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**PARADIGM 1:  
A PROPOSAL FOR A COMPREHENSIVE  
HIGH SCHOOL ASSESSMENT SYSTEM**

**Origins**

This proposal for a comprehensive high school assessment system originated in discussions with the State Board of Education in a series of public meetings and retreats. It found considerable support and elaboration among stakeholder groups around the state, including students and the teachers who will ultimately determine the success or failure of any such proposal. Teacher responses came from after-school faculty meetings and focus groups meeting for periods of three or more hours. Above all else, teachers liked the balance between state and local control in determining student competence. This proposal represents a synthesis of input on student assessment from stakeholder groups around the State of Maryland.

**Goals and Purposes**

The principal goal of this proposal is to ensure that graduates from Maryland's high schools in the 21st century are successful

- In post-secondary education and other lifelong learning opportunities,
- In an increasingly volatile workplace and competitive economy, and
- In their personal and social lives.

To achieve these goals, the State Board of Education intends to raise standards for academic achievement in English, mathematics, science, social studies, and Skills for Success and to hold every student accountable for learning that required content. A comprehensive assessment system must

- Ensure uniformity of standards across classrooms, schools, and LEAs in the State of Maryland;
- Provide students across the state with equitable opportunities to demonstrate competence in the state-mandated learning goals; and
- Provide students, teachers, parents, schools, LEAs, and the State Board of Education with timely, reliable, and valid data on individual student competence in the learning goals.

## **Assumptions**

Any proposal is based on assumptions. They should be made explicit to better understand the proposal. The assumptions undergirding this proposal are:

1. High expectations (in education) require substantive, sustained reform. (Qualitative improvements will not happen overnight.)
2. Substantive, sustained reform requires systemic change. (More of the same will not work.)
3. Systemic change is best promoted by a partnership between state and local agencies (empowerment). (Top-down management does not promote systemic change.)
4. The state's role in an educational partnership is to establish vision and goals, set standards, provide support, monitor achievement, cultivate and validate local reforms, and provide sanctions, as a last resort.
5. State and local agencies should be partners in gathering, interpreting, and reporting evidence of student competence in state-mandated learning goals.
6. The most useful forms of assessment reflect and cultivate the most productive forms of instruction. (Assessment can have positive and/or negative effects on instruction and, consequently, learning.)
7. Multiple measures provide better estimates of student competence (triangulation) in complex, high-level learning goals than single tests administered on a single occasion.
8. Multiple measures in multiple formats administered at different times and in different situations provide students with more incentives and more opportunities to demonstrate competence than single, high-stakes tests. Alternative assessments offer special needs students better opportunities to demonstrate competence.
9. Teacher involvement in scoring complex responses is one of the most productive forms of staff development available.
10. A comprehensive assessment system should use the right measure in the right format for the right content and purpose. Multiple-choice formats are useful for providing reliable estimates of breadth of knowledge. Alternative assessment formats (e.g., portfolio assessment) are useful for measuring depth and use of knowledge and Skills for Success. Skills for Success cannot be measured in on-demand assessments.

## **Principal Features**

As indicated in the attached graphic and based on the foregoing goals and assumptions, the principal features of this comprehensive assessment proposal are as follows:

1. This proposal represents a partnership between state and local education agencies in gathering and utilizing evidence of individual student competence in state-mandated learning goals.
2. The partnership in assessment is represented as parallel but independent sources of evidence. (Partners must have substantive roles and meaningful choices.)
3. The partnership is intended to provide reliable, accurate estimates of student competence while simultaneously supporting local choices and reforms in instruction and assessment.
4. State-mandated tests are end-of-course tests with adjustments for variations in local curricula. Local assessments are end-of course and/or curriculum-embedded assessments.
5. State tests are in multiple-choice plus short-answer, open-ended-response format. These tests will measure breadth of knowledge and provide reliable, valid data to anchor evidence of student competence from multiple sources.
6. Local agencies will choose their own measures from an array of possibilities:
  - Existing CRTs in use by the LEA. Some adjustments in content covered may be required;
  - Alternative assessments in place, under development, or desirable in the LEA;
  - Alternative assessment formats might include performance assessments, portfolio assessments, and extended school or community projects.
7. Local assessments should measure depth and use of knowledge and skills. Local assessments will provide better qualitative data than state tests and better opportunities for special needs students. Local assessments will provide the only opportunity to measure competence in Skills for Success, which are state-mandated learning goals.
8. The state will provide guidelines for use of alternative assessments. If the state joins the New Standards Project, the locals will have access to alternative assessments and training in their use.

9. Local assessments will be scored locally with, for example, scoring tools developed in collaboration with the contractor or New Standards. Some degree of standardization in the use of alternative assessments will be necessary to compare results.
10. The state could audit local scores by double-scoring a sample of student responses (as in the New York State Regents exams). This practice would provide guidance for targeted staff development as well as continuous improvement in the quality of data from local assessments to compare results.
11. In effect, state and local assessments would cross-validate each other. Over time, as local assessments are validated, it would be possible to reduce state testing from a census to a sample administration. At that point, systemic reform in assessment would be successful.
12. The student's perspective is equally important. The scoring model in this proposal is compensatory. That is, instead of a “do-or-die” test administration (high-stakes testing at its worst), students will have several opportunities to demonstrate competence in the learning goals. Lower performance on one measure can be balanced by higher performance on another. All testing is targeted at learning goals. There is no “retesting” or “remediation,” no repetition. Follow-up is targeted at specific learning goals, not tests or courses. Gains are incremental, with the goals known explicitly in the beginning, successes accumulated along the way, and meeting the standards for graduation clearly possible for every student. Such a comprehensive assessment system should promote rather than just record success. Without building principles of learning and motivation into the assessment system, large numbers of students will fail to graduate, or standards will be reduced to allow them to do so.

