

# Top 10 Things Parents Need to Know About the High School Assessments

Maryland  
**PTA**

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## 1. THEY COUNT NOW!

PASSING the High School Assessments (HSA) is **REQUIRED** in order to receive a Maryland high school diploma beginning with the graduating class of 2009.

## 2. Students take the HSA at the end of the class, NOT senior year.

The HSA are end-of-course exams that your child takes at the completion of four core subjects (English, government, algebra, and biology) in whichever grade he or she happens to take the class. So students and parents need to start paying close attention in middle school—when some students take high-school-level courses—and throughout all four years of high school.

## 3. Prepared students have brighter futures.

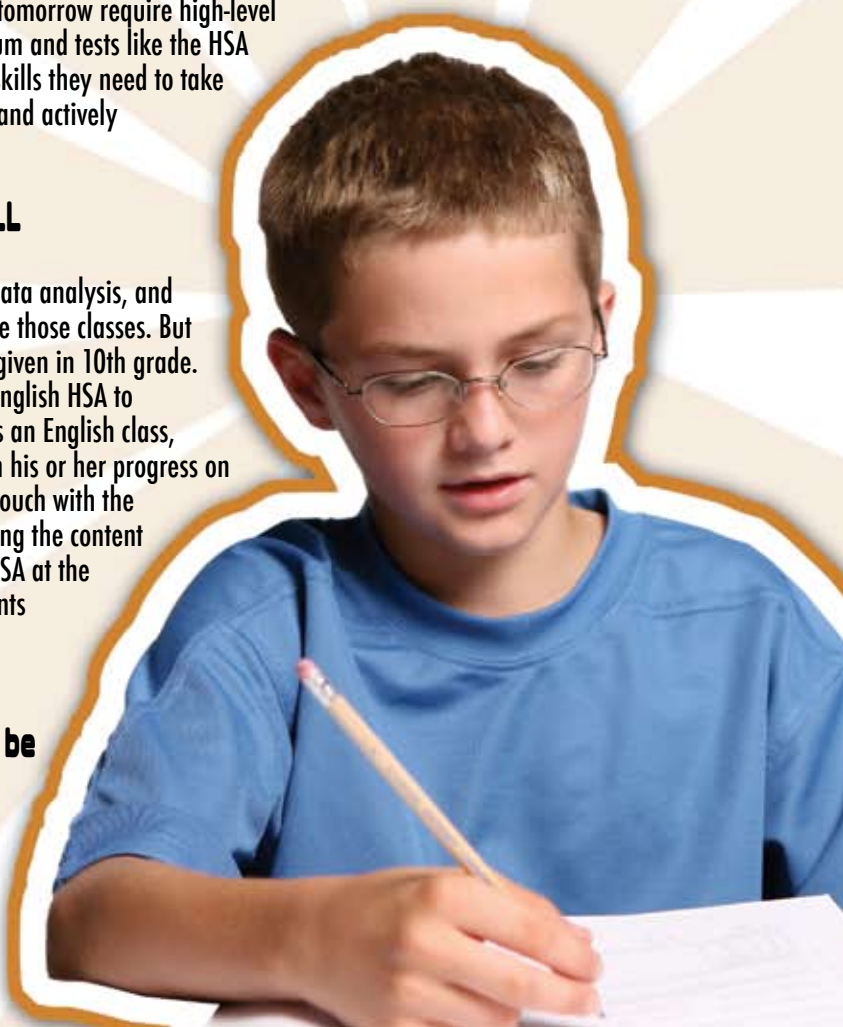
Today's students live in a different world than the one we grew up in, and they must be prepared to compete for jobs in a global economy. The jobs of today and tomorrow require high-level knowledge and skills. The school curriculum and tests like the HSA will help students develop the new basic skills they need to take care of themselves by holding down jobs and actively contributing to society.

## 4. The English HSA affects ALL 10th-graders.

Students take the government, algebra/data analysis, and biology HSA in whichever grades they take those classes. But there's one test—the English HSA—that is given in 10th grade. All 10th-graders must take and pass the English HSA to graduate. Every 10th-grade student takes an English class, and both you and your child should watch his or her progress on assignments, quizzes, and tests. Keep in touch with the teacher to ensure that your child is grasping the content taught and will be prepared to pass the HSA at the end of the course. (Some advanced students may take the English HSA prior to their 10th-grade year.)

## 5. The HSA test what should be taught and learned in key subjects.

These end-of-course exams test the skills and knowledge that students should be able to master after taking the course. Coursework in these subjects should be





aligned with the Maryland Voluntary State Curriculum, which clearly outlines content, objectives, and skills. Teachers, students, and parents should have a clear concept of what is expected of students at the beginning of the class.

## **6. The HSA are not a one-shot deal.**

If your child does not pass the HSA the first time, he or she has more chances to take the test and be successful. Students may retake the test the next time it is given, and have three opportunities each year to do so—in January, in May, and during the summer. Students may retake failed tests as many times as they need to pass them. The school and school system will help your child review and understand the content that he or she has not yet grasped before retaking the tests.

## **7. Help is available for students.**

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has developed a series of interventions for students who may need extra help while they are taking an HSA-tested class, and for students who need to review or catch up on missed skills after failing a test. This is a supplement to the assistance that the school and school system provide.

Online courses in algebra/data analysis and government are currently available in all 24 Maryland school systems. Teachers and, in some instances, parents can use these courses to help students before or after they take the HSA. The courses are interactive and can be used in whole or in part. For instance, if a student is having problems with a specific class objective, parts of the online course can be used to target that area. On the other hand, if a student needs an entire review, then the full course can be used. Online courses in biology and English will be available soon.

## **8. Help is available for parents.**

The teacher is the first person parents should go to for help in understanding what is expected in an HSA-tested course. The teacher works with your child on a daily basis and knows how he or she is progressing and what additional help may be necessary.

To learn more about the HSA, go to [HSAexam.org](http://HSAexam.org). MSDE created this Web site for parents so that all information on the HSA would be available in one convenient site. Here you can view sample HSA questions, learn more about how the test is scored, access the Voluntary State Curriculum, and find people in your school system and at MSDE who can answer your questions.

## **9. There are two ways to pass the HSA.**

Your child can pass all four HSA or meet a minimum combined score. The passing scores are: algebra/data analysis, 412; government, 394; biology, 400; and English, 396. There is also a combined-score option that allows your child to offset lower performance on one test with higher performance on another. Basically, he or she must earn a minimum score on each test and a combined score of at least 1602. See MSDE's Web site, [HSAexam.org](http://HSAexam.org), for further details.

## **10. Call 877-HSA-EXAM.**

MSDE has set up a toll-free, voice-directed telephone line to provide answers to commonly asked questions about the HSA. Parents can also leave a message and an MSDE staff person will return the call within 24 hours.

