



High School Improvement *Update*

State Board Sets Passing Scores for High School Assessments

Passing not required for graduation until at least 2009 graduating class

At its August 26 meeting, the Maryland State Board of Education set passing scores for the Maryland High School Assessments (HSA) in English 1, algebra/data analysis, biology, and government¹. The new passing scores will help schools understand performance expectations. The table at right shows how many Maryland students would have passed the tests in 2002.

“It is important for our school systems to have a target,” noted Nancy S. Grasmick, State Superintendent of Schools. “With a target score set for passing, it puts every one of us involved in education on alert. When we see how well our students are doing, we can make the kind of

instructional changes that will help to make certain that every child achieves.”

Although it set passing scores, the Board did not vote to make passing the tests a graduation requirement. Instead, the Board postponed this discussion until December, after the 2003 results are released, so that it will have another year of data with which to make a decision.

Also at the August meeting, the Board delayed by one year the first group of students that could be required to pass the HSA, from entering freshman in 2004–2005 to entering freshman in 2005–2006 (the graduating class of 2009). The delay gives schools and school systems more time to evaluate past test results, refine curriculum and instruction, and design intervention

and appropriate assistance programs. To encourage improvement over time, the State Board will review test results periodically and consider raising the passing scores for future graduating classes. ■

Percent of students who would have passed the HSA in 2002

Test	Passing Score	% Passing in 2002
Algebra/Data Analysis	412	52%
English 1	407	45%
Government	394	57%
Biology	400	54%

¹The geometry HSA has been transitioned into the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) program and is now used to measure high-school math proficiency under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Taking the geometry test is still a requirement for graduation.

How did the State Board determine passing scores?

Setting standards for the High School Assessments (HSA), Maryland School Assessment (MSA), and the Independence Mastery Assessment Program/Alternate MSA (IMAP/Alt-MSA) began in July. Standard-setting for the HSA involved determining a passing score for each test. Standard-setting for the MSA and IMAP/Alt-MSA involved determining proficient and advanced performance on the tests.

School systems nominated teachers, principals, and school system staff with subject-matter and grade-level expertise to serve on standard-setting groups, alongside representatives of various education organizations such as the Maryland PTA and MSTA.

The groups—one group per test—analyzed test questions and student responses, then engaged in rounds of discussion and voting. After several rounds of voting, each group arrived at a recommended passing score (HSA) or proficiency levels (MSA and IMAP/Alt-MSA). The groups were facilitated by CTB/McGraw-Hill staff. Maryland State Department of

Education staff were on hand to answer questions, but they were not involved in making decisions and did not vote.

After the standard-setting groups were finished, the state’s Psychometric Council, comprising assessment experts, reviewed their work to ensure that the process followed was technically sound. Then, a Review and Articulation Committee reviewed the articulation among grades and subjects and checked that rigor was equivalent across grades and subjects. All groups’ findings and recommendations were forwarded to Dr. Grasmick, who reviewed them and made a final recommendation to the State Board of Education. The State Board established proficiency levels for the MSA and IMAP/Alt-MSA in July and passing scores for the HSA in August.

For more information on the standard-setting process, see the October 2003 issue of *Maryland Classroom* or visit the School Improvement in Maryland Web site at www.mdk12.org. (The direct URL for standard-setting information is www.mdk12.org/mspp/k_8/performance.html.) ■

State Board Terminates Functional Testing Program

In August 2003, the Maryland State Board of Education decided to end the Maryland Functional Tests, which have been required for graduation since 1990. The graduating class of 2004 is the last class of students required to pass the Maryland Functional Tests to earn a diploma. The State Board ended the Functional Tests so that schools can focus on preparing students for the Maryland High School Assessments. The Functional Testing Program consisted of the Maryland Functional Reading, Writing, and Mathematics Tests. The Maryland Functional Citizenship Test was phased out beginning in 1998.

“The Functional Tests are low-level tests that do not align with the Maryland Content Standards, so it was no longer appropriate to continue them,” said State Superintendent of Schools Nancy S. Grasmick. “We wanted to make it perfectly clear to

teachers that the instructional target should be the Maryland Content Standards and the High School Assessments.”

An advantage of discontinuing the Functional Tests is that it will reduce the time students and school staff spend in testing. During the 2003-2004 school year, the Functional Tests will be administered only to seniors who have not yet passed them.

“It’s important to note that teachers and parents are not losing access to student performance data,” said Dr. Grasmick. “The Maryland School Assessment, which is administered in grades 3 through 8 and in high school, produces achievement data in reading and math.”

The 2003 MSA administration did not produce subscores, but the 2004 administration will, giving teachers and parents even more detailed information on student performance. ■

New Program “Leads the Way” to Engineering Careers

Project Lead The Way (PLTW) is now up and running in Maryland. In this pre-engineering program, high schools work with businesses and higher education to implement a challenging math and science curriculum that includes hands-on activities for students. The program’s goal is to increase the quantity and quality of engineers graduating from two- and four-year colleges. Another critical goal is to increase female and minority participation in math and science careers.

Last school year Maryland awarded grants to 11 schools to support the development of PLTW programs. With a year of plan-

ning under their belts, the schools are now ready to launch PLTW programs, offering courses such as Principles of Engineering and Computer Integrated Manufacturing. Benefits to students include training in current industry technology, hands-on assignments, and opportunities to intern with local engineering companies. Some colleges even offer credit for PLTW courses.

For more information about Project Lead The Way in Maryland, contact the Division of Career Technology and Adult Learning at 410-767-0183 or log on to pltw.org. ■

Sample HSA Individual Score Report

Maryland High School Assessment	Content	Student Scale Score	School Mean Scale Score	LEA Mean Scale Score	Passing Scale Score
Doe, John	Algebra/Data Analysis	xxx	xxx	xxx	412
LEA Student ID: 0123456	English 1	xxx	xxx	xxx	407
Test Date: 05/03	Government	xxx	xxx	xxx	394
School: Any School	Biology	xxx	xxx	xxx	400
LEA: Any LEA	Geometry	Taken	—	—	—

Reporting HSA Scores

The 2003 HSA scores for schools, school systems, and the state will be published on the Web in mid-November. The scores will be reported as a mean scale score and will be disaggregated by race/ethnicity and special services (limited English proficient, free and reduced-price meals, special education).

Also in mid-November, school systems will receive two duplicate labels for each individual student score. One label is to be sent home to parents (see the Sample HSA Individual Score Report above). The other label is to be affixed to his/her student record card #3 (transcript).

There will be no subscores reported for the 2003 results.

In 2004, the state anticipates reporting subscores for each test. The subscore categories will be identified later this fall after being reviewed by the state’s Psychometric Council.

Now that passing scores have been set, the HSA results will be more useful to schools, students, and parents than the median percentile rankings used last year. In fact, 2002 results for schools, school

systems, and the state will be republished this fall on www.mdreportcard.org with the new passing scores applied. Student results will not be reissued. Parents can compare their children’s 2002 scale score with the passing scores posted on the Web to see if their children would have passed. ■

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