### **Test Development/Purchase**

State-mandated, end-of-course tests will be developed in collaboration with a contractor. This recommendation is based on a comprehensive review of available tests and item pools among commercial publishers and states with exemplary assessment practices. No “off-the-shelf” tests or item pools exist to measure Maryland's proposed core learning goals. Maryland's tests will have to be secure. They may exist in multiple forms and/or modules to provide

sufficient uniformity in content while still adjusting to local course variations. The state tests will target the learning goals taught in any course configuration. What's being measured are learning goals, not courses.

Local assessments may be existing measures that are adjusted to cover state learning goals. Locals may also choose alternative assessments. Such assessments, like performance, portfolio, or project assessments, could be provided by consortia the state joins (e.g., New Standards) or developed as a local option. State consortia (e.g., the Maryland Assessment Consortium) and collaborations among LEAs could also provide alternative assessments. All use of alternative assessments would have to be standardized to the extent necessary to compare scores across classrooms and LEAs. The state would need to provide guidelines, support staff development, and monitor use and interpretation of scores.

### **Test Administration Time**

State end-of-course tests should require no more than two hours of testing time per course. Local assessments may be considered part of the course—curriculum-embedded tests—and/or part of an end-of-course testing program. Testing time and schedules would be locally determined.

### **Scoring and Reporting Results**

The multiple-choice section of the state tests would be machine scored and results returned to teachers and students quickly. The open-ended responses on the state tests would be scored by teachers locally, using state scoring tools and procedures to ensure uniformity and reliability. Teacher scoring has been used successfully in the New York State Regents Examinations for many years. Local scoring and consequent grading have several important advantages:

1. Locus of control and decision-making remain close to teachers and students.
2. Turnaround time is short enough to make the results useful and meaningful for students and teachers.
3. Teachers have the information they need to understand student performance and provide meaningful explanations of results to students and parents.

4. Scoring provides invaluable staff development for teachers. The learning teachers gain from scoring will, as much as anything else, guide improvements in instruction and gains in student achievement.

All open-ended or constructed responses in use in local alternative assessments would also be scored on site. In the case of state tests, the state would monitor scoring of open-ended responses by double-scoring samples of student responses. The state could also monitor the use of alternative assessments in LEAs. The extent to which state test scores contribute to student grades in courses would have to be negotiated and approved by the State Board. It might be possible to set a minimal score on state tests in this design without subverting the partnership or the high standards that drive the entire program.

Managing student progress across multiple learning goals through multiple measures would be much more complex than simple pass/fail, high-stakes testing. But the continuous access, rapid updating of student progress can be managed by software provided by the state. This software would provide integrated estimates of student competence, using both state and local assessments, a record of success to date, and learning goals remaining for targeting in both instruction and assessment. The further along a student moves through the high school experience, the more testing and instruction should be customized until the student has satisfied state mandates for learning. Test modules, rather than item pools, would make this feasible.

Some students may move through the program quickly, allowing more time for recognition or specialization programs. Others may spend most of their high school years concentrating on these learning goals. That possibility is NOT the same as being trapped in teaching-testing-failing-remediation cycles which end, more often than not, in dropping out of school. Most teachers found the different consequences for high- and low-achieving students in this model quite reasonable. Low-achieving students should concentrate on these learning goals. State testing should end for most students by the end of tenth or the middle of eleventh grade. That expectation would be facilitated by a four-period day.

