA. (A committee would be established to identify acceptable substitute assessments and passing scores.)
- **Combined Score Option:** Students take all four HSA (English I, Algebra/ Data Analysis, Government, and Biology), earn a minimum score on each test, and earn an overall combined score.
  - The minimum score for each HSA will be established by the State Department of Education and will be a score below the passing score. The proposed combined score is equal to the total of the four HSA passing scores adopted by the State Board in August 2003.
  - The combined score option permits students who score very well on some tests to compensate for lower scores on other tests.

## 2) Certificate of Program Completion

For high school students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) who complete the requirements of their IEP and whose IEPs indicate their eligibility for the Certificate.

- Students working toward the High School Certificate of Program Completion will be required to take only those assessments outlined in their IEPs. These assessments may include the Alt-MSA and/or the High School Assessments.

## 3) Diploma by Examination

For citizens not enrolled in high school.

- Non-enrolled citizens may earn a Diploma by Examination either by passing the GED Test or completing the Maryland Adult External Diploma Program.

### Whom should I contact to offer my comments on the proposal?

I'm eager to hear your comments on the new proposal. If you want more information on the High School Assessments, you can visit the Maryland State Department of Education Web site at [www.marylandpublicschools.org](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org).

If you wish to share your ideas and thoughts with us, email us at [hsafeedback@msde.state.md.us](mailto:hsafeedback@msde.state.md.us). Please feel free to extend this invitation for comment to others in your area. We look forward to hearing from you. More information will follow on how to comment to the State Board as we work for a graduation plan that will benefit all children.

NSG:rp

Attachment—Proposed Maryland High School Completion Policy

## Proposed Maryland High School Completion Policy (beginning with students entering ninth grade in fall 2005)

	Maryland High School Diploma <sup>1</sup>	Certificate of Program Completion <sup>2</sup>	Diploma by Examination	
Students Eligible	All students enrolled in high school	Students with an IEP who have significant disabilities and who are enrolled in high school	Students not enrolled in high school	Students not enrolled in high school
Required Assessment	<p><b>NCLB Tests</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take the Geometry and Grade 10 Reading tests.</li> </ul> <p><b>HSA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Passing Score Option</u>: Take and pass all four HSA. (Students will have multiple opportunities for appropriate assistance and retesting.)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Substitute Assessments</u>: Students may substitute a passing score on one or more approved substitute assessments (e.g., Advanced Placement, SATII) for a passing score on an HSA.</li> </ul> </li> <li><u>Combined Score Option</u>: Take all four HSA and earn the minimum<sup>3</sup> score for each test <b>and</b> earn the combined<sup>4</sup> score. (Students will have multiple opportunities for appropriate assistance and retesting.)</li> </ul> <p><b>Note: Assessment results will be reviewed in 2008 to determine if changes in graduation requirements are necessary.</b></p>	<p><b>NCLB Tests</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take the Alt-MSA.</li> </ul> <p><b>HSA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May take HSA, depending on IEP determination</li> <li>Passing is not required.</li> </ul>	Take and pass all 5 national GED tests.	Take and pass the national competency-based, applied performance assessment for the External High School Program.
Other Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete state credit and service-learning requirements<sup>5</sup></li> <li>Attend school for four years past the eighth grade.</li> <li>Complete any local graduation requirements.</li> <li>Participate in intervention/appropriate assistance programs before retaking a failed HSA.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The IEP Team determines the student is eligible for the Certificate.</li> <li>Attend school for four years past the eighth grade.</li> <li>Complete all IEP requirements.</li> <li>An Exit Document that cites the student's skills will accompany the Certificate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Age 16</li> <li>Withdrawn from school for at least 3 months</li> <li>MD resident</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Age 18</li> <li>Withdrawn from school for at least 3 months</li> </ul>

HSA = Maryland High School Assessments (English, Algebra/Data Analysis, Government, Biology)

IEP = Individualized Education Program

<sup>1</sup> Assessment results will be reviewed in 2008 to determine if changes in graduation requirements are necessary.

<sup>2</sup> Only a small number of students with significant disabilities will pursue the Certificate of Program Completion. Eligibility for the Certificate is determined through the IEP process.

<sup>3</sup> The minimum score is an acceptable score established by the Department that is below the passing score for an HSA.

<sup>4</sup> The combined score is equal to the total of the four HSA passing scores established by the State Board in August 2003.

<sup>5</sup> To earn a Maryland High School Diploma, students must earn a minimum of 21 high school credits, to include English (4), mathematics (3), science (3), social studies (3), fine arts (1), physical education (1/2), health education (1/2), and technology education (1); and foreign language (2) or advanced technology education (2) or complete a state-approved career and technology program. Students must also complete a service-learning requirement (75 hours of service or a locally designed, state-approved program).