



Nancy S. Grasmick  
State Superintendent of Schools

200 West Baltimore Street, Baltimore, MD 21201 410-767-0100 410-333-6442 TTY/TDD

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**CONTACT: Bill Reinhard 410-767-0486**

## **STATE MOVES FORWARD WITH HSA PLAN, MAKING PROVISIONS FOR SPECIAL SERVICES STUDENTS**

### ***PROGRESS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS, ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS TO BE REVIEWED BEFORE INSTITUTING THE EXAMS AS A GRADUATION REQUIREMENT FOR THOSE POPULATIONS***

**BALTIMORE (February 28, 2007)** – State Superintendent Nancy S. Grasmick today announced that she intends to bring before the State Board of Education in August a recommendation to adjust the High School Assessment (HSA) requirement for students in special education, English language learners, and students with 504 plans.

The State Board is required by regulation to review the HSA program in 2008 as the class of 2009 approaches graduation. However, the State Board has conducted reviews of the test results each year in order to track progress. The reviews have helped ensure that the assessment program accomplishes its goals for all students. Today's announcement underscores the State's commitment to raising standards for all students.

While the progress for most students indicates a likelihood that few if any would be unable to graduate in 2009 solely due to a failure to pass the HSAs, Dr. Grasmick said that 2006 data indicate that the three groups of students include some who may not be fully prepared to pass the tests without extraordinary intervention on the part of local school systems.

“The High School Assessment program is designed to raise the bar for students, but was never intended to place extraordinary strains on our most vulnerable learners as they work to complete their high school careers,” Dr. Grasmick noted. “While we are seeing great progress by many students receiving special services, we want to assure students and their parents that instruction has an adequate time to catch up with the new assessment program.”

State officials will track the progress of students receiving special education, limited English proficient, and 504 services. Students with 504 plans are individuals with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, have a record of such an impairment, or are regarded as having such an impairment.

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The 2007 test results, due in August, will help determine how long the delay will last, though it is expected to be 1-2 years. Special services students will continue to be required to take the assessments, and their results will be included in measures of school performance under the No Child Left Behind Act.

Assessment scores in algebra/data analysis, biology, government, and English all saw substantial gains during the 2005-2006 administration of the exams for the students headed toward graduation in 2009.

For last year's freshmen, the first students for whom passing the assessments will be a graduation requirement, the news was particularly good. For example, 71.5 percent of those students who would graduate in 2009 had already passed the algebra test by the end of last school year; 79.4 percent had passed the biology assessment; and 77.8 percent had passed the government test.

Although progress has been steady since the State Board announced the phase-in of the HSA program three years ago, the State Board and Dr. Grasmick put in place a review of the program during 2008 to make certain that students would not be barred from receiving a diploma if they had made focused efforts to meet the requirements. MSDE has conducted thorough analyses of the results each year and has reported results to the State Board. The 2007 review will help determine the kind of changes or the duration of a delay to be recommended by the State Superintendent.

Students have as many as three times per year to pass each High School Assessment. Should a student miss passing an assessment on the first attempt, a variety of on-line tools and school-based assistance is available to help preparation for additional attempts.

After many years of study, the State Board voted to make passing the HSAs a requirement for the Maryland High School Diploma for students entering ninth grade in the fall of 2005 (this year's sophomores), a measure supported by a broad coalition of business and higher education leaders. Approximately half the states have instituted some form of exit exam as a graduation requirement. The HSAs replaced the Maryland Functional Tests, a group of basic skills exams, which had been a graduation requirement for more than a decade.

Maryland is set to pilot the Comparable HSA in the 2007-2008 school year. The Comp HSA is an assessment that tests the same contents as the HSA, but is more suitable for students who struggle with traditional tests.

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