### **Design and Implementation**

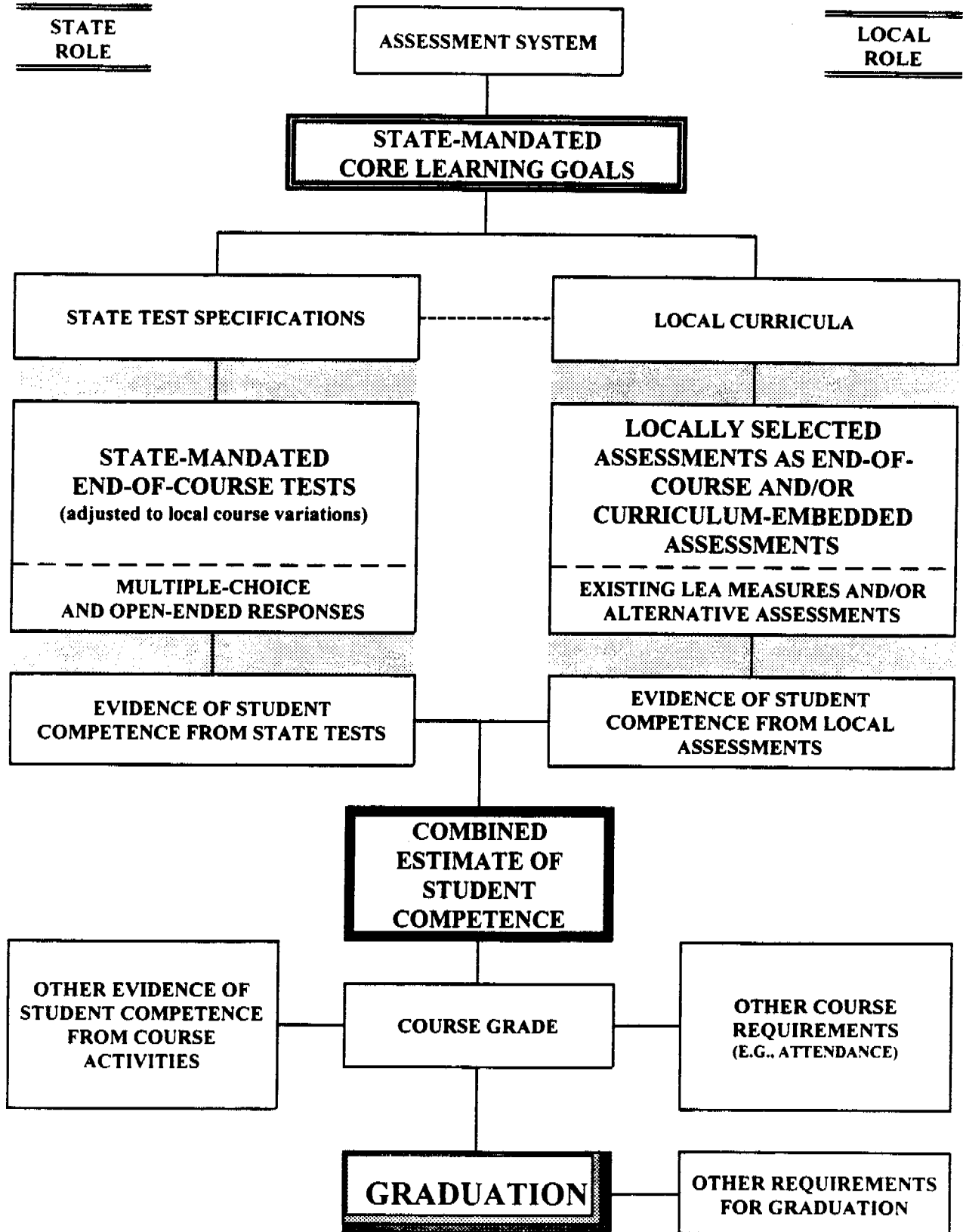
This particular proposal directly addresses most of the guidelines provided by the State Board of Education and the High School Assessment Task Force. Consequently, it is not a simple system (as Paradigm 2, for example, is). It sets out to balance state and local needs in assuring the accountability of individual students. Scores must be reliable estimates of the

competence of individual students, so state tests will be highly reliable and offer an anchor for scores coming from alternative assessments. Comparability of scores across instruments, schools, and LEAs will be ensured by standardizing alternative assessments and scoring practices.

In the end, however, no assessment system is any better than the extent to which its principal users—teachers and students—embrace it. Teachers have already responded positively to the outlines of this proposal. Many of the suggestions incorporated here come from them. They will continue to support this proposal as long as they consider it feasible, fair and equitable to their students, and effective for its stated goals. This assessment system will have to be implemented deliberately and carefully over an extended period of time to allow teachers and school staffs to solve the start-up problems that plague any complex system. During that phase-in period, the state would have to provide schools with substantial resources in staff development. Teachers identified that need repeatedly in focus groups. They want to make professional improvements. If the state supports teachers and schools in a careful implementation, this proposed assessment system will contribute greatly to the preparation of Maryland's students for life in the next century.



**PARADIGM 1:  
A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN STATE AND LOCAL AGENCIES  
IN A COMPREHENSIVE HIGH SCHOOL ASSESSMENT SYSTEM**



**PARADIGM 2:  
A PROPOSAL FOR A STATE-MANDATED  
END-OF-COURSE TESTING PROGRAM  
FOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION**

**Introduction**

Members of the State Board of Education have discussed this kind of proposal for a high school testing program on numerous occasions over a period of more than a year. The goals and purposes of this proposal are exactly the same as Paradigm 1 and therefore will not be repeated here.

The model for this proposal is the New York State Regents Exam which has operated successfully for more than several decades. Several other states have recently implemented or are in the process of implementing statewide testing programs, lending credence to this kind of proposal.

The value of this proposal is in its simplicity:

1. Identify academic courses where students gain required units for graduation;
2. Assess, at the end of each of the courses, student competence in the state-mandated learning goals taught in those courses; and
3. Require students to pass those state-mandated end-of-course tests to graduate from high school.

This is classic high-stakes testing; the stakes for students are high every time they take one of these tests. Any failure outweighs any accumulated record of success.

The straightforward test administration, scoring, and consequences make this testing program easier to implement and therefore more feasible than more complex assessment systems. Except for the pass/fail score interpretation and the use of the scores, the state-mandated testing component of Paradigm 2 is exactly the same as Paradigm 1.

