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MARYLAND MAKES MORE PROGRESS ON HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

GRAD RATE RISES, DROPOUT RATE FALLS

BALTIMORE (October 30, 2013) – More Maryland students are receiving their high school diplomas, and fewer are dropping out of school prior to graduation, according to data released today by the Maryland State Department of Education.

Maryland two years ago moved to the cohort graduation rate, which follows a set group of students from freshman year through their senior year, better tracking their progress. The four-year cohort graduation rate for the class of 2012 jumped more than 1.5 percentage points between 2010 and 2012, from 81.97 to 83.57 percent. The five-year cohort graduation rate – those students completing their diploma in five years – improved from 84.57 to 86.32.

Four-year cohort data for the class of 2013 will be available next year, after summer data is finalized.

“Working together, Maryland has invested more in its schools, even during tough times when other states were cutting back. Those investments are paying off with better schools, better teachers, and students who are better prepared for tomorrow’s challenges,” said Gov. Martin O’Malley. “A quality education is a ladder of opportunity, and investing in schools is key to a strong and growing middle class.”

State Superintendent of Schools Lillian M. Lowery agreed, emphasizing that a high school diploma represents the first step in gaining the requisite preparation for a student’s next step.

“We need our students to be prepared for a career or college, and we continue to strengthen standards to prepare them for the future,” Dr. Lowery said. “We remain concerned about gaps in the graduation rate, but the trends are in the right direction. A Maryland high school diploma opens the door to a world of opportunity.”

Data disaggregated by student subgroup finds success in nearly every category. Four-year cohort graduation rates for American Indian, African American, Asian, Hispanic, and White students improved between 2011 and 2012. Only the small Native Hawaiian and the two-or more race category tallied declines.

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Among students receiving special services, the four-year cohort graduation rate rose steadily in all three categories. The graduation rate for both Special Education and Limited English Proficient students improved nearly a percentage point each, while the graduation rate for students receiving free- or reduced price meals jumped more than a percentage point, from 73.7 percent to 74.87 percent. At the same time, many special education and English Language Learners attend school an additional year to gain skills necessary for the workforce or higher education.

As graduation rates have risen, the percentage of students dropping out has continued to fall. The cohort dropout rate has dipped from 11.93 percent in 2010 to 10.22 percent in 2012.

Dropout rates showed declines that were nearly across-the-board. The dropout rate for African American students fell more than one percentage point in just one year, from 14.6 percent to 13.57 percent.

- **HIGH SCHOOL ASSESSMENTS ARE NO BARRIER TO GRADUATION**

The 2012-2013 senior class was the fifth one for whom passing the High School Assessments (HSAs) in algebra/data analysis, biology, and English was a graduation requirement. An exam in government stopped being administered in 2011, but action by the General Assembly last year means that the exam returned this spring. Government returns as a graduation requirement for those students who entered ninth grade this fall.

Early data for the class of 2013 found that nearly 60,000 students completed high school – 58,776 receiving diplomas and 811 receiving special education certificates. Not a single student missed receiving a diploma solely because of failure to meet the Maryland High School Assessment requirement for graduation.

Of the students who received a diploma in the spring, nearly 90 percent met the HSA requirement through examination. Only 10 percent—5,831 students—met the requirement through the alternative Bridge Plan for Academic Validation. The Bridge Plan is the project-based alternative to the HSA exams.

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The State Board voted in 2004 to make passing the HSAs a requirement for the Maryland High School Diploma starting with the Class of 2009, a measure supported by a broad cross-section of business and higher education leaders.

- **MARYLAND'S ESEA FLEXIBILITY**

Today's data announcement marks the second high school data release under Maryland's recently granted flexibility regarding the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law. Under NCLB, all students were required to score at proficient levels by 2014, and progress toward that goal was gauged by a statewide measurement known as Adequate Yearly Progress. Under Maryland's new "School Progress" plan, each school is measured against its own targets, and must work to strengthen achievement across all subgroups.

Last year's data launched a new baseline, and schools and systems are working to cut in half between 2012 and 2017 the percentage of students not scoring at proficient levels on the exams. As in the past, the accountability system measures all students as well as racial subgroups and groups of students receiving additional services: special education, free or reduced-price meals, and English language learners. Schools and systems must work to hit improvement targets, which are calculated for the student population in each school as well as for special service and racial subgroups. Those targets rise each year, making it more difficult for schools to meet their goals.

Gone are the categories of "School Improvement," under which schools were sanctioned for not making progress. Maryland's plan now focuses special attention on those schools with the most difficulty, but the requirement for restructuring and other sanctions is no longer part of the equation. All schools are expected to take action in areas where students are not making progress.

Under the School Progress calculation, 70.8 percent of high schools met the target for "all students" for 2013 compared to 87.1 percent last year.

The new high school and system data will be available on the updated MdReportCard.org website at noon today.

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