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Education

Impact of the High School Assessments on Graduation Rates

The class of 2009 was the first that was required to meet the State's new high school graduation requirement in order to earn high school diplomas. Only 11 students who would otherwise have graduated did not because of the new rules. Most students (92.5% statewide) met the requirement by passing the High School Assessments, and another 6.3% completed subject-based "bridge" projects to achieve the new standard. As it enters its senior year, the Class of 2010 appears to be in a similar position to meet the requirement by the end of this school year.

High School Assessments Required for the Class of 2009

The Maryland High School Assessments (HSAs) consist of four end-of-course tests designed to measure school and individual student academic performance in English, algebra/data analysis, biology, and government. Statewide planning and development of the HSAs began nearly 15 years ago with the goal of raising high school standards and replacing the Maryland Functional Tests, which were being used at the time as a requirement for high school graduation. In 2004, the State Board of Education voted to make passage of HSAs a graduation requirement beginning with students entering ninth grade in fall 2005 (the class of 2009).

In October 2007, after a significant amount of additional study and discussion, including five public hearings held throughout the State at the request of the General Assembly, the State board voted 8-4 to retain HSAs as a graduation requirement. In the process of reviewing HSAs, the State board made two modifications to the policies that had been in place. The board approved the Bridge Plan for Academic Validation, thus providing a student who is unable to pass HSAs with the option of completing one or more subject-based projects in lieu of passing the assessments. The board also altered the minimum score requirement. Previously, a student was eligible for graduation with a qualifying combined score on the four tests as long as a minimum score on each test was achieved. The qualifying combined score option was retained but with no minimum required scores for individual tests.

After receiving additional information about students' progress in meeting HSA requirements in fall 2008, the State board voted again (7-4 this time, with one member absent) to retain HSAs as a graduation requirement for the class of 2009. However, the board adopted an appeals process for students from the class of 2009 with extenuating circumstances at its December 2008 meeting. Emergency regulations were issued to allow a student who has not passed all four HSAs to receive a waiver and graduate if the student (1) has met all other graduation requirements; (2) has taken or will take all four tests; (3) has taken advantage of all extra help; and (4) the circumstances that have prevented the student from passing the test are beyond the student's control.

Impact of HSAs on the Class of 2009 Graduation Rates

Only 11 students did not graduate due solely to inability to meet the new requirement in 2009. An additional 2,280 students did not graduate because they failed to meet local graduation requirements, and of these, 682 students also failed to meet the HSA requirement. The 2009 graduation rate of 84.24%, which counts all graduates, not just those who graduate in four years, is comparable to recent graduation rates, including last year's rate of 85.09%. The percentage of high school seniors who dropped out was the lowest it has been in over 10 years (2.8%).

Most Students Met New Requirement Through Examination

The majority of students, 92.5% (50,683 students), required to pass HSAs did so by passing all four exams or by meeting the combined minimum score. Another 3,481 students (6.3%) completed one or more bridge plan projects to meet the requirement. The number of projects a student needed to complete was based on the student's scores on the HSA exams. An additional 531 students (1.0%) received waivers for one or more of the exams, and another 3,418 students who entered high school prior to 2005 and were not required to meet the HSA requirement graduated in 2009.

The percentage of students who used each method to meet the HSA requirement is shown by county in **Exhibit 1**. Prince George's County and Baltimore City granted the highest percentages of HSA waivers, at 2.8% and 2.6%, respectively. Baltimore City also had the greatest percentage of students, 20.9%, meeting the HSA requirement by completing bridge projects.

Bridge Project Approval Rates Increased Over Year

Bridge projects were designed by the Maryland State Department of Education content specialists and were scored by panels assembled by the local school systems. First time approval rates for projects increased from 68% for projects graded before December 9, 2009, to 85% or 90% from that point until the end of the school year. Coordinators attributed this increase to project monitors becoming more familiar with the projects, their format, and the expectations of scoring panels. Over 90% of resubmitted projects were approved. Some counties only allowed students to resubmit projects for rescoring once, while others allowed multiple submissions. Students working on bridge projects were encouraged to continue retesting, and there were anecdotal reports of students passing HSAs after completing bridge projects.

Most of the Class of 2010 Has Met HSA Requirements

With respect to the State's new graduation requirement, the students from the class of 2010 are on par with the class of 2009 at the end of grade 11. Currently, there are 55,801 students in the class of 2010 who must complete the requirement and are otherwise on pace to graduate in June 2010. Of the total, 47,145 students (84.5%) have already taken and passed all

four exams or met the requirement by reaching the combined minimum score; at the same point last year, 83.4% of the class of 2009 had passed the HSAs.

Another 5,477 students (9.8%) have taken all four exams but have not achieved passing scores on all four or the minimum combined score option. This is comparable to the 9.1% of students from last year. These students have begun to work on their bridge plan projects. In addition, there are 3,121 students (5.6%) statewide who have yet to take one or more of the HSAs, which is somewhat less than the 7.5% who were in that position last year. HSA exams are offered four times per year, with two more testing opportunities before June 2010. A third test administration will take place in June and allow for summer 2010 graduation.

Exhibit 1
Method by Which Students Met the High School Assessment Requirement
Class of 2009

County	% of Students Who Met Requirement Through			Percent Who Did Not Meet Requirement
	Examination	Bridge Projects	Waiver	
Allegany	92.5	7.3	0.0	0.1
Anne Arundel	95.1	4.1	0.8	0.0
Baltimore City	76.1	20.9	2.6	0.3
Baltimore	93.4	6.1	0.5	0.0
Calvert	98.1	1.9	0.0	0.0
Caroline	94.4	5.4	0.0	0.3
Carroll	98.0	1.9	0.1	0.0
Cecil	98.0	2.0	0.0	0.0
Charles	92.4	7.6	0.0	0.0
Dorchester	93.1	6.3	0.0	0.7
Frederick	97.2	2.7	0.1	0.0
Garrett	95.2	4.8	0.0	0.0
Harford	97.4	1.8	0.9	0.0
Howard	98.4	1.4	0.0	0.1
Kent	91.1	8.2	0.0	0.6
Montgomery	95.7	3.0	1.2	0.1
Prince George's	83.4	13.1	2.8	0.6
Queen Anne's	94.8	5.2	0.0	0.0
Saint Mary's	98.1	1.6	0.2	0.1
Somerset	88.8	11.2	0.0	0.0
Talbot	90.8	8.9	0.0	0.3
Washington	97.9	2.0	0.1	0.0
Wicomico	87.7	12.2	0.0	0.1
Worcester	93.6	6.4	0.0	0.0
State	92.5	6.3	1.0	0.1

Note: Numbers may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Source: Maryland State Department of Education