**Principal Features**

As indicated in the attached graphic, the principal features of this proposal are:

1. These are state-mandated end-of-course tests with adjustments in test content for local variations in courses.
2. The end-of-course tests will be secure and administered in a standardized fashion.
3. Each test will be organized in two sections: a multiple-choice and a short-answer, open-ended-response section.
4. Total test administration time for each test will not exceed two hours. These will be timed tests.

5. The multiple-choice section will be scored by machine and results returned quickly to teachers and students. The open-ended responses will be scored locally by teachers (as in the New York State Regents Exams), using scoring tools and training provided by the state. Results will be available to teachers and students quickly.
6. Students will be scored as pass/fail on each end-of-course test. They must pass all end-of-course tests to graduate. If they fail a test, they must retake the tests and, perhaps, the course.
7. Student scores on state tests will be independent of course grades and other evidence or judgments of competence in the learning goals. Students must pass state tests and required courses and satisfy other graduation requirements to earn a high school diploma.
8. LEAs, schools, and teachers will be at liberty to develop, purchase, and use any assessments they judge appropriate in a local assessment system.

### **Test Development/Purchase**

State-mandated, end-of-course tests will be developed in collaboration with a contractor. This recommendation is based on a comprehensive review of available tests and item pools among commercial publishers and states with exemplary assessment practices. No “off-the-shelf” tests or item pools exist to measure Maryland’s core learning goals.

### **Implementation**

Implementation in this proposal can proceed rather rapidly because it requires no coordination in use of multiple measures or state and local roles in assessment.

### **Some Comparisons**

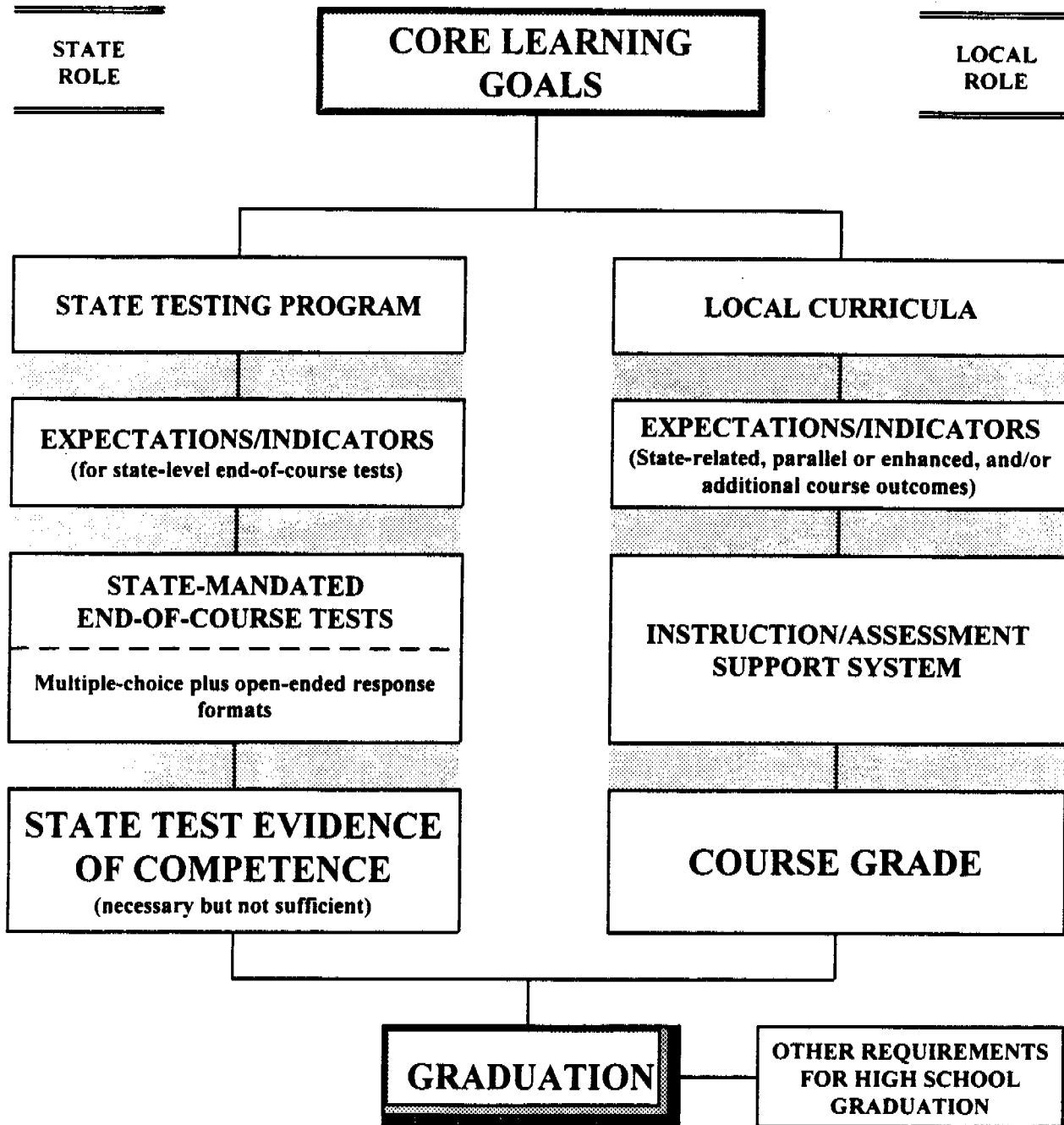
While modeled on New York State Regents Exams, there are significant differences between that assessment system and this proposal. All students are not required to take regents exams to graduate. Testing selected student populations allows New York to keep standards high on the regents exams. Even so, high percentages of students who take regents exams fail to pass them. Students are not required to keep taking regents exams until they pass them.

Some states (e.g., Georgia, Minnesota) have state-mandated assessments for all students, but they are not end-of-course tests. They tend to be subject tests (e.g., reading, writing, mathematics), and the performance standards set for those tests tend to reflect about eighth-grade levels of

competence. They are dramatically different from Maryland's intention to set high standards and require all students to meet them.

The state testing component in Paradigm 1 is essentially the same as this proposal. The dramatic difference is scoring and use of scores in Paradigm 1 and the coordination with local assessments. Paradigm 2 represents a state-initiated and state-controlled assessment system with local options having no influence or effect on state judgments of student competence. It is essentially a doubling of graduation requirements: pass the course **and** pass the state test. On the other hand, it does provide clear, uniform standards across classrooms, schools, and LEAs. The major problem will be providing follow-up services to students who fail state-mandated exams.

**PARADIGM 2:  
STATE-MANDATED END-OF-COURSE TESTING PROGRAM  
FOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION**



**PARADIGM 3:  
A PROPOSAL FOR STATE-MANDATED  
END-OF-COURSE-OF-STUDY TESTS  
FOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION**

**Introduction**

The idea of an end-of-course-of-study test was brought before the State Board of Education in discussions about the Certificate of Initial Mastery idea adopted by the State of Oregon several years ago. The principal feature of this program was systemwide testing at the end of tenth grade (or approximately age 16) to certify student attainment of high academic performance standards and to free students to specialize or work in advanced programs for the rest of their high school careers. This concept for a high school assessment program was reintroduced to the State Board in Maryland by the local superintendents' association in an effort to broaden the discussion about high school assessment systems.

The goals and purposes of this proposal are exactly the same as Paradigms 1 and 2 and therefore will not be repeated here.

**Principal Features**

1. In this proposal, the state will mandate "end-of-course-of-studies" tests at the end of tenth or the middle of eleventh grade.
2. These state tests will cover approximately two years of study in state-mandated learning goals in English, mathematics, science, and social studies. There will be one to two tests for each of these four academic disciplines, and each student will have to take all four to eight tests.
3. The tests will focus on content knowledge taught across two years of study. Because of the breadth of knowledge covered, the distance between learning and testing, and limitations in available testing time, these end-of-course-of-study tests will necessarily be more general than end-of-course tests. (The alternative is to sample state-mandated learning goals for assessment.) There is no provision in this model for measuring state-mandated Skills for Success.
4. The breadth of content covered in these tests will make multiple choice the preferred testing format, though short-answer or essay responses could be added to the tests.
5. End-of-course-of-study exams will be scheduled and administered in standardized situations across the state. Exams could take two to three hours per subject.

6. Multiple-choice sections will be machine scored with results available quickly to teachers and students. Open-ended and/or essay responses will be scored locally with state scoring tools and provide short turnaround time. The state could rescore samples of student responses to check reliability (as in the New York State Regents Exams).
7. Performance standards will be set by the State Board of Education. Students will pass or fail each exam. These are high-stakes tests with no local control. To graduate, students must pass all exams, so they will have opportunities to retake the tests they fail.
8. Exam scores will be independent of any other evidence of student competence in the learning goals.
9. Having passed state-mandated exams, students will be able to devote the rest of their high school careers to specialization (e.g., work/study) and/or advanced courses of study (e.g., college-credit courses).
10. Any locally-selected and administered assessments or judgements of student competence will be independent of the state testing system and will not affect state judgements.
11. It would be possible to distinguish between those who pass all tests and those who do not, but allow the latter to graduate if they meet all other requirements.

### **Test Development/Purchase**

It may be possible to purchase the right to use end-of-discipline tests for these purposes. If not, the state could collaborate with a contractor to develop custom-made instruments. The former is more convenient and less expensive; the latter provides a better match among test purposes, state-mandated learning goals, and test items or tasks. In any event, developing multiple-choice plus open-ended tests will be much less difficult and expensive than performance assessments.

### **Implementation**

Like Paradigm 2, implementation of Paradigm 3 would be relatively straightforward.

### **Some Comparisons**

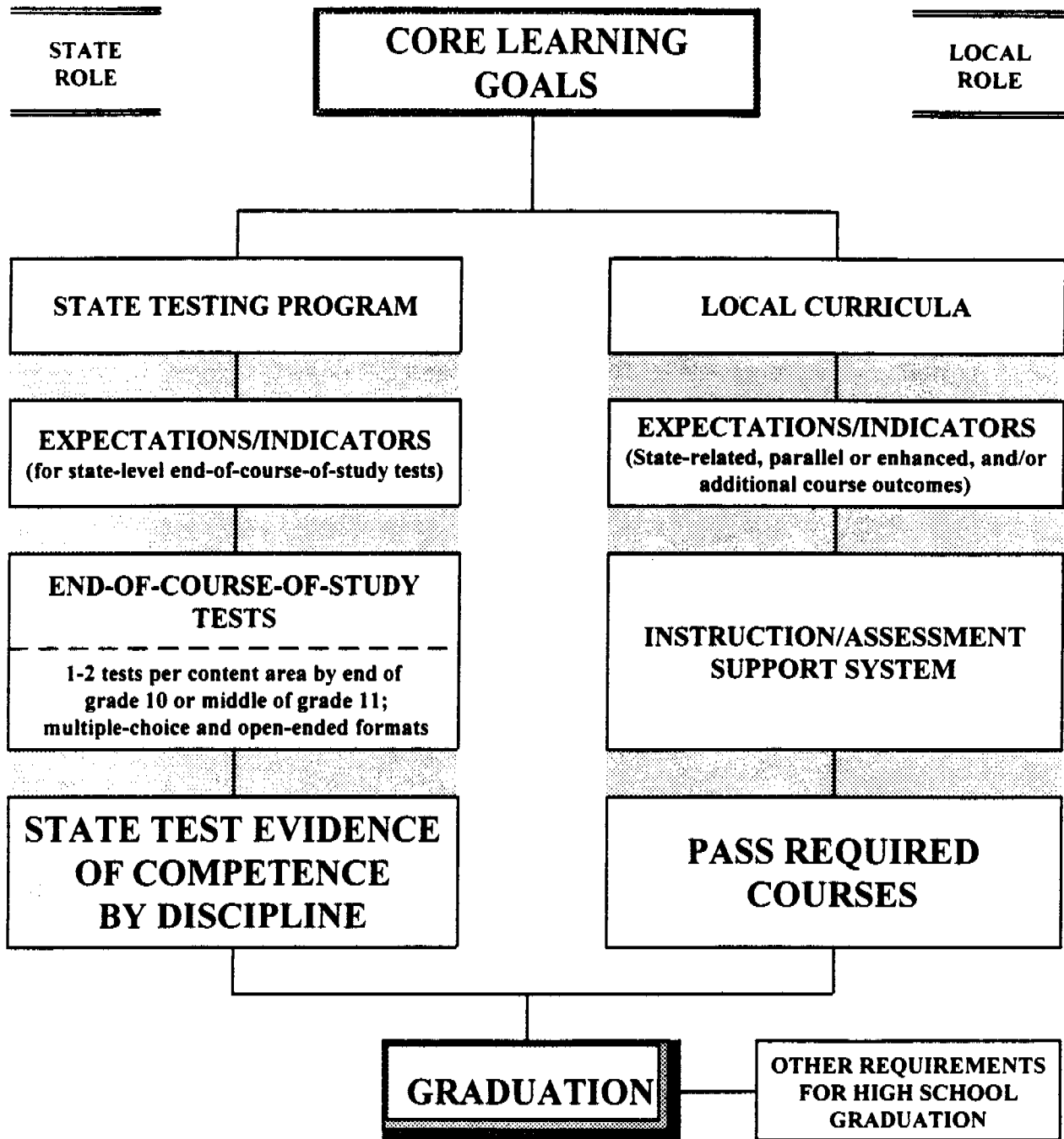
The benefits of local scoring of open-ended or essay responses would accrue to schools as in Paradigms 1 and 2. Local benefits, however, would be far less than teacher scoring of complex, extended responses in alternative assessment formats in Paradigm 1. Paradigms 2 and 3 are much more traditional than Paradigm 1 in assessment formats and relationship between state and local assessments and agencies.

Paradigm 3 has some advantages. If there is only one test per discipline, then the amount of state-mandated testing is dramatically reduced from end-of-course tests. However, if there are two tests per discipline, in an effort to cover more content knowledge, then the amount of state testing is nearly the same as Paradigms 1 and 2. One test per discipline, however, will drive the test toward a general test of knowledge of the discipline rather than a specific test of the state-mandated learning goals. This issue becomes especially significant given that the learning goals in some disciplines (e.g., science) were written with end-of-course assessments in mind. End-of-discipline tests would require revision of the learning goals.

A major disadvantage of Paradigm 3, from the student's perspective, is deferring testing until a student has completed two or two and a half years of study in a discipline. The farther testing is removed from instruction, the more it makes demands on students for retention. The more general the test becomes, the more demands it makes on students for generalization, application, and transfer. These are the very attributes where the most at-risk students are weakest. A test design of this sort may exaggerate achievement differences between low- and high-achieving populations.



**PARADIGM 3:  
STATE-MANDATED END-OF-COURSE-OF STUDY TESTS  
FOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION**



## A Paradigm for High School Assessments

Assistant Superintendents of Instruction

11 May, 1995

Over the past several months, there has been considerable discussion about the proposed high school assessments, and a number of paradigms have been proposed. During that time, assistant superintendents of instruction have engaged in detailed discussions of the various proposals. From those conversations has emerged another paradigm for the high school assessments. This paradigm is based on the premise that the focus of instruction should be on student attainment of the state learner core learner goals at a high level, rather than passing a single test.

According to this paradigm, school systems would use test items from MSDE-developed test banks to assess core learning goals. There would be discretion as to when the core learner goals would be assessed and items could be integrated into locally developed assessments if desired.

Students not attaining the designated expectation for each assessment will be given targeted assistance and retested. Attaining the designated expectation on each assessment will be required for a diploma. A phase-in process will be used in which the expectations for students will be increased over time.

### RATIONALE

- ◆ It is essential to develop a defensible measure of student learning that will be accepted as adequate evidence by both the State Board of Education and the public at large of student mastery of high school content.
- ◆ Focus should be on student attainment of state core learner goals at a high level, not on passing a test.
- ◆ Local school systems are currently in such different places in the development of local assessments that no single approach meets the needs of all students.
- ◆ High school assessments should reflect what is known and valued about quality assessments that meet the diverse needs of all students. There must, therefore, be multiple types of assessments, administered over time, instead of a single testing format, administered at just one point during a student's high school career.
- ◆ Local districts should have the option to determine the time of test administration. The timing may vary from school to school or even from student to student.
- ◆ Allowing a variety of options for assessing students will provide greater opportunity for Maryland's diverse student population to demonstrate their attainment of common expectations.

### WHY (Purposes of High School Assessments)

The high school assessments should be designed to:

- ◆ Demonstrate that individual students have met expectations on state learner goals.
- ◆ Prepare students for post secondary education, entry into a skilled occupation or both

- ◆ Accelerate high school reform by compelling schools to focus on each student's progress toward mastery of the learning goals as opposed to merely "passing a course."
- ◆ Have both diagnostic and accountability purposes. Assessments should be used to identify students who have mastered graduation expectations at designated checkpoints, and to identify specific academic areas in which non-mastery students must focus their study.

#### WHO (State and Local Responsibilities)

- ◆ State - establish core learner goals and develop and validate test items to assess the goals.
- ◆ LEAs - develop and implement curriculum to support core learner goals; select and place assessments from the state bank; certify that students have mastered the core learner goals prior to high school graduation.
- ◆ State and LEA's - determine the degree to which within-building scoring, combined with randomized verification of scores by the state, can be reasonably expected of teachers and provides an answer to the need for timely return of results.
- ◆ State - establish a technical advisory team that would be charged with addressing and monitoring—validity and reliability issues, item and test equating, and other psychometric aspects required for a "high stakes" testing system.
- ◆ State - establish outcomes, develop and select items for the test bank (together with procedures for establishing item difficulty values for equating purposes), and develop test specifications to be followed in constructing and administering the test(s) used in local districts.

#### WHAT (The Assessment)

- ◆ MSDE content teams will identify the core learning goals EVERY student will be expected to master by the conclusion of his or her experience in high school.
- ◆ Skills for success should be embedded within content tests.
- ◆ Student attainment of the learning goals should be the focus of instruction rather than obtaining a cut score on a specific test.
- ◆ The high school assessments should reflect the performance of *individual students* on the attainment of the learning goals.
- ◆ Meeting the learning goals should be a graduation requirement.
- ◆ The format of the assessments may vary depending upon the nature of the content being assessed. The format should permit a variety of levels of performance.

#### HOW (The Administration)

- ◆ The Maryland State Department of Education should develop item banks which include a variety of types of assessments, including multiple choice test items; open ended responses with accompanying rubrics; performance assessments, with scoring keys; and portfolios with specifications.
- ◆ Each local school system will follow a procedure established by the state for the selection of items from the bank in the *creation of its own assessment of the learning goals*

- ◆ Selection of items will be based on core learner goals and the type of response. Individual items will not be known prior to their selection.
- ◆ The state should provide the software to support the generation of the tests in a variety of formats by locals.
- ◆ LEAs will have the option of using the item banks as a part of final examinations at the end of courses, at the end of course of study, or in a battery of tests.
- ◆ The state will have ongoing monitoring responsibility for the test by controlling the items included in the bank, the specifications or criteria used in the development of the local tests, and the monitoring of the reliability of the scoring procedures.
- ◆ Locals may submit items which will be considered for inclusion in the bank based upon an established review/approval process.
- ◆ Provisions will exist for a fast turnaround time on results.
- ◆ At the option of the local, provisions should exist for locals to score assessments as a vehicle for staff development and a driving mechanism for school improvement.
- ◆ Students who do not demonstrate mastery of the core learner goals on the initial assessment will be given targeted assistance and retested. Focus needs to be maintained on the high quality nature of the core learner goals and assessments so that this assistance avoids low-level remediation sometimes associated with the functional tests.
- ◆ Higher cut scores should be phased in so as not to disadvantage initial classes of students in the implementation of the assessment program.

#### WHEN (Implementation)

- ◆ An intensive, statewide staff development program should be in place sufficiently far enough in advance of the first administration of these assessments.
- ◆ The earliest date for testing to count as a graduation requirement should be set for four years after the implementation of the Middle School Milestones.

#### WHERE (Timing of Assessments)

- ◆ Local school systems should have flexibility to determine the time(s) and methods for administration of high school assessments.

#### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- ◆ Results from high school assessments should be a part of a school improvement model and result in instructional improvement.
- ◆ System/school accountability could be reported by the percentage of students meeting requirements by end of grade 11.
- ◆ Individual teachers must have *ownership* of the state/local assessment program and must understand their responsibility in helping students meet performance standards.
- ◆ Intensive academic supports should be in place to assist students who do not demonstrate all core learner goals initially.
- ◆ Fiscal support from the state should be in place to support these tests.

**HIGH SCHOOL ASSESSMENT PLAN  
CHARLES COUNTY  
June 9, 1995**

The following plan for a High School Assessment System is presented as a recommendation for the Charles County Board of Education to forward to the Maryland State Board of Education as they continue their deliberation on the nature of student and school accountability in the High Schools in Maryland. This proposal represents consensus among the High School Principals, Writing Resource teachers, Regional Administrators, the Assistant Superintendent and the Deans of Instruction, Research and Assessment Staff and the Coordinator of Staff Development. The plan is divided into sections on Content Development, Assessment Model Description and Staff Development.

Content Development

There are currently four state committees of content specialists in English, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies. These groups have developed goals for student learning that should be mastered by the end of High School. Their draft document, High School Assessment Core Learning Goals, was presented to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) in December of 1994. More refinement continues but the basis of the document is sound.

Assessment Model Description

The assessment model or paradigm that is proposed for Charles County Public Schools will meet the following assumptions.

- 1) All students will receive instruction and be assessed in order to meet the rigorous standards on the Core Learning Goals.
- 2) Students who do not meet these standards will not graduate from High School.
- 3) There will be a system of remediation for students who do not meet standards that can begin early in the High School career.

The assessment model will have the following components.

- 1) MSDE will develop a bank of assessment tools covering the Core Learning Goals. This bank will offer many different ways of measuring each goal including multiple choice questions, performance tasks and portfolio assessments. Each assessment tool will come with all materials necessary for scoring.

- 2) Field testing will build a catalog of information about each tool that will document its reliability and validity. By determining how much information students must demonstrate in testing, a standard for adequate performance will be developed. As part of the field testing of the assessment bank, standards will be applied to each item. Since the standard is held constant rather than the number of items correct, different forms of the test can be constructed for each Core Learning Goal and still yield comparable standards. This process is used currently with the annual forms of the functional tests.
- 3) There will be minimum qualifications, or a blueprint, for constructing sets of assessment tools that will be psychometrically sound. Obviously more than one question must be asked of students before determining that they have met the level of learning required by the standard. This blueprint will guide the development of parallel forms of assessment.
- 4) Individual school systems will determine how the Core Learning Goals will be distributed across courses and sequences of courses. To facilitate early information about a student's performance on these goals, every effort should be made to put as many goals as possible into courses in grades 9 and 10. In some cases this will not be possible and should be done only when the integrity of the curriculum is not compromised to do so. With the same admonitions, these goals should be covered early in the courses (first semester) so that additional student support can be given before the end of the course. This will allow the local school system to maintain control of its curriculum while still assuring that all Core Learning Goals will be taught. For example, Charles County may wish to place a different configuration of goals in World Geography than St. Mary's County chooses.
- 5) Using the blueprint for construction provided by MSDE, assessments that cover the system-selected Core Learning Goals for each course will be developed by each school system. School systems may choose different assessment tools from the bank. This allows local school systems to continue with an assessment philosophy that may differ from that of another system while maintaining the same standard for performance. For example, Charles County may wish to emphasize performance tasks and use portfolios and multiple choice items more sparingly than Calvert County.
- 6) The total assessment for the course may include two parts. The first will cover the Core Learning Goals and the second will assess other content covered by the course. These two parts could be combined so that the student only sees one assessment instrument if the school prefers.
- 7) Teachers will be trained to score the entire assessment, state and local, and would do so. The school system will assume responsibility for the training of teachers and will monitor the scoring to ensure accuracy and appropriateness. MSDE will randomly select and rescore portions of the assessment that cover Core Learning Goals. This step will verify the accuracy of local scoring. Following this procedure will assure the state that scores are accurate while teachers retain ownership and responsibility for the assessment and scoring of their own students' work.

8) The student must pass both the state assessment items and all other course requirements mandated by the local system in order to receive credit for the course. It is possible to allow students to retake any portion of the assessment if they do not meet the prerequisite standard with or without retaking the course. This also should be local option.

### Staff Development

We propose a Staff Development Plan to be implemented two years before the assessment is in place because too often staff development occurs because of poor test results. Specific staff development activities must occur regardless of the final configuration of the High School Assessment. The following areas represent crucial needs at the high school level.

#### 1) Instructional Connections:

The higher order thinking skills around which this assessment will be built can best be instructed through two focus areas. One area is a solid foundation in The Dimensions of Learning. The other emphasis should be the Skills for Success which connect learning as outlined in the other Core Learning Goals. This essential training should be presented as vertical staff development throughout the system, including personnel at all levels.

#### 2) Performance Assessment Techniques:

It seems likely that the state assessment will include a combination of assessment tools such as multiple choice, portfolios, performance tasks, and/or projects. Ongoing training should also be provided in the use of scoring tools, especially rubrics in all content areas.

#### 3) Emphasizing the Core Learning Goals and the Skills for Success

The State Board of Education is proposing major increases in the performance and knowledge of students before they graduate from Maryland schools. Increases are reflected in the content represented by the Core Learning Goals. All staff should be trained in the requirements presented in the Core Learning Goals.

# Schematic Diagram of Charles County High School Assessment Plan

